

SOCIAL INNOVATION IN RUSSIAN SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE

INNOVACIÓN SOCIAL EN EL DISCURSO CIENTÍFICO RUSO

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Abstract: The concept of social innovation is the subject of active discussion in almost any country of the world. This trend is typical of Russia too, and the introduction of social innovation in our country was discussed back in the Soviet period. Taking into account the fact that Russian research findings are not included in the international discourse on a wide scale, we consider it important to summarize the experience in the field of social innovation and highlight characteristic features of its development. The paper consistently analyzes the works of Russian scientists of different periods; this allows us to trace the transformation of views on the social innovation essence. Addressing practical aspects in the social innovation development, we find that the main features of their implementation in Russia are as follows: prevalence of top-down initiatives, development of social entrepreneurship and the non-profit sector of the economy, and creation of support infrastructure.

Key words: Social innovation, Russian context, civil society, social entrepreneurship, economic theory, social economy.

Resumen: El concepto de innovación social es un tema en discusión activa en cualquier país del mundo. Esta tendencia también se presenta en Rusia. La introducción de la innovación social en nuestro país se discutió en el período soviético. Teniendo en cuenta el hecho de que los resultados de la investigación rusa no están incluidos en el discurso internacional a gran escala, consideramos importante presentar la experiencia rusa en el campo de la innovación social y resaltar los rasgos característicos de su desarrollo. El artículo analiza los trabajos de científicos rusos en diferentes períodos, esto nos permite rastrear la transformación de los puntos de vista sobre la esencia de la innovación social. Al abordar aspectos prácticos en el desarrollo de la innovación social, encontramos que las principales características de su implementación en Rusia son las siguientes: prevalencia de iniciativas de arriba hacia abajo, desarrollo del emprendimiento social y del sector sin ánimo de lucro y la creación de infraestructura de apoyo.

Palabras clave: innovación social, contexto ruso, sociedad civil, emprendimiento social, teoría económica, economía social.

Introduction¹

Currently, the concept of social innovation has been firmly anchored among the priorities of social economy development. The most telling example can be found in Western European countries where social innovation is the central element of Europe 2020 strategy that aims to ensure smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Jenson & Harrison, 2013). In particular, since

the 2000s, many research projects on the theory and practice of social innovation (SINGOCOM, KATARSIS, TRANSIT, SI-DRIVE, TEPSIE etc.) have been implemented with the support of the European Union framework programs). As a result, scientific literature has described many approaches to understanding the essence of this phenomenon and methods for its studying, which were further developed in the global discourse. Today, we can say with confidence that the subject of social innovation is reflected in the activities of the academic community, business

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structures, non-profit organizations and authorities around the world.

Russia is no exception in this case; the country experienced a surge of interest in innovation in the social sphere after the period of the Great Recession. The popularity of social innovation in Russia is largely due to the low efficiency of traditional mechanisms of state and market regulation, which leads to the persistence of system-wide problems and growth of new challenges (Solov'eva et al., 2018: 53), that must be addressed (Soboleva & Chubarova, 2017: 8-27). In this regard, social innovation practices become a kind of response to market and state failures more and more often.

However, a favorable environment for social innovation development in the country has not been formed yet. According to the estimates of the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2016, the value of the Social Innovation Index in Russia was 41.1, which corresponds to the 30th position in the ranking of 45 countries participating in the study (ECONOMIST, 2018). In our opinion, the reasons for such a situation are to be found in the disunity of knowledge about the nature of social innovations and the possibilities of their use in the context of the Russian reality. The situation is aggravated by the insufficient inclusion of Russian research findings in the international discussion. This is due to the fact that the vast majority of works are published in Russian. Besides, the interaction with foreign colleagues is

