EFFECTS OF TOURIST SATISFACTION: INFLUENCE ON THE TOURISTIC FLOWS (CASE RUSSIA-BULGARIA)

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Tourism is a socio-economic and political phenomenon. The increase in tourism flows and the development of inbound tourism and the country's economy as a whole are positively influenced by consumer satisfaction with the tourism industry. Satisfied tourists are always willing to share their successful experience with friends and acquaintances. Tourism is an important economic sector for Bulgaria. A survey-based methodology was developed for the purpose of this study and the questionnaire was developed on the basis of the multi-attribute approach to the satisfaction rating of a tourist destination. This study identifies factors that have a greater impact on overall satisfaction of Russian tourist. The improvement of the aforesaid components will, in our view, drive a rapid increase in the level of satisfaction among tourists arriving from Russia and further increase of tourist flows to Bulgaria.
Key words: tourism, satisfaction, consumer, tourist flows, definition, Russia, Bulgaria
JEL: F23, M21, Z32

Introduction

Modern tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. The share of tourism revenues in the global GDP is increasing every year Tourism accounts for about 30% of global trade in services. Investments in the tourism industry are growing every year[1]. The tourism industry employs considerable manpower and about 10% of global capital. For many developed countries (France, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, etc.) and developing countries (in Southeast Asia, Southern Europe, Latin America, etc.), tourism is an important part of economy contributing to its development.

Inbound tourism plays a special role in the country's economy. This type of tourism not only attracts foreign currency and ensures the growth of the national tourism product output, but also enhances the investment attractiveness of the tourism industry and the country as a whole for the business community[2]. The increase in tourism flows and the development of inbound tourism and a country's economy as a whole is positively influenced by consumer satisfaction by the tourism industry. The fact of re-visiting the tourist destination with satisfied tourists is confirmed by scientists in a wide range of studies[3]. In addition, satisfied tourists are a good tool for attracting new tourists to the tourist destination[4].

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[1] *Tourism Highlights*, 2016 edition (2016), p. 2.
[2] FILOSOFOVA, T. (2016): Tourism as a Priority Vector of Humanitarion Cooperation and Intergration*s*, p.301
[3] e.g. RAJARATNAM, S. D. – MUNIKRISHNAN, U. T. – SHARIF, S. P. – NAIR, V. (2014): Service Quality and Previous Experience as a Moderator in Determining Tourists' Satisfaction with Rural Tourism Destinations in Malaysia: A Partial Least Squares Approach, p.203; FILOSOFOVA, T. – GASPARYAN, L. (2015): The Eurasian Economic Union: Opportunities for Increasing the Russia-Armenia Tourist Flows, p. 259.
[4] YOON, Y. – UYSAL, M. (2005): An examination of the effects of motivation and satisfaction on destination loyalty: A structural model, p. 45.

1 Terminology, Theoretical and Methodological Framework of the Study

There are various definitions and interpretations of the word "tourism". The United Nations Statistical Commission in 1993 defined tourism as "the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. It is also noted that such activities are not related to any remunerated activities at the place of stay[5]. Tourism is essentially a kind of leisure associated with travelling to and staying during non-working time in an environment different from a person's permanent place of residence for various purposes, such as leisure, entertainment and meeting new people, etc. The first recorded use of the word "tourism" was reported as appearing in England's Sporting Magazine as far back as 1811. After World War II, tourism has turned into a mass phenomenon throughout the world.

Today, tourism is a socio-economic and political phenomenon. Tourism makes a great impact on the development of many states and regions, plays a major role in the sustainable development of society as a whole[6]. As a phenomenon, tourism performs various functions in people's lives: cognitive; recreational; educational; communicative; meeting the needs for new impressions and changing places of stay; providing economic benefits and services in accordance with the tourist's requirements; efficient use of spare time; increasing employment rates and improving the local population's living standards; developing socio-economic infrastructure and interregional cooperation among countries.

