

# Mapping of the Tangible and Intangible Heritage of Tabaco City, Philippines

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## Abstract

Cultural heritage mapping is an important process towards heritage preservation and protection, and a vital step in establishing and maintaining a cultural property. This paper determined the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Tabaco City, Philippines, and the local initiatives in conserving its cultural heritage. Purposive cultural mapping which was adopted from the Cultural Mapping Framework of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts was employed by this study. Furthermore, community immersion through Sikolohiyang Filipino, Focused Group Discussion (FGD), and document analysis were done in gathering data. This study revealed that Tabaco City, Philippines, has a rich tangible cultural heritage expressed in their old edifices such as the St. John the Baptist Church (“*Dakulang Simbahan*”), the Ruins of the old St. John the Baptist Church, the Tabaco City Catholic Cemetery Cimburrio, and the *Bahay na Bato* or the Ancestral House of Angela Manalang-Gloria, and the richness of their culture is mirrored in their intangible heritage such as folk narratives, folk stories (*osipon*), and religious tradition. The establishment of Tabaco City Culture and the Arts Council and the inventory of historical and cultural endowment are the conservation measures of LGU–Tabaco to its cultural heritage. This study recommends that LGU–Tabaco City should conduct a comprehensive cultural mapping activity to ensure that all important cultural heritage assets are documented for their protection, preservation, and promotion from the government and other stakeholders.

**Keywords:** *National Heritage Act of 2009, cultural mapping, cultural significance, conservation efforts, heritage inventory*

## Introduction

Heritage refers to the things with historical and cultural value that we inherited from our ancestors. It is a broad concept that includes natural and cultural environments such as landscapes, historic places, sites, built environments, as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge, and living experiences (ICOMOS, 2002). Heritage is innately valuable because it is seen to represent all that is good and important about the past, which has contributed to the development of the cultural character of the present (Smith, 2006).

Cultural heritage has two forms, the tangible and intangible (Templaza & Templaza, 2015). Material or tangible heritage provides a physical representation of those things from “the past” that speak to a sense of place, of self, of belonging, and of community (Smith, 2006). This includes the monuments and sites among others. On the other hand, intangible cultural heritage

refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and know-how transmitted from generation to generation within communities, created and transformed continuously by them, depending on the environment and their interaction with nature and history (UNESCO, 2003). According to Idilfitri (2016), cultural attraction is commonly used in order to preserve and maintain cultural heritage. Cultural heritage would be meaningless if there is no story behind it. Accordingly, people value heritage because of relative reasons. Age and rarity, architectural, artistic, associative, cultural, economic, educational, emotional, historic, political, public, religious, spiritual, scientific, social, symbolic, technical, and townscape values are primarily the reasons why people value cultural heritage.

In the Philippines, protecting and preserving cultural heritage is mandated in the 1987 Constitution. The state shall conserve, promote, and popularize historical and cultural heritage and resources. Several

legislations were then created in the pursuit of the government to preserve and protect cultural properties. One of the Philippine legislations that was created to protect cultural property was the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009. The law aimed to foster the preservation, enrichment, and dynamic evolution of a Filipino culture based on the principle of unity in diversity in a climate of free artistic and intellectual expression. Tankersley (2014) has noted that the said law does not only focus on built heritage preservation and protection but also on all areas of cultural heritage including art and intangible cultural properties.

Cultural mapping is an important process towards heritage preservation and protection. It is a process of identifying and documenting the unique heritage resources in a community (Rabang, 2015). It is a systematic approach where the communities map what is important to them (Borja, 2019). The conduct of cultural mapping activity can help each local government unit (LGU) and other stakeholders to identify the unique cultural resources of their community and properly record a heritage resource for heritage appreciation, protection, and utilization. The common goal of cultural mapping is to help communities recognize, celebrate, and support cultural diversity for economic, social, and regional development (Pillai, 2003).

The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) has established cultural mapping programs which is implemented in six phases to help LGUs account for cultural properties. The phases of the NCCA's cultural mapping include the scoping and negotiation, social preparation, training of the local team, data validation and reporting of draft and finalized profile.