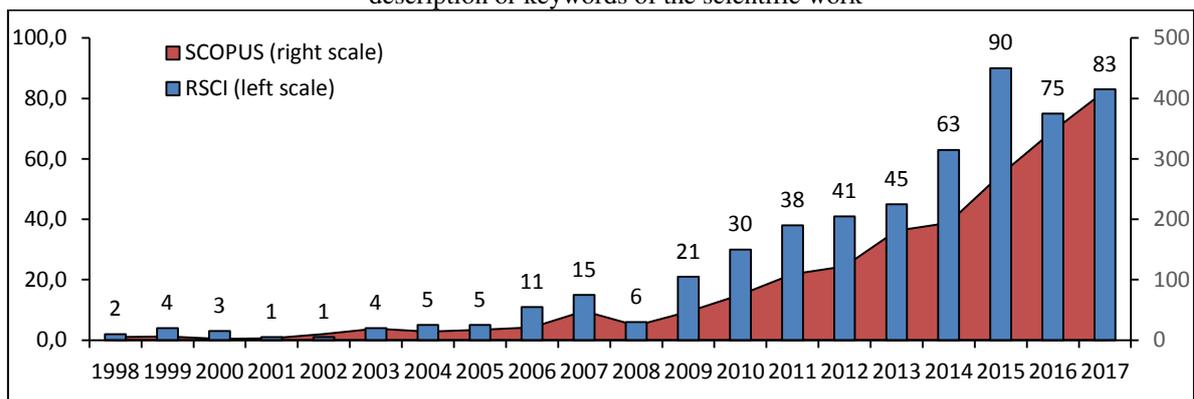
limited (the project of the Seventh EU Framework Program “Social Innovation – Driving Force of Social Change” is one of the few examples of such fruitful cooperation).

Thus, understanding the importance of the issues defined, we make an attempt to systematize and generalize Russian experience in the study of social innovation highlighting characteristic features of its development. The theory and practice issues of social innovation are examined separately for convenience of consideration.

1. Social innovation theory

According to the Russian Science Citation Index (national bibliographic database of scientific citation), there has been a continuing increase in the number of publications on the subject of social innovation since 2009 (Fig. 1). At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, there were very few such works; and at present, about 75–90 titles are published annually. A similar trend is typical of articles indexed in SCOPUS, although their number is much higher. However, it is noted (Westley et al., 2017: 2-4), that the term “social innovation” in the global perspective is used more often since the 1960.

Figure 1. The number of publications indexed in RSCI and SCOPUS, mentioning social innovation in the title, description or keywords of the scientific work



Note: the indicated time interval is due to the appearance of the first scientific work on the subject of social innovation in the RSCI.

Source: Own elaboration using Russian Science Citation Index and SCOPUS databases

Russian scientific literature contains the works of Soviet scientists (Lapin, 1982; Lapin & Prigozhin, 1982; Bestuzhev-Lada, 1990), that consider *sotsial'nye novovvedeniya*² (social novelties) in the socialist reality. In the most general terms, they were understood as qualitatively new formations, structures and mechanisms of social production, society as a whole, or their subsystems (Lapin et al., 1981: 9). Later Bestuzhev-Lada (1993: 19-20) substantiated a scientific approach to understanding the essence of social innovation, which helped separate them not only from technological innovations, but also from economic, medical, environmental ones, etc. This was achieved by highlighting the so-called sociological aspects (relationships between people as members of certain groups and institutions) and problems connected to them in each of the spheres of life. At the same time, special attention was paid to forecast-based substantiation of social and innovative projects due to the ambiguity and complexity of determining their effect on society. Typical examples of social innovations of that time were as follows: socialist competition, residence permit, voluntary people's guards, etc. At the same time, the problems concerning the introduction of innovative practices were actively considered at the micro level in the framework of planning social development of production teams (Lapin et al., 1975).

The period of social and economic shocks at the end of the 20th century is characterized by fading interest in the subject of social innovation and the crisis of social sciences in the post-Soviet space in general. Since the early 2000s, the theory of social innovation in Russia has been developed in the context of a wide variety of scientific disciplines: from conflictology (Tsoi, 2001) and sociology of management (Sednev, 2005) to finance (Potapova, 2004) and management of innovation and innovation activity (Vlasenkova, 2006). This had an impact on the understanding of the essence of the phenomenon under consideration. In contrast to the definitions of social innovation being used in the Soviet era, the emphasis has shifted toward the individual and their needs in an emerging market-based environment in the country (Table 1). At the same time, social innovations were not in the focus of research, being used mostly as a universal tool to solve various problems from a practical point of view. Thus, no strong theoretical and methodological "foundation" was developed. And it is no coincidence it was then that there appeared

some publications questioning the importance of social innovation in the socio-economic life of the country (Guseinov & Semenikhina, 2009).