There are various criteria for classifying the types of tourism: by transportation means, by purpose, by organizational form, etc. At the same time, different types of tourism are associated with meeting various human needs. The following types of tourism can be distinguished: recreational tourism (entertainment and wellness programs for tourists), sports tourism, medical and health tourism, cultural and educational tourism, event tourism, which implies meeting a person's need to attend a specific event, adventure (extreme) tourism, which implies meeting people's need to put themselves to test in various extreme situations), religious tourism, which is based on religious needs of people representing a wide array of religious beliefs), nostalgic tourism, which based on the need to visit places associated with events in a person's individual biography and that of his/her family), creative tourism, which is associated with a person's creative activity, etc.

Tourism industry is divided into internal and international tourism. UNWTO distinguished the following forms of tourism[7]:

(A) Internal tourism comprises trips by residents of the country of reference within that country;

(B) Inbound tourism comprises trips by non-residents of the country of reference within that country;

(C) Outbound tourism comprises trips by residents of the country of reference to another country.

In this paper, the term "tourism" is understood in a broad sense including economic activities associated with the production, sale and consumption of tourism products in a broad sense, i.e. goods and services by various organizations: providing travel, accommodation, services, insurance, etc.

All types of products (services) consumed by tourists can be divided into several groups:[8]

(A) hotels and restaurants (including catering);

(B) travel agencies and tour operators services;

(C) tourist guide services;

(D) other.

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[5] *International Recommendations for Tourist Statisics*, 2008 (2008).

[6] DUROVICH, A.P. (2012): *Organization of tourism*, p. 15.

[7] *International Recommendations for Tourist Statisics*, 2008 (2008).

[8] *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services*, 2010 (2010).

The impact of tourism on economic growth has been addressed in a number of papers. Specifically, some authors have proposed the tourism-led growth hypothesis (TLGH), maintaining that there is a link between economic growth and inbound tourism. The study says that a country's economic growth is possible through the expansion of tourist exports in addition to the growth in the amount of physical and human capital[9]. At the same time, international tourism is a powerful factor fostering international cooperation and it plays an important role in communication between peoples, has a great humanitarian, primarily cultural and economic significance[10]. Inbound tourism facilitates the development of new and improvement of the existing infrastructures of a destination, which are used not only by tourists, but by the local population as well, it also creates an opportunity for expanding entrepreneurial activities in the country. It contributes to the development of other economic sectors, such as agriculture, transportation, trade. Tourism creates the requirement to develop tourist facilities, transportation and communication means, consumer goods production and many other areas.

In view of the aforesaid, there is no denying the importance of inbound tourism for a country and its population. In addition to a county's economic growth, tourism also ensures social and cultural development, which, in turn, triggers a chain reaction and makes a positive effect on the living standards of the population and the country as a whole. In today's competitive environment, where it is important in any area not only to attract customers, but also to retain them by providing quality services and ensuring satisfaction with the services or goods received, the tourism industry is no exception either[11]. One of the main issues for each destination striving to develop inbound tourism is to ensure the satisfaction of tourists, which triggers the desire to come back and recommend it to other to spend their vacations in the country.

2 Main Provisions of the Consumer Satisfaction Study

Satisfied tourists are always willing to share their successful experience with friends and acquaintances. This phenomenon has been widely used in marketing under the name "word of mouth" or WOM recommendations, and satisfied tourists are more likely to make repeat purchases. The recent years have seen an increasingly greater interest in the concept of customer satisfaction on the part of scientists. However, no uniform approach to assessing customer satisfaction has yet been developed. The study takes into account that satisfaction is a psychological state experienced by a person after the realization that the desired goal has been achieved, and it relates to various aspects of a person's life, inter alia with regard to the services purchased[12]. It matches the term "customer satisfaction" as defined by the United Nations World Tourism organization (UNWTO): "customer satisfaction is a psychological concept based on a pleasurable feeling of well-being which arises when one's desires and expectations are met by products or services"[13]. Satisfied tourists are always willing to share their successful experience with friends and acquaintances. This phenomenon has been widely used in marketing under the name "word of mouth" or WOM recommendations, and satisfied tourists are more likely to make repeat purchases.

