

## CREATIVE AGEING IN GERMANY

A view from North Rhine-Westphalia

*By Harriet Lowe*



## Acknowledgements

This short report was written by Harriet Lowe, Communications and Research Officer at the Baring Foundation, based on a visit to North Rhine-Westphalia in September 2017. Grateful thanks in particular go to Almuth Fricke, Director of kubia (Centre of Competence for Creative Ageing and Inclusive Arts) who hosted and guided me patiently and expertly around NRW for five days. Thank you also to all those who spoke to me about their projects, including Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz; Sybille Kastner; Jochen Schmauck-Langer; Susanne Düwel; Karin Nell, Jörg-Thomas Alvermann, Corinna Bernshaus and Uscha Urbainski at Keywork; Birgit Hauska, Sparkasse Stiftung Köln/Bonn; Kim de Groote, Annette Ziegert and the whole team at kubia.

## About the Baring Foundation

Since 2010, the Foundation's arts programme has focused on participatory arts for older people. This has had many aspects, including funding partnerships with all four of the UK's national arts councils. We have also sought to learn from best practice abroad. This has included partnerships with the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust on a joint travel fellowship scheme for nearly 50 creative ageing practitioners and with the British Council in North East Asia. This report is the third in a series of short profiles of creative ageing work in different countries. Much more about our programme can be found in a new publication *Towards the end* published in 2017.

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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The context</b>	<b>2</b>
Ageing in Germany	
Social care: challenges and innovation	
Arts and ageing	
<b>Arts in practice: case studies from North Rhine-Westphalia</b>	<b>5</b>
Performance – theatre, dance and music	
Visual arts – appreciating and participating	
Intergenerational arts	
<b>Professional training and development</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Concluding thoughts</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Resources on creative ageing</b>	<b>20</b>



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# Introduction

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This publication is part of a series of short reports intending to bring some of the rich creative ageing projects and experiences from in other countries to an English-speaking audience. It follows two reports by David Cutler, one on Japan (*Living National Treasure*) and another more recently on the Netherlands (*Dutch Old Masters – and Mistresses*). It is based on a series of project visits in North Rhine-Westphalia in September 2017, kindly organised and hosted by kubia, the Centre of Competence for Creative Ageing and Inclusive Arts, which is based near Cologne.

This report is based only on observation and some limited desk research and cannot be regarded as a rigorous evaluation of creative ageing projects in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), let alone in Germany. However, we hope it will give readers in English more idea about what is happening outside the UK and perhaps inspire them to visit Germany themselves.

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# The context

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## AGEING IN GERMANY

Germany is facing similar demographic changes to other countries in Europe with respect to a rapidly ageing population. UN data reports that one in 20 Germans are now over 80 and by 2050 it will be one in six. Unlike Britain and France however, where birth rates remain close to or at the replacement rate needed, Germany's has been falling for a number of years, heightening concerns among policy-makers and businesses alike that the working population will be unable to support the growing pension and healthcare needs of older generations<sup>1</sup>.

## SOCIAL CARE: CHALLENGES AND INNOVATION

As in the UK, the social care system in Germany is creaking under the weight of these changing demographics. The system is a social insurance model with most Germans paying into a Long Term Care Fund (Pflegeversicherung) as part of statutory social security contributions, but as in the UK, there are concerns over future affordability.

However, as in other European countries, innovative new ways of managing the problem of care provision at both ends of our lives are now starting to develop. For example, Germany is also experimenting with multigenerational living. 'Co-habitation' projects like the Amaryllis project in Bonn have created residential communities for people of all ages with a co-operative style ethos of community and mutual support<sup>2</sup>. Another housing complex in Freiburg in the South West also provides care services for its elderly residents and has a café open to locals and serving home grown food from the gardens<sup>3</sup>. There are several such initiatives across the country. This is a similar model to the recent co-location of nursing homes and nurseries on the same premises in England, for example at Nightingale House care home in south London.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Germany's demographics: Young people wanted', *Financial Times*, 24 August 2015.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amaryllis-bonn.de/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.generationen-verbinden.com/>