² We would like to emphasize the use of the Russian word "*novovvedeniye*", because nowadays the term "innovation" is commonly used.

Table 1. Some definitions of “social innovation” in the Russian scientific discourse

Author	Social innovation is understood as ...
Lapin et al., 1981: 9	qualitatively new formations, structures, mechanisms of social production, society as a whole, or their subsystems
Tsoi, 2001: 147	processes that lead to significant and irreversible changes in the interaction between people and groups; which contributes to establishing new links and relationships between them, aimed to meet new spiritual and intellectual needs, new norms, and which also contribute to creating organizations and links of a higher level of development
Vlasenkova, 2006: 10	creation and implementation of various types of novelties generating significant changes in the social sphere, meeting the needs of the individual and society and promote economic development
Droganova, 2006: 9	changes in the social sphere that are based on practical fundamental scientific knowledge and are aimed at improving the quality of life; these changes are strongly dependent on the group and personal qualities of users and do not always require new technical equipment
Tsarev, 2011: 9-10	a complex social process of introduction, development and integration of new elements in various spheres of life, leading to significant and irreversible changes in the system of social relations and interactions
Akhmetzyanov, 2013: 8	the result of implementation of contractual relations that take the form of a product or process with qualitative advantages in the reproduction process, ensuring that the agents of transactions obtain additional social value in comparison with the previous product or process, as well as the formation of a positive external effect, determining, in contrast to economic innovations, their non-competitiveness, non-universality, non-commercializability, safety and adaptability
Veretennikova, Kats, 2015: 8	innovations in the social and cultural sphere of society, which are aimed at meeting the social needs of individuals bringing social benefits
Popov, Veretennikova, Omonov, 2017: 81	new combinations of resources in the social space, changing the institutional context and stimulating the search for effective solutions to social problems.

Source: Own elaboration

Rapid development of social innovation agenda in foreign countries at the beginning of the 21st century alongside with negative consequences of the global financial and economic crisis contributed to the active development of this sector in Russia. Since 2010s, there has been a noticeable “deepening” of research conducted in the direction of studying the social innovation concept (as well as social entrepreneurship and social economy as a whole). It is reflected most comprehensively in the framework of economic theory (Akhmetzyanov, 2013; Veretennikova & Panikarova, 2015; Kuznetsova, 2015; Popov et al., 2017).

Of great interest is Akhmetzyanov’s dissertation (2013: 8-9), which proposes and substantiates a theoretical and methodological approach to the content of social innovation, emphasizing their non-competitiveness, non-universality, non-commercializability, safety and adaptability (table 1). The author focuses on the following

functions of social innovation in the modern economy: pragmatic (meeting social needs, maintaining communicative integrity of the system, forming identity and reproducing values), stimulating (improving the standard of living and quality of life, promoting socially oriented economic growth, expanding the opportunities of choice), predictive (forming long-term goals of social development) and conservative (critical rethinking of the past experience, preserving traditions). With regard to the non-governmental sector, Veretennikova and Panikarova (2015: 119) link the purpose of social innovation with overcoming the failures of the state and its institutional environment, first of all, and with the reproduction of public goods and ensuring their proper quality. At the same time, the key role in these processes is assigned to state-owned enterprises, public-private partnerships and social entrepreneurs (Veretennikova & Kats, 2015: 13-15). In

contrast, foreign approaches imply that the widest possible range of participants is involved in the implementation of social innovation management system functions (Kuznetsova, 2015: 83).

In this regard, the so-called “bottom-up” research of social innovation development is becoming increasingly popular. In particular, the work of Veretennikova and Omonov (2018: 92) considers the mechanism of social and innovative development in civil society, including the regulatory framework, innovation infrastructure, the role of economic agents, their social and commercial goals and stages of social innovation process. The main idea of the model developed by the authors, in our opinion, consists in the necessity to form an effective dialogue between government, business and society, which otherwise can result in negative effects from spreading social innovation practices. This thesis is actively studied at Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences within the ecosystem approach (Solov'eva, 2017; Solov'eva et al., 2018). Currently, the Russian model of social innovation implementation has been developed as one of the stages of social innovation ecosystem construction, which reflects the relationship between the actors at different stages of project activities (Il'in et al., 2018: 126-127). Special attention is also paid to the impact of social innovations on individual subsystems of the regional economy (Solov'eva, 2018: 87).

