

## **STRATEGIC OPTIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BUCHAREST BRAND THROUGH THE APPLICATION ANALYSIS OF THE MEASURING INSTRUMENTS FOR THE URBAN BRANDS**

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**ABSTRACT.** *The reality demonstrates that, in the present context, the competition between the cities is harsh, amplified by the economic and politic effects of the globalization. The cities are fighting to attract investments, influence, businesses, tourists, residents. One of the challenges of the urban management in its efforts to grow the performance is linked around the construction of the urban brand as a solution in the process of the cities' development. This construction implies the validity, credibility, simplicity, attractiveness and distinctiveness of the city's image. The answer of the researchers to the need of a critical effective instrument in this area was the creation of the Urban Brand Index. Through these measuring instruments, the actors implied in the administration of the cities can easily understand the perception of the visitors, investors, costumers and future residents upon the image of the city, to identify and apply some pro-active measures to stimulate and improvement of the existing opportunities that have as main result the development of the city. In this study are presented three of these instruments - The City Brands Index, The European Barometer of City Brands and The Global Cities Index - and the way in which these can contribute to the actions for constructing a powerful urban brand of Bucharest, is analyzed.*

**KEY WORDS:** *city brand; marketing strategies; tourism; ways of measuring the brand*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

As the phenomenon of globalization is intensifying, the cities are entering into a harsh competition, to gain attention, influence, sale markets, investments, businesses, visitors, residents, talents, and nonetheless, important events; obviously, the competition is not represented anymore by neighbour areas, but by regions and countries from anywhere. Even if the urban branding concept is relatively new, the process itself was conscious or unconscious practiced since the cities became rivals in the fight for commerce, population, wealth, prestige or power in a global context.

Usually, the individuals associate the cities with a single quality, a promise, an attribute or a story. Paris means romanticism, Milan means style, New York means energy, Washington - power, Tokyo-modernity. The branding operates especially with these mental images. These become thus the raw material that needs to be processed and finished through branding. The management of the urban brand is the one that tries to influence this image, being the object of the urban marketing, and not the city itself.

There are more important reasons to study the need and potential of a place or city branding. A positive powerful image has the capacity to offer a city a competitive solid and distinctive advantage. Moreover, it can influence the decisions in the process of choice of the places for direct foreign investments and affects the attitudes towards the services and products of that place, of its ability to attract tourists and entrepreneurial activities. The image of a city plays an important role in the belief of the labour force and the students with potential to choose that place.

In the last years, the conception that a country, a region or a city can transform in a brand won more and more partisans and started to obtain more attention both from the practitioners, and the theoreticians. But, until now there was no consensus regarding the appliance of the techniques that belong to the commercial brands management.

## **2. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE URBAN BRAND - STRATEGIC OPTION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CITIES**

“The conscious attempt of the governs to shape an identity of location projected especially and to promote in front of the target-groups both on the internal plan and external one, is a practice almost as old as the civic government act itself” (Karavtzis & Ashworth, 2005). Really, the concepts of promoting the places and identity do not represent something new. The existence of the civic government act was, as it appeared, doubled by the efforts of the cities to promote for attracting objectives such as the development of the entrepreneurial climate and the growth of the tourist sector, which Short (1999) names “the labour city” and “the fun city”, elements that inter-condition each other.

At the start of the 1990s, the researchers like Ashworth and Voogd, Berk or Koetler started to mention the concept of “place marketing”. Nevertheless, the urban branding represents a new notion, few authors referring to it. Karavtzis and Ashworth (2005) specify that “there are important lacunas in the literature referring to the city branding problem in general and to real case studies in particular”. Moreover,

Parkerson and Saunders (2005) recognize that “there were few empiric researches to determine how you can build a successful urban brand”. Thereby, it is very hard to approach a theme that the theories almost don’t treat at all. Hankinson states the idea that there is still a general theoretic frame that differentiates the development of the place brands from the classic theories referring to the commercial products branding.

Ashworth and Voogd declare that the place marketing suffered generally from the lack of understanding of the concept by the marketing specialists and by the markets. Karavtzis (2004) adds that “the limited implementing of the location marketing is caused by the lack of marketing knowledge by the urban administrators”.