People mostly believe those they trust, and, therefore, acquaintances who have already visited a tourist destination concerned will be one of the most relevant sources of information

[9] BALAGUER, J. – CANTAVELLA-JORDÁ, M. (2002): Tourism as a long-run economic growth factor: the Spanish case, p. 877.

[10] FILOSOFOVA T. (2016): Tourism as a Priority Vector of Humanitarion Cooperation and Intergration, p. 308.

[11] FILOSOFOVA,T. – GASPARYAN, L. (2015): The Eurasian Economic Union: Opportunities for Increasing the Russia-Armenia Tourist Flows, p. 263.

[12] SZYMANSKI, D.M. - HENARD, D.H. (2001): Customer Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis of the Empirical Evidence, p. 16.

[13] CHEN-YI WU (2016). Tourist Behavioral Intentions and Festival Quality: The Case of Kaohsiung's Lantern Festival, p. 24.

for potential tourists. Therefore, a high level of tourist satisfaction has a positive effect on the development of inbound tourism of a destination and it is achieved through fostering the loyalty of satisfied tourists who feel like revisiting the destination. Another positive influence is the increase in the number of visitors coming to a tourist destination on the recommendations of tourists who have already visited it and are happy with it. A factor that is also relevant is the attraction of tourists using the destination's competitive advantages compared to other destinations.

All the aforesaid factors contribute to increased tourist flow to a destination, which, in turn, leads to an increase in the income received from the expenses made by tourists. The funds generated by tourism can further be used to create new opportunities for the improvement of destinations' competitiveness and tourist satisfaction contributing to the development of the tourism industry, which is important for the country's economy. However, it is important to properly understand which particular tourism segment needs to be developed to achieve the highest positive result and ensure an efficient growth of the country's economy. This hypothesis was reaffirmed by James Petrick's work, who has proven that indeed there is a connection between satisfaction and inbound tourism using SERV-PERVAL[14]. At the same time, a correct destination perception by tourists is essential for its successful promotion, as it influences vacation choices and purchases of goods and services during the trip, as well as the decision to revisit a particular holiday destination[15]. The higher the level of tourist satisfaction and the better the impression of the vacation, the greater are the chances that the same destination will be chosen for the next holiday.

In this paper, the level of consumer satisfaction is determined by the degree to which a particular product meets their expectations. Satisfaction evaluation is often formed by customers as they compare their expectations before a service is rendered against the subjective perceptions they have got after the service was provided[16]. (This theory served as a theoretical framework to build the model for measuring customer satisfaction using the SERQUAL method[17]. According to the available research data, there are various factors that influence satisfaction with tourist destinations[18] It is therefore important to identify such components and assess the tourist's level of satisfaction with them for a specific destination. At the same time, the significance of the same component for the formation of overall satisfaction can considerably vary across different segments due to tourists' preferences.

The study conducted to assess satisfaction with Bulgaria as a tourist destination was based on a multi-attribute approach. The assessment toolkit included transportation, accommodation, price levels and some other attributes. As part of the study, the satisfaction assessment was performed with due regard for a separate segment identified on the basis of available statistics, which represents the main and growing market for the destination and accounts for the largest part of the tourist flow from Russia to Bulgaria.

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[14] PETRICK, J. (2003): Measuring Cruise Passengers' Perceived Value. p. 252.
[15] KOZAK, M . – RIMMINGTON, M. (2000): Tourist satisfaction with Mallorca, Spain, as an off-season holiday destination
[16] OLIVER, R. (1980): A cognitive model of the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions, p. 460.
[17] OLIVER, R. (1980):A cognitive model of the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions, p. 460.
[18] DANAHER, P. – ARWEILER, N. (1996): Customer Satisfaction in the Tourist Industry: A Case Study of Visitors to New Zealand, p. 89; HUANG, S. – HSU, C. (2009): Effects of Travel Motivation, Past Experience, Perceived Constraint, and Attitude on Revisit Intention, p. 29; MAYER, K. – JOHNSON, L. – HU, C. – CHEN, S. (1998). Gaming customer satisfaction: An exploratory study, p. 178.