A slightly different approach to the study of social innovation is used in the research conducted at the Institute of Economics of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Ural Federal University named after B.N. Yeltsin, the first President of Russia. Here the institutional conditions of social transformations come to the focus, and the institutions of social innovations development form a central link (Popov & Semyachkov, 2017). Subsequently, all of them were divided into six groups for our purpose: institutions of human capital development, institutions of public administration, institutions of innovative culture, institutions of civil society, institutions of financing, and institutions of business environment. The analysis of the state of each institution allows us to assess the quality of the institutional environment for the social innovation development; it was carried out on the example of the Sverdlovsk Oblast (Popov et al., 2017: 85-88). The theoretical results

obtained have formed the basis of the econotronics concept, which is devoted to the dynamics of developing economic institutions for interaction between actors and society in modern digital economy (Popov, 2018: 24). Scientific principles and ideas of the concept help establish causal relationships between endogenous environmental factors and successful development of social projects.

A distinctive feature of the modern period of Russian science development is the dynamism of views on the essence of social innovation. This leads to a continuing updating of existing knowledge and emergence of new theories and concepts. As a result firm theoretical “structures” are not being formed. Such a situation can be determined not only by the influence of foreign studies, but also by the versatility of the phenomenon under consideration and the possibility of studying it from different perspectives. Further development of theoretical provisions in the field of social innovation depends largely on understanding the experience accumulated (including the experience obtained in the Soviet times).

2. Social innovation practice

Examples of social innovation projects in the Russian practice in the broadest sense of the term can be found in the days of tsarist Russia and the USSR, when various initiatives of social orientation were implemented. This was manifested in different forms: charity and philanthropy, social responsibility of entrepreneurs, social projects of the state, etc. For example, social projects aimed at working with difficult children and adolescents (Makarenko, 1950), programs to expand the provision of free services to the population at the expense of public consumption funds (Ivanova, 2014), the introduction of universal compulsory education (Shpakovskaya, 2009), etc. Social innovations in Russia started to develop more rapidly in the 21st century, when the state began to provide significant support to non-governmental organizations and small businesses, promoting public-private partnership and the growth of social investment. At the same time, private business has also become actively involved in supporting various social initiatives. In particular, LUKOIL president V. Alekperov was one of the first to provide

assistance to social innovators and social entrepreneurs within the framework of the Fund for regional social programs Our Future that he established in 2007.

However, despite the development of ideas and practices of social innovation in Russia, their potential is currently underutilized. Summarizing the above, we can highlight the following main features in the development of social innovations in the Russian context:

1. Unlike European countries, social initiatives in Russia are mainly directed “top-down”. The authorities understand their relevance and stimulate the processes of social activity in the areas they find important for the state. In particular, this is demonstrated in organizing and conducting various competitions of social projects. For example, the all-Russian competition of social innovations³, the competition of innovative social projects of the Fund for support of children in difficult life situations⁴, the all-Russian competition of youth projects⁵ etc. In addition, state authorities themselves often initiate the implementation of social innovation projects. For example, in the city of Vologda, the whole system of urban social projects (more than 40) has been developed in order to improve the quality of life and urban environment⁶. At the same time, the development of social innovation projects takes place “bottom-up”, to, although it is less active.
2. Social innovations in Russia are mainly associated with the concept of social entrepreneurship as one of the most effective tools for their implementation. Perhaps the reason is that social entrepreneurship, according to many researchers, has an in-built element of innovation (Neshchadin et al., 2014:145; Boriskina et al., 2016: 22-30) and is a social innovation activity (Vasil’eva & Poltavskaya, 2017: 37). However, the Russian legislation still lacks both the

concept of “social entrepreneurship” and clear criteria for its identification. Official legislation places more emphasis on technological innovations than on social ones. In 2016, the Russian Ministry of Economic Development prepared a draft law on social entrepreneurship, but it was never adopted by the Government. Support for social entrepreneurship is carried out mainly within the framework of developing small and medium-sized business, as well as expanding the access of non-governmental organizations to provide services in the social sphere. The sphere of social entrepreneurship is actively expanding, despite the fact that at present its volume is not more than 1% of the total volume of entrepreneurship⁷.