At the beginning of the marketing proliferation, the notion of urban marketing meant promotion or, more exact, the advertising of the city as a whole. Until the last decades, the urban marketing was treated as a process in which the urban activities were in close connection with the demands of the consumers to maximize the social and economic efficiency of the area according with the goals wanted to be achieved. Ashworth and Voord (1990) emphasize that the urban marketing is “the approach oriented towards demand” in which the changes in the urban space are planned from the approach of the present and potential users of the urban product. Nevertheless, Shidt-Jensen (2006) argues that if a city concentrates only on marketing, instead of inoculate to its citizens, companies and local organizations the brand values, then the risk of misunderstandings between the real experiences lived by the tourists or the new residents and the promises of the branding company, appear. If the promise refers to “dynamism” and “opening”, but the experience resumes only to an inactive local community and little opened to foreigners, the city becomes a disappointment.

According to the definition of Mommaas (2002) the urban branding represent “a strategy that wants to confer cities an image, a cultural significance, which ideally will function as an added and symbolic value source”. The city brand is an instrument meant to grow the statute and prestige of the city as a tourist destination or as a residential or entrepreneurial location. On internal plan, this could determine the positive implication for places or cities providing a civic pride, sense of community, investments in the public area, a feeling of development. A powerful city brand must be created holistic, because the entire city represents a brand. In the creation process of the brand, some aspects, such as images, characteristics and experiences are usually selected, while others are eliminated. In brad, many times there can be integrated ignored aspects until then.

Once the urban planners understand the current image of the respective place, they can deliberate regarding the type of image that can be built accordingly. One of the challenges that result from this situation is the creation of an image that determines efficient results for all the target-groups. The eligibility conditions of an urban image to the title of universally available efficiency are (Koetler&Gertner, 2002):

- **Validity**: if the place promotes an image being to far from the reality, the chances of success are minimum.
- **Credibility**: The exaggerated efforts of promotion become dangerous if they are practiced on long term.
- **Simplicity**: Because most of the cities do not develop promoting strategies, they tend to disseminate any information a little positive, without making a profound

analysis of it; so, the priority process is usually inexistent, generating an exhaustive promotion and implicit, confusion in the target-groups.

- **Attractiveness:** The image must offer reasons to generate the wish of the individuals to visit, live, invest or work in the respective place. For this, it is based on the promotion of different attributes like the economic stability, quality of life, opening towards exterior, infrastructure etc.
- **Distinctiveness:** The image “works” most efficient when it approaches differently other common themes.

The creation of an image with resonance for the public represents an organic part of the entire process of branding, needing both a profound improvement of the city at a real scale, and the call to creativity for discovering symbols.

### **3. ACTIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BRAND OF BUCHAREST THROUGH THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE APPLICATION ANALYSIS OF THE MEASURING INSTRUMENTS FOR THE URBAN BRANDS**

Through the measuring instruments of the urban brands, the political leaders and business men can easily understand the perception of the visitors, investors, costumers and future residents upon the image of the city, to take pro-active measures, improvement and stimulations of the existing opportunities. The Urban Brands Indexes prove that there is a need of a sincere rethinking of the city’s offer for the present and future. The urban branding is not something held just by the local governments or by some agencies and departments from their structure. It represents a responsibility and a common practice of the main urban actors. What can be more powerful than an urban brand defined and created by the authorities of a city that use their quality and advantages to assure that the world receives a comprehensive and consistent message about the city? To achieve this goal, the urban branding demands the use of new forms of leadership, strategies and creativity. This represents the premise in the intervention of evaluating the capacity of constructing a solid urban brand for Bucharest in the context of the place analysis occupied by the capital of Romania in the offered charts by the most known instruments of measuring the urban brands.

#### **3.1. Context**

**Bucharest** is the capital of Romania, and in the same time, the biggest city, industrial and commercial centre of the country. The population is of 1.944.367 citizens (evaluation at 1 January 2009 according to [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro)) makes Bucharest the sixth city in European Union as inhabitants. Still, in fact, Bucharest concentrates daily more than three million people, and the specialists forecast that, in the next five years, the total will exceed four millions (Benezic, 2009).