Keeping and maintaining cultural heritage is vital in our culture. Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is to ensure identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage (UNESCO, 2003). Likewise, the importance of preserving immovable tangible heritage has also been recognized especially that the existence of tangible cultural treasures may be threatened by armed conflict and natural calamities such as floods, typhoons, and other man-made calamities. In October 2013, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake hit Cebu City and Bohol that damaged several centuries-old Philippine churches. One of the churches that was heavily destroyed by the very strong earthquake was the Immaculate Conception

Parish Church or the Baclayon Church in Baclayon, Bohol. The church was a coral stone church built in 1727 and was declared as a national cultural treasure.

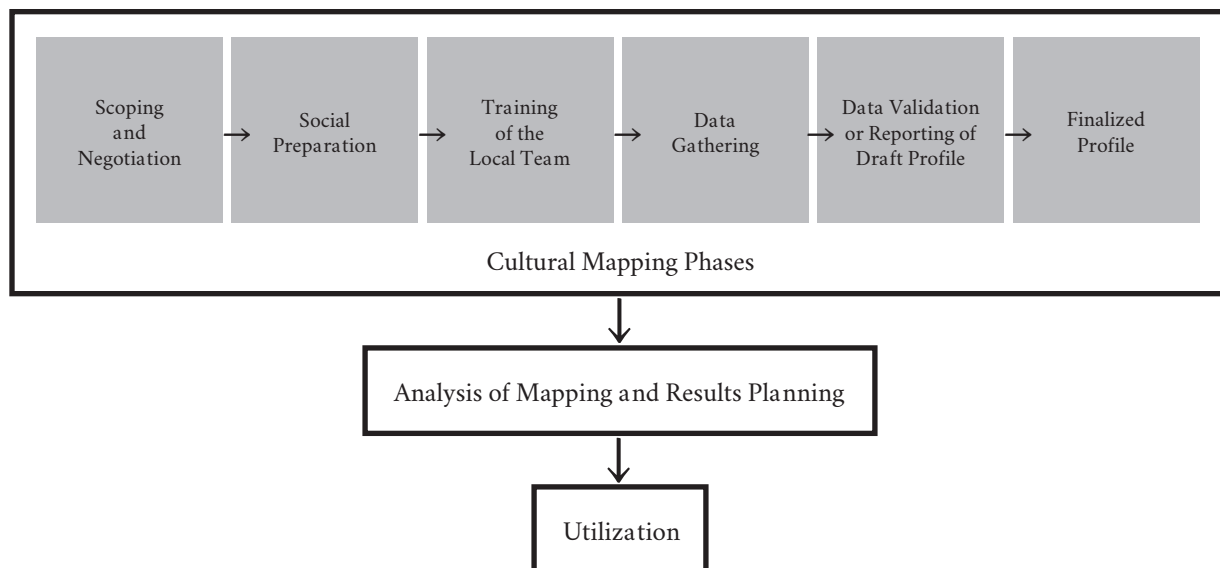
In the Bicol Region, Tabaco City is one of the three component cities of the province of Albay and at its south lies the active Mayon Volcano. Tabaco City is one of the eight towns and cities in Albay that share jurisdiction on the world-renowned perfect-coned volcano whose natural heritage values have been essential to the cultural fabric of the communities around it. Two of the outstanding heritage structures in Tabaco City were declared as a national cultural treasure and a national historical landmark. It is an affirmation that the place has a rich history and culture. Thus, the need to preserve, conserve, and promote cultural heritage, which has shaped the lived experiences of the community has cultivated the interest of this study. This study was conducted to document the city's unique cultural tangible and intangible heritage, determine its cultural value and significance and identify the local initiatives in conserving the city's cultural heritage.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study employed a purposive cultural mapping, which was adopted from the cultural mapping framework of the NCCA (Horfilla *et al.*, 2019). Figure 1 shows the phases of cultural mapping.