Another relatively recent development are the state-supported *Mehrgenerationenhäuser* – ‘Multigenerational Houses’. These are non-residential and more like intergenerational social centres which bring services such as childcare, youth groups, support for young mothers, day care for the elderly and advice centres – all under one roof<sup>4</sup>. Each *Haus* is unique: pensioners may volunteer to read books to the children once a week, most run a kind of ‘rent a Granny’ service to relieve busy parents, some have technology surgeries where teenagers help the elderly; others run arts and theatre courses. The first *Mehrgenerationenhaus* was established in 2003 in Lower Saxony and there are now around 450 across Germany<sup>5</sup>. They are supported financially by grants from the federal government and topped up by local funding; however, there has been a question mark looming over their future funding recently.

## ARTS AND AGEING

It must be stated again that this research only took in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and even in here, there is far more happening than I was able to see in a short visit. However, it should hopefully give a flavour of the work.

### Funding and organisation of arts and culture

In Germany, policy and funding provision for art and culture largely happens at state (Länder) rather than national (Bund) level.

As you might expect in a country which 150 years ago was a collection of independent states, the cultural infrastructure between them varies considerably. The history of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) has left a particular imprint on the cultural landscape there. The state was formed during the British occupation after the Second World War out of the old regions of the Rhineland and Westphalia. The new configuration meant that there was no history of state cultural institutions (no state opera as there is in Bavaria, for example) and many cultural activities are also the purview of cities, towns and communities. However, today the state and the municipalities together spend around 1.6 billion euros per annum on arts and culture. It is also Germany’s most populous state with 18 million people, with several large and sprawling urban centres.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Germany’s ‘multigeneration’ houses could solve two problems for Britain’, *The Guardian*, 2 May 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *The generation strain*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2014.

North Rhine-Westphalia is a good place to visit for anyone interested in creative ageing as it has been a pioneer in the field.

This must in large part be due to the support of the State Ministry for the Arts and Sciences in Düsseldorf. Specific responsibility for arts and older people lies with Susanne Düwel who is a keen advocate for the importance of cultural participation in older age. Her remit has its own budget, which supports the state's unique training centre for cultural gerontology, *kubia* (see page 16) and an open fund of around 100,000 euros a year for the support of arts projects across the state. It also tries to influence other parts of the Ministry to integrate consideration of older people into culture provision more widely.

The flourishing of creative ageing in NRW is also without doubt due to the establishment of *kubia* itself, founded ten years ago, which now acts as an important regional hub of information and expertise.

It is worth noting here that the funding provided by the Ministry and administered by *kubia* also has a strong programmatic emphasis on disability, inclusion and access to the arts. This seems to be a response to the recognition that there is quite a variation in degrees of understanding of inclusive practice in culture. A recently supported project is the *Musiktheater im Revier* in Gelsenkirchen. This project aimed to give people with visual impairments a uniquely barrier-free opera experience. Teams of visually impaired and sighted people work together to create unique audio descriptions of several current opera productions, which describe the staging alongside the music and lyrics. Before the performances, visually impaired visitors can go to special sessions where they can touch and discover the costumes, masks and props to create their own inner picture of the stage before they see the show.

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# Arts in practice: case studies from North Rhine-Westphalia

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The following project examples are divided into three sections.

- Performance – theatre, dance and music
- Visual arts – appreciating and participating
- Intergenerational arts

There then follows a section on professional development and training, which is an area of focus in Germany in a way that has not been in the UK, for example.

## PERFORMANCE – THEATRE, DANCE AND MUSIC

### Altentheater, Cologne

Tucked away in the cultural southern district of Cologne, the Altentheater is a world pioneer as much as a German one, having been started almost 40 years in 1979 ago by Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz. The Altentheater is part of the Freies Werkstatt theatre, a professional theatre established in 1977 with its own productions and performances of literary works, and an active programme of public engagement with all ages.