The first mention of the town appears in 1459. In 1862 it becomes the capital of Romania. Since then, it suffers continuous modification, being the center of the artistic, cultural and mass-media scene. Between the two world wars, the elegant architecture and the Bucharest elite brought it the fame of “Little Paris”. Presently, the capital has the same administrative level as a county and is divided in six districts.

According to [www.citymayors.com](http://www.citymayors.com), Bucharest is situated in the category of “*the regional marginal metropolis, with limited international influence, having few third party services at metropolitan level and international functions little developed*”, similar with Athens and Lisbon, but with the possibility to prepare the pass to the superior category of “*regional metropolis with powerful international influence, with a structure of activities little specialized and specialized or incomplete international functions*” as Rome, Madrid or Bern.

Bucharest is still looking for its identity. Reported to the national brand, presently being in an incipient phase, it can play two roles: either ingredient of the country brand, capital being an element included on the list of values promoted at national level, either as mark point for the definition and later, the improvement of the country brand. The potential remained unexploited must be improved in the future by the urban branding, some marketing steps adapted to the local specific.

### **3.2. City Brands Index**

**A. Principles of functioning.** The City Brands Index was realized for the first time in 2005, being the result of the collaboration between Simon Anholt<sup>1</sup> and Gfk Roper Public Affair & Media<sup>2</sup>.

*The City Brands Index is the only analytic chart of the urban brands realized at global level.* It uses an innovative set of instruments that assist the cities in the development, implementation and evaluation of their own brands, offering global and local perspectives necessary to the urban progress and the success of businesses, commerce and tourism. Through this chart, the political leaders, the business men can easily understand the perception of visitors, investors, costumers and future citizens upon the image of their cities, to take pro-active measures and improve and stimulate the existing opportunities.

The Urban Brand hexagon represents the basic premise of this index. Its components consider (Anholt, 2007):

1. **Presence** is an element that refers to the international statute of the city and its place on global plan. The questions that aimed the quantification of this dimension referred to the familiarity of the questioned ones with the cities, to the proper visiting of them, and to the major elements that recommend them for celebrity. “The place” in the top does not reflect just a one dimension characteristic, does not express just a superior or inferior position, but also the importance of the contribution of the respective city to the cultural, scientific patrimony or urban government from the last 30 years.
2. The opinions of the questioned persons are incarnated in points granted to “**the place**”: physical aspects of each city, that refer to elements such as exterior

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<sup>1</sup> *Simon Anholt* is an authority in the marketing area, concentrating upon the activities of states, cities and regions branding. His expertise is confirmed by the position in the United Kingdom’s Government, being a member in the Council of Public Diplomacy, and moreover, working as independent councilor for other 20 national, regional and local governments on the strategy of brand and public diplomacy.

<sup>2</sup> *Gfk Roper Public Affair & Media* is a division of Gfk Custom Research North America, specialized in the pollster and social problems, media researches, communication and the measurement of the corporative reputation, both in United States of America, and at global level.

ambiance, traveling through the city, exterior aspect and influence of the climate upon the state of the individuals.



Source: *The Anholt City Brands Index - "How the World Views its Cities"*, 2005

**Figure 1. The Urban Brand Hexagon**

3. **The potential** takes into consideration the economical and educational opportunities that each city can offer to the visitors, business men and immigrants. The differentiation criteria for this component are: the facility to find a place of work in the city, choosing the best one for business, the best city to obtain a university diploma.
4. **The pulse** underlines the meaning of the vibrant urban life in the city brand, the easiness of which the people think they can find interesting things to do, both as a resident, and tourist. This dimension has an intangible character, taking into consideration the emotional impact of the city, being a decisive element to characterize the townsman spirit.
5. **The people** represent one of the most important elements of the marketing strategy, the approach of urban actors depending on their grade of hospitality and their prejudices for strangers. The brand is based on the facility of the new comers to integrate in a community which they share the language and culture with, and the level of security in the city.
6. **Basic necessities/Fundamental demands** express the basic qualities of a city that imply the life in that place, the facility of finding satisfying and convenient accommodation and which are the general standards of the public services.