### **Data Collection**

Community immersion through *Sikolohiyang Filipino* (Filipino Psychology) was used as main method in gathering data (Marcelino & Pua, 2000). This approach was based on assessing historical and socio-cultural realities, understanding the local language, unravelling Filipino characteristics, and explaining them through the eyes of the native Filipino that include, "*Pagtatanong tanong*" (improvised informal, unstructured interview), "*Pagdalaw-dalaw*" (visiting), "*Pakikisama*" (getting along with), "*Pakikiramdam*" (sensitivity), and "*Pakikipag-kwentuhan*" (Informal conversation), (Marcelino and Pua, 2000). Focused Group Discussion (FGD), in-depth interview with the key informants and document analysis were also employed in data collection. Moreover, this study used the cultural mapping forms from the NCCA to obtain vital information from key informants. Tangible cultural heritage was also assessed using the descriptions in Table 1.



**Figure 1.** The Phases of Cultural Mapping as adopted from the NCCA (Borrinaga *et al.*, 2019) was implemented in five phases which include the scoping and negotiation, social preparation, training of the local team, data validation/ reporting of draft and finalized profile. The result of this cultural mapping can draw out significant information that may be utilized in the formulation of development plans, programs and activities.

### Key Informants

The key informants of the study were seven local residents and three local government officials of Tabaco City, Philippines. The researcher considered the following criteria cited in Luna and Roxas (2016) in choosing the key informant (a) must be born and raised in Tabaco City, (b) must be aged 30 years and above, (c) must be knowledgeable about the cultural heritage of Tabaco City, and (d) must have experienced the local culture.

### Data Analysis

The data gathered were qualitatively analyzed and categorized into two groups; the tangible and intangible heritage. Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis were used to unveil the cultural significance of the said tangible and intangible heritage. Further, the parameters adopted from *Heritage Building Condition Assessment: A Case Study in from Johor Bahru, Malaysia* (Noor *et al.*, 2019) were used for analysing the status or condition of the immovable tangible heritage.

### Results and Discussion

#### *Tangible Cultural Heritage of Tabaco City, Albay, Philippines*

UNESCO (2003) defines tangible cultural heritage as physical artifacts produced, maintained, and transmitted in a society. It includes buildings, monuments, and other physical or intangible products of human creativity that are invested with cultural significance. As revealed in this study, Tabaco City has immovable tangible heritage that connects them to their past, to a certain degree of cultural value, beliefs, customs, traits, and age-old traditions (Table 2). These tangible cultural heritages are the ruins of Saint John the Baptist Parish Church, (first stone church in Tabaco), the Saint John the Baptist Parish Church, and the Tabaco City Catholic Cemetery Cimburrío and the Ancestral House of Angela Manalang-Gloria.

The ruins of the Saint John the Baptist Parish Church were the only remnants of the first volcanic stone church built in Cormidal, Tabaco City, Philippines, which was said to have been destroyed by the 1814 Mayon Volcano Eruption. Figure 2 shows the façade of the ruins of the St. John the Baptist.

According to a 68-year-old resident of Barangay Cormidal, Tabaco City, there were skulls and bones

**Table 1.** Matrix Analysis for Condition of the Heritage Buildings/Structures

Indicator	Description
Excellent	The building or structure shows minor defect but does affect the structure or structural component, and/or other building services. Thus no maintenance is required
Good	The building or structure has minor defect which there is almost no impact to the structure and to structure component, and/or other building services but still should be maintained and required easy redecoration.
Fair	The building or structure has major defect. The defect may cause structural failure and/or services failure if not repaired or maintained. It requires a further detail investigation
Deteriorated	The building or structure has major defect. The functionality of the structure and or structural component is affected and may cause injury. Thus, building requires immediate action.
Ruins	The building or structure is in a state of decay or disintegration

**Table 2.** Immovable Tangible Heritage of Tabaco City

Name	Form of Expression	Year Constructed	Condition of the Structure	Integrity of the Structure	Declaration	Year Declared
Ruins of Saint John the Baptist Parish Church (1st stone church in Tabaco)	Ruins	1723	Ruins	Ruins/ Original Site	None	
Saint John the Baptist Parish Church	Church	1850	Excellent	Altered/ Original Site	National Cultural Treasure	2001
Tabaco City Catholic Cemetery Cimburrio	Cemetery	1861	Good	Unaltered	None	
“Bahay na Bato” or Ancestral House of Angela Manalang-Gloria	Ancestral House	1868	Fair	Altered	National Historical Landmark	2007

buried and others also believed that there were treasures hidden at the ruins. The place was also said to be inhabited by spirits and ghosts because supernatural beings such as white ladies, dwarfs, and ghosts of headless priests were reported to have been seen in the place. However, more than the treasures and the folk beliefs associated with the said structure, the ruins is

a living testament of the establishment of Tabaco City as a vista by the Franciscan missionaries under the patronage of St. John the Baptist.