3. Interest in social innovation is also growing in connection with the development of the non-profit sector, as non-profit organizations are close to the direct recipients of benefits. From 2012 to 2016, the number of socially-oriented NGOs in Russia increased more than three-fold⁸. This was facilitated by the improvement of legislation in the field of support of socially oriented NGOs and legislative consolidation of the NGOs status as providers of socially useful and social services. The development of the NGO sector in the sphere of providing social services is included in the main directions of the state policy for providing social support to the population in the framework of the Concept for long-term socio-economic development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2020. At the same time, it is noted that in practice the potential of expansion of the non-governmental sector to provide social services is not high due to the low effective demand of the population and the state, which results in a low capacity of the social services market (Moskovskaya, 2018: 100).
4. Supporting infrastructure is being developed. Back in 1985, in the Soviet Union, the newspaper Komsomolskaya

³ All-Russian competition of social innovations. <http://pokoleniedobra.ru/>

⁴ Projects of the Fund for support of children in difficult life situations. <http://fond-detyam.ru/granty-fonda/proekty/>

⁵ All-Russian competition of youth projects. Russia – the country of opportunities. <http://rosmolgrant.ru/>

⁶ Social projects. Official website of Vologda City Administration. http://vologdaportal.ru/o_gorode/index.php?SECTION_ID=4477

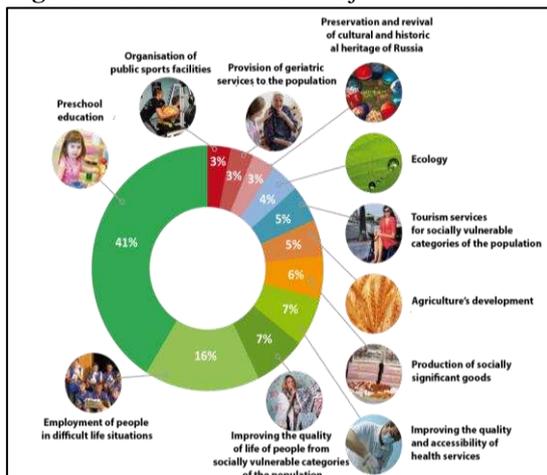
⁷ What is needed for the development of social entrepreneurship. *Vedomosti Newspaper*, 2018, no. 5, October <https://www.vedomosti.ru/partner/articles/2018/10/05/782341-nuzhno-razvitiya>

⁸ Main information on the work of SONPOs in the Russian Federation for 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016. <http://www.gks.ru>

Pravda created a fund for social inventions, which contributed to the development of social innovation and provided organizational, financial and legal support (Bestuzhev-Lada, 1993). Modern Russia started to make more active efforts to build the supporting infrastructure in 2011 when the Agency for Strategic Initiatives was established with support from the Government of the Russian Federation. Further, the work was carried out to create such structures as the Centers of social sphere innovations in the regions of the Russian Federation, the Council for social innovation development of the RF subjects under the Federation Council. These efforts contribute to the identification and support of promising projects at the regional level. In addition, the state, foundations and private businesses hold competitions to promote projects of social entrepreneurs, create various platforms to raise funds and search for partners, organizations to provide consulting services and assistance in the development of franchises, training, etc. are being established.

As practice shows, at the moment there is some experience in the implementation of social innovations. Most of the initiatives are aimed at achieving equality of opportunities for different categories of population in access to quality education, health care, labor market, etc. (Fig.2).

Figure 2. Social innovation Projects in Russia



Source: According to the Fund of regional social programs Our Future

The presence of active demand can be named as a starting point in the development of social innovation in Russia. Most of the projects respond to social demands from certain groups of society, whereas not all the projects offer new innovative solutions, many of them simply adapt or modify existing practices. Support from the authorities is an important incentive; that is why many projects are related to certain political programs, because in this case it is much easier to get help from the state. However, sometimes such support is purely formal; and the real instruments, especially financial ones are used less frequently. The development of new technologies, including information and communication, also acts as an incentive for the development of social innovation and social entrepreneurship. The emergence of various platforms makes it possible to effectively search for the necessary resources, partners and share experiences (Solov'eva, 2017: 99).