**B. Index City Brands and Bucharest.** Bucharest isn't in the Urban Brands Index realized by Simon Anholt and Gfk Roper Public Affair & Media. The reasons of this absence are multiple: Bucharest isn't perceived as a brand, there isn't a unitary urban image; it is a part of the "wronged" cities even by its own citizens, its image being undermined by the lack of administrative will and initiative, by the lack of implication from the civil society and the inability of the marketing activity to fill a

feeling of pride, of townsman membership; Bucharest offers a “story”, even a complex “story”, fascinating as evolution, history, culture, but this story was not yet transposed in a marketable product.

The causes of the non-inclusion of the capital in the first 60 cities of the world can be identified by the analyze of a potential hexagon of the urban brand of Bucharest:

- **Presence** of the city is based on two elements. From the familiarity of the foreigners with the city, point of view, it is very low. While the image of other cities from the ex-communist block were loomed increasingly better by the promotion (the best examples are Budapest and Prague), Bucharest is identified with difficulty. Even if the statute of capital of Romania is recognized and its geographic position, its image hasn't the capacity to generate international echoes. The contribution of the city at the cultural and scientific patrimony is minor, if not inexistent of negative; so, the consequences of capitalism translated not only into a denial from the communist past, but also by the architectural interwar heritage, will of modernization and freedom translated by the inadvertence and partial destruction of the Bucharest cultural image. The problems from the educational system were not attenuated by the dimensions and importance of the capital, because it is not yet an international university centre and can assert only punctual on the scientific scene. Of course, neither the local administration doesn't represent a model of governance, because of the multiple problems of the urban development, the inexistence of durable and feasible urban strategies that take into consideration all interest groups, but also of an organizational structure that doesn't permit a harmonious collaboration between governors.
- **Urban location** doesn't benefit of a feedback from the respondents because they don't have a well defined mental image about Bucharest.
- **Potential of Bucharest** is a major one from the businesses opportunity point of view, but it is undermined by the lack of fiscal and financial stimulants for the foreign investors, considering that in the last years, numerous international companies oriented towards Central and Eastern Europe to open branches. As a university profile, the lack of proper campuses, a solid university spirit and opportunities offered to the students, determines the low potential, but in the conditions of suitable reforms, it presents real chances of improvement.
- **The pulse** of the city is the aspect which demonstrates the unfair consequences of the inexistence of a branding activity: Bucharest is a vibrant, young, open, interesting city, but the absence of an international image doesn't permit to the foreigners to perceive it at its true value.
- The chapter “**People**” considers the level of urban security, not a high one for Bucharest, its familiarity with language and culture, available only for visitors with Latin roots (from Spain, Italy, Portugal etc.) and the image of people; internationally, we can't talk about a separate perception of the people from Bucharest from the Romanians, the latter not having a positive image because of the values of immigrants from Europe and some unpleasant punctual events. Nevertheless, Bucharest is a friendly social environment, its residents being hospitable with the foreigners.

- About the **basic necessities/fundamental demands** we can say that they represent the “Achilles heel” of the capital. So, the real-estate market with high prices inadequate to the quality of accommodation, low quality public services or with an unequal coverage of the territory and the existing disparities between different Bucharest neighbourhoods, the road, sportive, educational infrastructure which is undesirable “convicts” Bucharest only, at most, to the statute of touristic and/or business destination, but not into a city in which the individuals would desire to move.

### 3.3. The European Barometer of the Urban Brands

**A. Principles of functioning.** Another reference index is “*The European Barometer of Urban Brands*”, created by the British consulting company Saffron in 2008. This is an instrument used to compare the strengths of the European cities, taking into consideration that the competition between them intensified due to the large integration, the expedient travel conditions in the space of the old continent, rediscovery of the local identities and cultures. The barometer measures the force of the urban brands and evaluates the efficiency of branding in the exploit process of the goods held by the cities.

The study aimed 72 European cities, the majority over 450.000 inhabitants, but also metropolis like Manchester, Bristol, Cardiff, Leeds and Newcastle. The analysis emphasized **two major aspects**:

**a). The force of the urban goods:** depending on this, the potential maximum power of the urban brand is foreseen. The survey realized by Saffron implied two stages: the identification of the best wanted urban goods and comparing them with the real offer of the cities subject to the barometer.