On the other hand, the St. John the Baptist Church or the present-day church in Tabaco City, Philippines (Figure 3), locally called as “*dakulang simbahan*” or big

church, which is in excellent condition, is a site in the Bicol Region declared by the National Museum of the Philippines as a National Cultural Treasure (Figure 4) on July 31, 2001 by the National Museum pursuant to Republic Act 4846 as amended by Presidential Decree 374 and Republic Act 8492. The said declaration to the church is the highest designation of cultural properties for possessing an outstanding historical, cultural, artistic and/or scientific value. It also affirmed St. John the Baptist Church's landmark significance in the development of the city's rich culture.

Historically, the St. John the Baptist Church was said to have been destroyed by 1814 Volcano Eruption. The new and bigger St. John Baptist Church that was also constructed using volcanic stones was built next to the town's watchtower when Fr. Fermin Llorente was assigned as the Pastor of the Tabaco Parish.

Moreover, the Cimburrio (Figure 5), which is in good condition, is an old chapel found inside the Catholic Cemetery in Barangay Tagas, Tabaco City. It was built using volcanic stones with a combination of medieval and baroque architecture and patterned after the structural design of St. John the Baptist Church. On the other hand, the Angela Manalang-Gloria's Ancestral

House or commonly known as *Bahay na Bato* and *Bahay Kalakal* or Smith, Bell and Company (Figure 6) is also one of the country's National Cultural Heritages that was built in the early 1900s by a wealthy Bicolano, Don Mariano Villanueva. The said structure used to be a former commercial establishment involved in the abaca business dating back in 1868 before the poet and literary brilliant, Angela Manalang-Gloria bought the house in 1965 from an American agent of Smith, Bell, and Co., who was clueless of its real estate value. Manalang-Gloria allegedly bought the house only for investment purposes.

The *Bahay na Bato* or the Angela Manalang-Gloria's ancestral house that withstood more than a hundred years of typhoons and volcanic eruptions is a Spanish-era structure made of durable stone and delicate capiz. This old two-story edifice has four big bedrooms, two living rooms, a dining hall, a kitchen, a terrace, a basement and wooden stairs, floors, ceiling, and windows. It is considered as one of the beautiful houses in the country, and it was given two historical landmarks (Figures 7 and 8) in 2007 by the National Historical Institute for its outstanding historical significance in the country.



**Figure 2.** The Façade of the Ruins of the St. John the Baptist in Corrmidal, Tabaco City





**Figure 3.** St. John the Baptist Church in Tabaco City, Philippines



**Figure 4.** The marker installed to the St John the Baptist Church in Tabaco City as a National Cultural Treasure. It acknowledges the outstanding historical, cultural, artistic and/or scientific value of the church.



**Figure 5.** Cimburrio—A Chapel Inside the Catholic Cemetery of Tabaco City in Barangay Tagas, Tabaco City, Philippines



**Figure 6.** The Bahay na Bato or the Ancestral House of Angela Manalang-Gloria is one of the biggest and beautiful ancestral houses in Tabaco City, Philippines which was built in the early 1900s by Don Mariano Villanueva. It was a former Company House of Smith, Bell & Company before the Philippine literary brilliant Angela Manalang-Gloria acquired this property and made it her residence.



**Figure 7.** The historical landmark of the National Historical Institute installed on the building states that this is the Bahay Kalakal or the Company House of Smith, Bell & Company.



**Figure 8.** The historical landmark of the National Historical Institute is installed on the Ancestral House of one of the talented poets and writers in the Philippines, Angela Manalang-Gloria.



### **Intangible Cultural Heritage of Tabaco City, Philippines**

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated with the communities (UNESCO, 2003). Table 3 shows the intangible heritage of Tabaco City that includes folk narratives, folk story (*osipon*), festival, and religious tradition.