The development of social innovations involves many actors such as the public and private sector, non-governmental organizations, the media, foundations, etc. But the limited interaction between them creates the so-called "barriers" in the form of additional transaction costs. It is no coincidence that one of the main factors contributing to the success of such projects is the cooperation and development of partner networks (Solov'eva et al., 2018: 63-65). The main obstacle to the development of socially innovative projects and social enterprises in Russia is the absence of legislation on social entrepreneurship and social innovation, which would help establish clear criteria for identification and the framework of state support. The presence of a socially active layer of citizens who are able to take responsibility in addressing social problems is of great importance in the implementation of social entrepreneurship and social innovation ideas. Nevertheless, the majority of Russians are characterized by civic passivity. For example, according to the public opinion monitoring conducted by Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, almost one third of the population of the Vologda Oblast (28%) would not show civic participation under any circumstances, and the same amount (32%) are not ready to do anything for the development of their locality (Table 2).

Table 2. How people assess the possibility of civic participation in addressing social problems

Answer	Proportion, %
“Could you become a “social activist”? If the answer is “Yes”, in what situation?” (civic participation potential)	
I could not in any situation	28.1
I could in case of violation of my rights	15.5
I could in case of violation of the rights of others	7.1
I could, if it were necessary to find a solution to some social problem	8.7
It’s difficult to answer	40.1
“What are you ready to do for the development of your hometown (village)?” (five most common answers)	
Nothing	31.7
Everything I can	31.7
Participate in the beautification	24.7
Take part in restoring order	22.3
Give advice, suggest something	17.7
...	
To be an organizer of projects	4.9

Source: the calculation by the authors is based on the data of the public opinion monitoring, VoIRC RAS, 2018.

In addition to legislative and administrative barriers, serious barriers to the development of social innovation include lack of funding, lack of qualified personnel and staff competencies, lack of recognizable image among the general public, etc. Due to these barriers, many projects are presented only at the local level and find it difficult to expand their territorial coverage (Solov’eva, 2017: 100).

Thus, at present, the environment for the development of social innovations in Russia is in its infancy. Certain actions are being taken in this direction, but they are still insufficient. Further development of social innovations will require a clear definition of the legislative framework and the creation of a favorable environment for their development by eliminating or mitigating the barriers identified.

Conclusions

The development and implementation of social innovations is one of the promising areas for improving the quality of life, meeting various needs of citizens, reducing inequality, etc., that is, for the development of human potential as the basis of national security and global competitiveness of the country. In Russia, certain theoretical and methodological developments in this area emerged in the Soviet period, when social design, planning and forecasting were greatly developed in the conditions of the planned economy. In the 1990s under the general crisis of the social sciences, the research in the

field of social innovations was scattered, and it was often carried out at the micro level. During the first decade of the 21st century, the subject under consideration was addressed in the mainstream of various sciences: from psychology and conflictology to sociology, philosophy and economics. The crisis in the global and Russian economy gave an impetus to the extension of scientific research in this field and, as a result, since 2010, there have appeared a considerable number of publications devoted to the institutional aspects of implementing social innovation and mechanisms of socio-economic development, as well as the attempts to use the ecosystem approach in the development of social innovations. At the same time, there is no integral unified understanding of the nature and process of social innovations in modern Russian science, which is due not only to the influence of foreign studies, but also to the versatility of the phenomenon under consideration.

Nevertheless, in practice, social innovations in Russia have been implemented for a long time in one way or another. However, social innovations as well as their theory have been actively developed in the 21st century when the government started to provide support to the formation of civil society, and when attention to the non-profit sector and social entrepreneurship increased. Currently, various structures and organizations are being created to promote social innovation development, i.e. some elements of the social innovation ecosystem are being formed. However, this process is constrained by

a number of barriers (legal, administrative, information, socio-cultural, etc.). In order to improve the areas of support for social innovation, it is necessary to develop theoretical

concepts as a scientific basis for management decision-making, and to encourage various business entities to support and implement social innovation projects.

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