**b). The force of the urban brand:** experts from Saffron chose **4 factors** to be included in the Barometer that measures the force of the urban brand: *recognition of the city (can the people identify the city by a simple visualization of a postal card?); the quantity/force of the positive/attractive features; the conversational value (how interactive can be a debate about visiting the respective city?); the recognition in mass-media, quantified by the number of mentions in media in the last year.*

**B. The European Barometer of the Urban Brands and Bucharest.** Regarding Bucharest’s position in the European Barometer of the Urban Brands, it occupies, from the viewpoint of the criteria categories taken into consideration, the following positions: at the chapter “force of the urban goods”, obtained 61 points and occupies place 36 from 72; at the chapter “force of the urban brand”, obtained 44 points and occupies place 42 from 72; regarding the use of the Brand, Bucharest uses it in percentage of 73%, occupying place 47.

So the capital is on the medium side of the chart, but remarkable is the sub-use of the urban brand, because of the absence of a proper urban marketing activity. By analyzing the top, we can observe the presence of some cities with lower scores for the first two categories that use more efficiently their brand upgrading Bucharest (table 1). Newcastle, Marseille and Rotterdam have solid marketing and branding strategies, sustained by specific organizational structures from the City Councils. They have



declared values and aim the procurement of the durability and growth of the visibility of the cities on an international plan. So, even if the offered urban goods and the force of the brand have lower values, they maximize their efficiencies by using a message that will overpass until the target-group and raise its interest.

**Table 1. Comparing the scores - Bucharest - other relevant European cities**

City	Bucharest	Belgrade	Marseille	Newcastle	Rotterdam	Sarajevo
Force of the urban goods (points)	61	47	56	43	52	49
Position considering the force of the urban goods	36	64	47	69	55	59
Force of the urban brand (points)	44	38	44	43	43	43
Position considering the force of the urban brand	42	55	42	46	46	46
Grade of brand use (percent)	73%	80%	79%	99%	83%	86%
Position considering the grade of brand use	47	41	42	18	38	35

The superiority of Belgrade and Sarajevo could surprise, regarding the struggled history after 90s from the ex-Yugoslavia. So, even if Sarajevo is a small city, with little over 300.000 inhabitants, it benefits of a favourable geographic position, with impressing landscapes due to the presence of the Dinaric Alps. Its promotion was assisted also by the collaboration with cities like Shanghai, Venice, Istanbul, Madrid, Barcelona, Amsterdam and Stockholm.

Belgrade has an urban development strategy which contains a single chapter designed to the promotion of the city’s identity, the marketing activity being powerfully sustained by the Tourism Organization of Belgrade.

If we analyze the top of the most desired urban goods, we can observe that Bucharest has a rich offer for the first three positions:

- touristic attractions, less natural because of the degradation of the environment, but historic, due to the numerous ages of the city and the architectural heritage, make the capital a city of contrasts which addresses to various target-groups;

- even if there is no typical Bucharest kitchen, the local gastronomy is an open door to the Romanian kitchen, offering diversity and colour, flavour, but also many restaurants with international profile;
- the local population is more opened to the foreigners, while the Latin character of it facilitates the communication with tourists.

Regarding the utilities and facilities, Bucharest is known as a relatively cheap city, occupying the 57<sup>th</sup> place in the top of the most expensive cities in Europe (according to [www.citymayors.com](http://www.citymayors.com)) and benefits a favourable climate, due to the relative stability of it.

So, we can say that Bucharest is “satisfied with little” and is underrating its qualities. The lack of a structure with clear defined responsibilities for the marketing activity and a capable strategy to improve the favourable elements of the branding lead to a sub-use of the brand potential. The recommendations regarding the improvement of this situation will be presented later in the chapter.

### 3.4. Global Cities Index

**A. Principles of functioning.** Global cities index was realized by “Foreign Policy” magazine, with managerial consulting company A.T. Kearney and the Council of Global Problems of Chicago. Even if, at first sight, it can not be considered an explicit index of the urban brands, the elements on which the classification is based represent the key ingredients of a successful urban brand. Moreover, it places the city into a larger context, determined by globalization and best illustrates the international presence of every metropolitan area and the way in which they integrate in the planet’s mechanism of function. From the used methodology, Global Cities Index realizes a chart for 60 cities based on 5 *dimensions*: business environment; human capital; exchange of information; cultural experience; politic power.