Actors in the Altentheater, however, range from their mid-sixties to mid-nineties and pieces are co-created with them. Its productions reflect the current life as well as the personal history of the actors and deal with the themes of older age. The piece I was lucky enough to see was a meditation on the theme of 'heimat', created out of the actors' childhood memories. Heimat is a difficult word to translate but means something like 'roots', conjuring up a sense of place, both physical and emotional. The show was punctuated by folk songs (Lieder), some in the local dialect of Kölsch, which are well known to the older generation and often deeply entwined with their conception of home. There was an opportunity for the audience to ask questions of performers afterwards. That day, two classes of social care students had come to see the show, which seemed like a good initiative by both the theatre and their colleges.

The ensemble has performed all over Germany and abroad, organising the first world festival of older people's theatre back in 1999 which had 250 participants from four continents.

### **Dance companies, Solingen and Dortmund**

There are a number of dance performance groups for older people in North Rhine-Westphalia. These include a dance theatre company in Solingen for over-55s, which has members between the ages of 55 and 80 and performs specially choreographed pieces, which the members co-create with the director. The Dortmund Ballet has also established a ballet company for older people with members between 55 and 80. The company is led by a professional dance teacher and choreographer and pieces are performed on stage at the Dortmund theatre.

### **Wir tanzen wieder (We dance again), Cologne**

*Wir tanzen wieder* is a Germany-wide initiative started by Stefan Kleinstück in Cologne in 2006. Believing it was important that people should have the opportunity to dance in the places of their youth rather than in institutional settings, he persuaded dance schools open their doors once a month to people with dementia and their relatives for an afternoon of dance from the foxtrot to the cha cha cha. Kleinstück has also taken the project into hospitals for people who are experiencing an acute dementia crisis. For twenty minutes, in-patients and relatives can waltz around the hospital ward, providing a welcome relief from the strict structures of the hospital day and allowing them to experience something light-hearted together at a difficult time.

## VISUAL ARTS – APPRECIATING AND PARTICIPATING

### **Dementia + Art, Cologne**

Dementia + Art is a small organisation set up by Jochen Schmauck-Langer who leads tours in several of Cologne's museums and galleries.

Jochen has developed his own methodology for Dementia + Art, which he calls 'Teilhabe-orientierte Vermittlung' – transmission through sharing rather than through knowledge. Having dementia can be a constant and wearing discovery of things you can no longer do. Jochen's tours are therefore deliberately not about education in art history but about people bringing and sharing their own resources, perceptions and experiences. The role of the tour guide is not to educate but to mediate between the individual and the piece of art.

The tours also include music and singing (sometimes Volkslieder, sometimes from the early days of pop) in his tours and often end with what he describes as the best picture in Cologne – a view of the famous cathedral with its twin spires.

Dementia + Art runs training in art appreciation for people with dementia for museums and other cultural institutions across German speaking countries. Its method is intended not only to be for people with dementia but to offer a particular form of engagement with art for others too. Interestingly, the tour I did with Jochen was attended by people without dementia as well.

It has also developed a partnership with the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), a major public broadcasting institution based in Cologne to offer dementia-friendly concerts with the WDR orchestra for people with dementia, largely from care homes, and their care-givers. The 50-minute programme consists of short classical excerpts and a sing-along at the end. These concerts take place both in concert halls but have also been organised in care homes as well.

## Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg

The Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg is a wonderful collection of 20th century sculpture and art, starting with the collection of Wilhelm Lehmbruck, a late 19th and early 20th century sculptor. The Lehmbruck Museum was the first museum in Germany to offer tours for people with dementia, starting in 2006, only shortly after the pioneering MoMA in New York. They also run art workshops for people with dementia in the museum's art studio.