3 Identifying the principal characteristics of tourist flows from Russian to Bulgaria

It is not by coincidence that Russia – Bulgaria tourist flows were chosen as the study subject matter. Tourism is an important economic sector for Bulgaria: 3–5% of the country's socially active population is engaged in excursion services accounting for $ 1.0 billion of income, or 7% of the country's gross national product. The country heavily relies on tourism to attract much needed foreign currency. The expansion of the transportation network and the increased number of vehicles facilitate the growing number of tourist trips to Bulgaria. The importance of tourism also translates in the growing consumer demand not only for goods, but services as well. Tourism positively effects the appearance and image of many cities and villages, as well as the development of those areas which lack favorable conditions for the development of industries and agriculture, improves employment rates and promotes patriotism among the country's population. It is through mutual knowledge of other peoples and countries that the conditions for strengthening peace and friendship are created.

Another positive impact of inbound tourism is the preservation of local culture and traditions, which often comprises the tourism product itself, the revival of local cultural values, reactivation of local cultural life, the development of folk art, traditions, and folk crafts, and increased demand for locally produced goods. It boosts the development of the souvenir industry and, therefore, the revival of many old crafts associated with the Bulgarian culture. Bulgaria's membership in the European Union will influence the development of tourism in the country in the coming years. This influence goes far beyond merely technological capabilities, such as border and customs control and many other areas, it mostly relates to Bulgaria asserting the image of a "close" destination offering a sense of stability, reliability and predictability. Bulgaria's history, communication and cultural affinities make it a popular destination in Eastern Europe, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus providing an excellent opportunity for the development of the tourism sector.

Owing to its natural and historical diversity concentrated within a relatively limited space, Bulgaria has a significant potential for the development of the tourism industry. It is not only the Black Sea coast and the mountains taking up more than one third of the country's territory that it offers, but also 9 sites included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, more than 600 mineral springs, thousands of local traditional and cultural attractions, 40,000 historical monuments, 160 monasteries, more than 330 museums and galleries, rich traditions of holding festivals and festivities featuring its ethnographic heritage, national cuisine and high quality wines and much more. Over 5% of the country's territory has the status of a protected area (including 3 national and 11 natural parks). The country has officially announced 142 resorts, 58 of which are balneology, 56 are mountain and 28 are sea resorts.

Bulgaria's recreational area totals 40 thousand sq. m (36% of the country's territory). The ratio between mountain and seaside areas is 96:4, the population potential is 2.4 million people (860 K people for sea and 1534 K people for mountain resorts).

The most developed types of tourism in Bulgaria are: sea tourism – 52.4%; alpine tourism – 16.2%; cultural and historical tourism – 11.1%; SPA tourism – 6.6%; eco tourism – 4.2%; congress tourism – 4.1%. The types of tourism that are so well represented, but are promising include rural, wine and adventure tourism (Bulgaria ranks third after the Czech Republic and Slovakia in terms of the potential for the development of adventure tourism among developing countries), event, camping, golf and hunting tourism[19]. Today, Bulgaria boasts 143 resorts (28 sea, 58 mountain and 57 SPA resorts) offering about 80 types of services. The facilities and resources are concentrated mainly in tourist complexes, mainly on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. According to the UNWTO data for 2016, Bulgaria ranks among the world's top 10

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[19] KURILOVA, Y. (2016): Inbound Tourism in Bulgaria, p. 74.

countries in terms of the tourism industry contribution to the country's GDP, but lags behind such countries as Croatia, Montenegro, Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, Spain[20].

The main tourist flows to Bulgaria are accounted for by Romania, Greece and Germany. Russia–Bulgaria tourist flow rank. Table 1 presents the list of the countries who supply the greatest number of tourists to Bulgaria.