**B. Global Cities Index and Bucharest.** The absence of Bucharest from the Global Cities Index is explained by its weak performances. The incapacity of promotion is translated through the episodic role of the capital on the international scene, the power and sophistication at low levels, the lack of attractiveness for researchers and students, but also the still starting level of connection to the society based on knowledge, characterized through rapid information exchanges. The only element which could take it in the far future would be the cultural experience, under the conditions of the efficient improvement of the architectural, historic and cultural patrimony and the organization of numerous events with international echo.

### 3.5. The European Cities Monitor Report or The top of the business cities in 2008

The Central and Eastern Europe countries are the most popular for the first 500 multinational top companies in the world, regarding the opening of branches. Bucharest classified in 2008 on 31<sup>st</sup> place (with a decrease of three places from 2007) from the total of 34 big cities included in the European Cities Monitor report of the real-estate consulting company Cushman&Wakefield, presented by [citymayors.com](http://citymayors.com).

On the first three places of the chart are London, Paris and Frankfurt.

- at the question how well the companies know the 34 cities included in the report as a possible business location, Bucharest obtained the lowest score. So, only 14% from the 500 companies knew the capital.
- the capital of Romania is also on the last place at the situation of external transport connections, declining three positions from 2007, while the intern transport improved, situating Bucharest on 26<sup>th</sup> place, at the same level with Prague and Oslo.
- Bucharest recorded a decline from the 28<sup>th</sup> place, in 2007 to the 32<sup>nd</sup> place in 2008 at possibility of companies to recruit qualified personnel, and is on the second position at the costs of labour force, after last year was on the first place, being passed by Warsaw.
- At the chapter availability of office buildings, it is on 28<sup>th</sup> place, with a decline of 18 positions. "If in 2007 the rents of the office spaces were considered accessible and placed Bucharest on the second position in this aspect, from the European cities, in 2008 Bucharest lost 11 places, situating at the half of the chart, on 13<sup>th</sup> place. Budapest rose from the 5<sup>th</sup> place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Prague rose from the 8<sup>th</sup> place to 6<sup>th</sup>, and Warsaw, which occupied the first position in 2007, rose on 5<sup>th</sup> place. This aspect is tight linked with the lack of such quality spaces solicited by companies, Bucharest being only on 28<sup>th</sup> place in 2008 in this matter, a fall of 18 places from the last year. Prague maintained as in 2007 on 19<sup>th</sup> place, while Budapest improved its position from place 13, in 2007, to place nine in 2008" (according to [www.citymayors.com](http://www.citymayors.com)) the report shows. Its intention of extension in the next five years places the Capital on the third position followed by Moscow and Prague, but at the same level with Warsaw.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The charts realized by companies with international fame reflect the perceptions of the citizens at European or global level regarding the urban image; both the positive perceptions and the negative ones can be used as instruments for the branding activity, the first being basic stones of the urban image, urban launch ramps, while the pejorative ones are becoming the premises of a reactive and proactive urban strategy. So the capital can be perceived as an offensive player, and not just as a defensive one that tries to preserve its position.

We have to mention that there is no universal recipe for the urban branding, this being a complex and personalized matter. Maybe the most difficult task is the deploy of a coherent and solid urban audit. This must describe accurately the portrait of Bucharest: which are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and what the urban essence that makes it unique is. All these key points must be researched in the business urban life, but also in the tourists and residents life, because they are the base of every city's use. It's opportune that the capital's brand to be oriented, first of all, towards people in the detriment of business concentration itself, on the tourism indicators or on the necessity of building a new museum to demonstrate its "cultural city" statute. It must facilitate the social imply by the active participation of the citizens (either tourists, residents or business men) in the urban life, this phenomenon

translating later in positive economic results. For example, the researchers will accept to work in the city only if there are powerful motivations: a high qualitative level of life, an adequate educational system for their children, an efficient sanitary system, etc. So, the alchemy is complete only when the impact of the brand is felt at every level, when all the needs of the residents are fulfilled, because the people are the ones who are building the city.

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