The public engagement team at the museum, led by Sybille Kastner, also initiated a research project looking at developing effective models of art appreciation for people with dementia. The research was translated into a practical methodology and a training workshop offering a qualification for tour guides. As part of the project the Museum worked with 11 other art galleries and museums across Germany helping them to develop similar programmes of their own.



Tour for people with dementia, Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg. Photo © Michael Hagedorn.

## Atelier D, Düsseldorf

*Atelier D* (Studio D) is a regular art workshop for people with dementia. It was the brainchild of, and is run by, Corinna Bernshaus, a ceramic artist. She and fellow artist Uscha Urbainski both have their own studios in the Kunstschule Werksetzen, an 'art school' where they do their own work as well as run the sessions. People with dementia attend usually with a relative or carer – there is usually no specific theme but they can use the materials there to do what they feel inspired to do. *Atelier D* is a separate room, offering a quiet retreat, but participants can mingle with whatever activities are going on in the main room as well.

*Atelier D* is hosted by community arts organisation, Keywork, see also page 13.



Atelier D art studio for people with dementia, Düsseldorf. Photo © Corinna Bernshaus.

## Art for Care, Essen and beyond

Art for Care is run by Evelyn Duerschlag, a visual artist and graduate of the *Kulturgeragogik* professional training course run by kuba and University of Applied Science in Münster (see page 16). Evelyn goes into care homes and works with residents to create intricate wall murals. The murals are often of familiar local landmarks and deliberately designed to look how they would have looked in the 1950s and 60s when residents were young. In a care home in Essen, for example, they have created a mural of the concert venue where the Beatles played in 1966, and there are lively street scenes from the city centre. The paintings often feature cameo appearances by the residents themselves. The point is co-creation and Evelyn works not only with residents but also with staff and management.

The projects have many positive outcomes for the homes involved – staff report that residents with dementia are more relaxed, for example, and stronger bonds are created through reminiscence. The murals even function as signposts within the home, with residents saying for example 'I live near the apple tree, or near the coal mine'. Art for Care operates across Germany and in Switzerland.



Art for Care project, Essen. Photo © Evelyn Duerschlag.

## INTERGENERATIONAL ARTS

### Generational blog, Sparkasse Foundation, Cologne

There is a branch of the Sparkasse bank in pretty much every town and village in Germany. The Sparkasse also has 8,000 local foundations which each fund projects in their local areas. Since 2012, the Cologne/Bonn Sparkasse Foundation, one of the largest and wealthiest of the foundations, has been running intergenerational art projects.

A recent project is called *Generationen Blog* or 'Generational blog'. Older people and local schoolchildren are grouped into threes and spend a week doing various artistic tasks around a central theme (e.g. where will I live in the future, 'money' or 'work'...) which they then photograph and upload to a dedicated 'blog'.



'Generationen Blog', Cologne. Photo © SK Stiftung Kultur.

The core purpose is artistic and aims to strengthen self-expression and identity for both groups. However, a happy side benefit for older participants is learning technical skills and becoming more confident in using them (for example, how to use an i-pad, how to upload photos to a blog site).

The projects take place all year around in schools, generally in less affluent areas of the city, high-rise estates for example, where there is less social infrastructure and few cultural opportunities for either group. Older volunteers tend to come from the local community around the school. The project has become so popular there is now a waiting list for volunteers.

The end products from the projects are usually displayed through exhibitions in local spaces like churches and community venues.

### **Lehmbruck Museum Artgenossen (art lovers), Duisburg**

The Lehmbruck Museum has an established group of older 'volunteers'. The group emerged from a specific intergenerational project, called *Hey Alter!* which paired up older people with school pupils blind-date style to talk about what they thought about particular works of art on show. However, the older participants have since become a permanent part of the museum. Rather than just being 'helpers' or recipients of programmes, they come up with their own ideas for community engagement and carry them out themselves. For example:

- They developed a visitors' audio guide to the museum's collections featuring the perspectives of both old and young people on objects in the permanent exhibition.
- The park surrounding the museum is a gathering place for often young homeless people and drug addicts. The *Artgenossen* decided that they should invite them in, engage them in conversations about the works of art and generally involve them in the life of the museum. These sessions take place every second month and are of course served up with coffee and cake. The project was also supported by a local AIDS charity, which helped build initial trust. Although the drug problem persists, Sybille Kastner, co-director of public engagement, thinks there has been a marked change in the way that these two very different groups of people interact.