**Table 3.** Intangible Cultural Heritage of Tabaco City, Philippines

<b>Name</b>	<b>Form of Expression</b>	<b>State</b>
Folk narratives that reveal signs of Mayon Volcano Eruption	Folk narratives	Existing
The proud and gallant heritage of Tabaco	Folk story ( <i>osipon</i> )	Existing
Perdon	Religious tradition	Existing

Folk narratives that revealed indigenous knowledge about the community’s preparedness on impending volcanic eruption is one of the intangible heritages in Tabaco City. In fact, a good number of these narratives flourished in Barangays Marirok, Magapo, San Isidro, Oson, and Buang. The migration of wild boars, snakes, monkeys, and other wild animals to the residential areas, the draining of wells, the dryness of the soil, frequent earthquakes, the sharpening of the appearance of the crater of Mayon Volcano, and the appearance of a hermit, which were unravelled in the folk narratives, were some of the signs used by the community to predict an impending eruption of the Mayon Volcano.

Another intangible heritage in Tabaco City is a folk story or *osipon* that gave the city its name. One of the versions said that a Spanish conquistadores asked a young maiden, daughter of an overprotective father, “*que lugar este?*” (what is this place?). Due to the inability of the visitors and the locals to understand each other, the enraged father shouted, “*Tabak ko! Tabak ko!*” (My bolo! My bolo!). The Spaniard thought that the words of the father were the answers to his question. Thus the scream, “*Tabak ko*” became the name of the city. Another romantic version of the folk story said that the first

inhabitants of Tabaco City were the “*Pagcamootans*.” They were farmers, weavers, and fisher folks who thrived in a community called Barangay Pagcamoot. The *Pagcamootans* valued the magnificent Mayon Volcano as sacred because they believed that their ancestors were born out of one of the major eruptions of Mayon Volcano. Accordingly, when Magayon, the daughter of Datu Maisog, was to be married to Makusog, Spanish invaders landed at Causwagan Bay to the surprise and dismay of the *Pagcamootans*. As the invaders approached the house of Datu Maisog and other houses bordering the seashore, the menfolk shouted to their wives, “*Itao mo sakuya an tabak ko!*” (“Give me my bolo!”). From then on, the Spanish invaders thought that the people were shouting the name of the locality, which they understood as tabaco.

Moreover, “*Perdon*” (*Patawad*) is an age-old religious tradition in Tabaco City. It is done to express Bicolanos’ petition or ardent prayer to God in order to protect them from any harm brought by accident or natural calamity. This living religious tradition is still practiced by the residents inhabiting the 6-km permanent danger zone of Mayon Volcano. In Barangay Buang, Tabaco City, *Perdon* is practiced every time there was a threat of volcanic eruption. According to a 65-year-old resident of Barangay Buang, the tradition of *Perdon* was practiced in the belief that God would protect them from the wrath and destruction of the eruption of Mt. Mayon.

### **Cultural Significance of the Cultural Heritage of Tabaco City, Philippines**

Tabaco City has tangible and intangible heritage that connects them to their past to certain degrees of cultural value, traits, beliefs, customs, and traditions. The cultural heritages of Tabaco City, Philippines, are worthy of being valued, preserved, and restored because they express people’s significant past, knowledge, and experiences. They also help the present generation learn the successes and realize the mistakes of the past generations and make them aware of their identity (Idilfitri, 2016). A country or society will lose its main source of self-expression and self-realization without cultural heritage.

Tabaco City’s outstanding religious architectures that include the ruins of the first stone church in Tabaco City, the Saint John the Baptist Parish Church, and the Tabaco City Catholic Cemetery Cimburrío are highly valued by its people and community because of their architectural, artistic, historic, spiritual, and scientific values. These religious structures are important because

they revealed the triumphs of the Spanish colonizers in evangelizing the natives of Tabaco City in becoming Roman Catholics. Old folks revealed that the church did not only serve as their place of worship but as a refuge during wars and volcanic eruptions. According to 83-year-old resident of the city, she would pray inside the St. John the Baptist Church whenever there was a threat of volcanic eruption. She also recounted that her parents took refuge in the church during the Second World War. According to Ayo (2017), religious structures, which stood the tests of time are tangible symbols of the Catholic faith in the country and have become a living testament of rich Hispanic past and religiosity. Similarly, the *Bahay na Bato* or Angela Manalang-Gloria's ancestral house is culturally significant because it helped the city in showcasing its colourful history. It also served as wonderful memory of how the townspeople once lived and how simple their life was before in Tabaco City.