## Keyword, 'School workshop project', Düsseldorf

Keyword is a community arts organisation in Düsseldorf which runs a range of participatory arts projects including *Atelier D* (see above). It has a particular philosophy, strongly influenced by art theorist Josef Beuys and his concept of 'Sozialplastik' – that the practice of art can transform our social relations. The main strands of its approach are: art *with* people rather than for them; equality between 'artist' and other participants; art at the fringes, in 'unusual' places; and strengthening a sense of community through cultural participation.

The *Schulwerkstatt* (School workshop) project is run in collaboration with two local primary schools. Art studios have been set up on the school premises. Primary school pupils in Germany have various activities available to them after formal teaching is over and before parents pick them up. The Keyword studios are open to all – children can come and make whatever they like, as long as they come with an idea. The studios are staffed by an artist and local retired volunteers who have craft skills and can help the children use some of the woodworking tools in particular. Other locals can also come into the studio to get something repaired.



The Art Lovers group at the Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg. Photo © Klaus Dieter Brüggnerwerth.



Sock puppet theatre, Düsseldorf. Photo © Stefan Eichler.

**Keyword, Cultural Driving Licence**

Keyword also runs a 'Culture Driving Licence' scheme which local, usually retired, people can undertake. Participants take part in training and as part of the Licence, must devise a project which they develop and organise themselves. One group of retired teachers developed a sock puppet theatre, which has been very successful, and has worked with refugee children with German as a second language to help them learn the language.

## Professional training and development

A unique feature of the arts and older people scene in North Rhine-Westphalia and in Germany is the Centre of Competence for Creative Ageing and Inclusive Arts (kubia).

kubia is a training and information institution for *Kulturgeragogik* or 'cultural gerontology'. kubia, together with the University of Applied Sciences in Münster, has been instrumental in efforts to build *Kulturgeragogik* as a professional and an academic discipline. It emerged from the strong belief that pedagogy (theory of learning) is linguistically and in practice inextricably linked to children's learning and there needed to be ways of working better suited to the lives, experiences, capabilities and interests of older people.

kubia runs a wide range of short workshops and webinars for professionals, amounting to about 14 a year attracting a total of around 200 people. The topics covered are very varied – its 2017 schedule, for example, included using video in storytelling with older people, leading an older people's choir, moderating a storytelling café, and using humour with people with dementia. The workshops are intended to be very practical and give something people can take away back to their work. They are run by practitioners and are designed to be opportunities to exchange experiences and ideas.

kubia and the University at Münster together offer a year-long professional qualification in *Kulturgeragogik*. Participants on this course come from social care, from the arts, and from local and regional authorities (often people in cultural sphere who want to widen their public programmes to include older people). The course is part-time, achievable alongside employment, and involves a practical project and a viva at the end of the course.

The university is also hoping to offer a Masters course from 2018.

As well as training, kubia manages the funding provided by the Ministry, dispensing

### What is 'Kulturgeragogik'?

*Kulturgeragogik* is a relatively new professional discipline which focuses on engagement with and delivery of art and culture for older people. In terms of teaching, it is very practical and designed to help students and practitioners from both the arts and social care fields to deliver high-quality arts and culture programmes for older people.

funds for innovative projects around the state. It also conducts research and tries to identify gaps in provision. For example, noting that older people's theatre groups are largely female and need performance material for large casts but that there was a lack of contemporary writing that met these criteria, it funded a competition for aspiring scriptwriters challenging them to fill the gap.

kubia also acts as an information hub and promoter of good practice, for example, running 'action days' where funded projects can meet, present their work and exchange ideas. Its long-running Theatergold (Theatre Gold) programme runs a biennial theatre festival WILDwest for older people's theatre in the region – with productions, workshops and seminars. Its website provides a calendar of relevant events for older people and for professionals and its well-produced magazine offers both inspiration and good practice.