The intangible heritages in Tabaco City also hold high cultural significance. The abundance and the perpetuation to the folk narratives and folk stories despite the advancement in science and technology that is taking place in the contemporary society could be attributed to the idea that these folk narratives embody beliefs and the customs of a people. Schlosser (1997), as cited in Imran (2017), asserts that folk narratives such as folktales speak of universal and timeless themes, and help the people make sense of their existence and/or cope with the world they live in. Folk narratives also serve as vehicles in showcasing the culture and identity of people. They function as basis to social tradition and living mirrors of the past (Gilbas, 2005).

### ***The Local Initiatives of Tabaco City, Philippines in Conserving its Cultural Heritage***

Safeguarding the tangible and intangible heritage is a vital aspect in the preservation of cultural identity; thus, cultural heritage preservation is a matter that should be prioritized by the local and national government (Estonanto *et al.*, 2019). LGU-Tabaco is at the forefront in conserving its cultural heritage. LGU-Tabaco has also initiated various activities that would further promote and safeguard its cultural heritage.

One important local legislations passed in Tabaco City is the City Ordinance No. 014-2017, which was created pursuant to the DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2002-81 dated May 17, 2002, that provided for the establishment of Tabaco City Culture and the Arts Council. The said local culture and arts council was

then mandated to sustain the freedom of belief and of expression; maintain a culture of, by, and for the Tabaqueño people; to support and promote Tabaqueño artists and cultural workers, and to formulate policies for the development of culture and the arts at the city level and implement these policies in coordination with the NCCA as well as affiliated cultural entities both from the private and public sectors.

Another initiative of the LGU-Tabaco in the conservation of its cultural heritage was its inventory of cultural properties/endowments. The local government unit of Tabaco City, through the Tabaco City Culture and the Arts Council, conducted an inventory of their cultural properties/endowments to properly account some of its important cultural properties. This process was particularly authorized by R.A. 10066, otherwise known as the National Heritage Act of 2009. This initiative was a worthy endeavour because heritage inventory is a vital step towards understanding the heritage values of the cultural properties and it is central for the identification of national cultural treasures and national historical landmark. The Philippine government shall give utmost protection to these declared sites and historical landmarks especially in times of armed conflict and natural calamities.

### **Conclusion**

Tabaco City, Philippines, has an inventory of tangible and intangible heritage that connects them to their past to certain degrees of cultural value, beliefs, customs, traits, and age-old traditions. The old edifices in Tabaco City such as the ruins of the first stone church, the St. John the Baptist Church, the Catholic Cemetery Cimburrio, and the Bahay na Bato or Angela Manalang-Gloria's ancestral house have become testaments of faith, history, and culture. Moreover, Tabaco City's rich culture is also mirrored in their intangible heritage such as folk narratives, folk stories (*osipon*), and religious tradition. Further, the conservation efforts of Tabaco City towards the protection, preservation, and promotion of its cultural properties are compliant with the existing national and local legislation and mandates.

### **Recommendation**

The LGU of Tabaco City through the Tabaco City Culture and the Arts Council must strengthen its

efforts in the conservation of its cultural properties. The council must create ordinances and more relevant cultural conservation programs that would help conserve and promote the city's cultural heritage. It is also recommended that a comprehensive cultural mapping in Tabaco City should be spearheaded to ensure that all the tangible and intangible assets are documented so that LGU-Tabaco can draw out meaningful information that may be beneficial in the formulation of city's development plans, programs, and activities.

## Acknowledgment

The author expresses his profound gratitude to Bicol University, Provincial Tourism and Cultural Affairs Office of the Province of Albay, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, local government of Tabaco City, and Tabaco City Culture and the Arts Council. Deepest appreciation is also extended to all his key informants for providing the needed data in completing this paper.

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