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## Concluding thoughts

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Whilst it can only ever be a snapshot, this research has revealed both parallels and contrasts with work happening in the UK and elsewhere.

To start with the parallels.

The professionally led dance groups in Solingen and Dortmund are in excellent company with programmes for older dancers in the UK (such as Ballet Rambert and Sadlers Wells' Company of Elders) and the range of initiatives springing up to engage older people with health conditions in dance (Dance for Parkinsons, for example). Cologne's Altentheater and Kuba's Theatergold programme are a wonderful illustration of the flourishing older people's theatre scene developing in many countries. Saitama in Japan and Stagebridge in California are two shining international examples, and *A new form of theatre* by Kate Organ provides many other examples from the UK. The Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg and the Ludwig Museum in Cologne join the ranks of the increasing numbers of museums and galleries in the UK which regard catering for the needs and interests of older visitors and particularly people with dementia as a vital part of their public mandate. There is clearly a strong degree of collaboration across the museum sector and the German Association of Museum Educators has a special interest group called 'Generation 60-plus', which aims to provide a platform for learning and exchange, as the Age-Friendly Museums Network does here. Finally, the inspiring ways the Lehmbruck Museum and Keywork in Düsseldorf have found to involve and empower enthusiastic older volunteers to work with other, often marginalised, community groups has a parallel in recent initiatives both in Manchester (Culture Champions) and in Hull (City of Culture volunteers).

The contrast with the UK is in the emphasis in Germany on training and professionalisation for people working in the arts with older people. This reflects its quite different education system, which places higher value on formal accreditation in more walks of life, including in the arts and cultural spheres. There is an interesting parallel with Helsinki, however, which has recently developed formal training and accreditation for care workers to become cultural coordinators. It may also reflect a cultural inclination to see artists in particular as integral to the social fabric, with for example, a longstanding policy of the state contributing to social security for all self-employed artists earning over 3,900 euros a year from artistic activity, which is hard to conceive of in the UK.

Staff at kubia like to quote the gerontologist, Professor Ursula Lehr: *Es kommt nicht darauf an, wie alt man wird, sondern wie man alt wird* – it doesn't matter how old you are; what matters is *how* you grow old. This small window into the creative ageing scene in Germany suggests that arts and cultural institutions and their committed creative ageing practitioners are living up to this advice.



'Generationen Blog', Cologne. Photo © SK Stiftung Kultur.

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## Resources on creative ageing

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All resources can be found on our website at [www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)

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*Ageing artfully: older people and professional participatory arts in the UK* (David Cutler, 2009)



*Living national treasure: arts and older people in Japan* (David Cutler, 2015)



*A new form of theatre: older people's involvement in theatre and drama* (Kate Organ, 2016)



*West Yorkshire Playhouse Guide to Dementia Friendly Performances* (2016)

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*Growing the creative ageing movement: international lessons for the UK* (Alice Thwaite, 2017)



*The role of local authorities in creative ageing* (David Cutler, 2017)



*Late opening: arts and older people in Scotland* (Andrew Eaton-Lewis, 2017)



*Dutch old masters – and mistresses: creative ageing in the Netherlands* (David Cutler, 2017)



*Towards the end: The Baring Foundation's Arts and Older People Programme 2010-2017* (David Cutler, 2017)





*“Es kommt nicht darauf an, wie alt  
man wird, sondern wie man alt wird”*

“It doesn’t matter how old you are;  
what matters is *how* you grow old”

Ursula Lehr

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