Table 1: Dynamics of the structure of tourist flows to Bulgaria in 2012-2016 (%).

Countries	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Romania	14.3	13.65	13.0	4.1	11.2
Greece	14.2	13.56	14.1	-5.7	9.7
Germany	9.9	9.9	9.8	-12.8	32.8
Russia	9.1	9.88	9.0	-26.2	19.7
Macedonia	5.9	5.8	5.6	16.0	11.4
Turkey	4.5	5.5	6.0	18.4	8.9
Serbia	4.2	4.4	4.3	11.1	8.0
Ukraine	3.9	4.3	3.7	-10.4	10.0

Source: The Ministry of Tourism of Bulgaria – statistical data. [online]
[Cited 11.10.2017]. Available online: www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii/statisticheski-danni.

The active policy to bring back Russian tourists to the Bulgarian tourist market has facilitated the growth of tourist flows to Bulgaria from Russia. It can be illustrated by the following examples: against the backdrop of changes in the currency exchange rates, the visa fee was reduced. (From January 1, 2016, the visa fee for Russians was reduced from 35 to 10 euro). 2016 was declared the year "free of fingerprinting", visas were issued without biometric data. The number of Bulgarian visa centers in Russia has been increased to 21. However, the analysis performed showed that there is a significant growth potential for tourist flows from Russia to Bulgaria.

4 Main content and results of the study, proposals developed

4.1 Method. Questionnaire design

A survey-based methodology was developed for the purpose of this study. It is also importatnt to note that the survey questionnaire was developed on the basis of the multi-attribute approach[21] to model of the satisfaction rating of a tourist destination[22]. Many of the principles using the multi-attribute approach are found in well-know studies[23]. The multi-attributive approach takes into account the peculiarities of different various components the tourist destination and their effects on the tourist satisfaction. what allows to develop recommendations for increasing tourist flows to the country. Two groups attributes of tourist satisfaction were used for the research methodology: (a) traditional universal attributes (transport, housing, prices for services and goods, etc.)[24] and (b) unique attributes specific to the tourist destination (were

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[20] Travel and tourism economic impact, UNWTO,

[21] PIZAM, A. – NEUMANN, Y. – REICHEL, A. (1978): Dimentions of tourist satisfaction with a destination area, p. 315.

[22] FILOSOFOVA, T. – GASPARYAN, L. (2015): The Eurasian Economic Union: Opportunities for Increasing the Russia-Armenia Tourist Flows, p. 264.

[23] KOZAK, M. – RIMMINGTON, M. (2000): Tourist satisfaction with Mallorca, Spain, as an off-season holiday destination. KOZAK, M. (2003): Measuring Tourist Satisfaction with Multiple Destination Attributes, p. 229.

[24] GOVERS, R. – GO, F. M. – KUMAR, K. (2007): Virtual destination image a new measurement approach, p. 977.
VAJČNEROVÁ, I. – ŠÁCHA, J. – RYGLOVÁ, K. (2013): The impact of factors influencing destination quality on overall customer satisfaction, p. 2917.

previously analised to this case). The study was conducted in the segment of Russian tourists had taken a vacation in Bulgaria before or staied in Bulgaria during the survey. The following key attributes were used: (1) quality and comfort of hotel rooms in tour areas; (2) quality of serving in the hotel; (3) presence of coffees , restourants and bars; (4) quality of the food and drinks in the restourants , coffees and bars; (5) quality of the servis in the restourants , coffees and bars; (6) value for money for sevice and products; (7) quality of the eco area; (8) landscape and natural objects; (9) weather conditions; (10) readiness of the local people to help; (11) readiness of the service/personal to help; (12) direct fly from Russian cities; (13) convenience and accessibility of public transport; (14) convenience of excursion transport; (15) total cost of travel; (16) cost of air travel.

In addition, taking into account the opinion of experts working in the tourism market, two more key attributes were proposed to assess the satisfaction of this tourist destination: (17) the level of security in the country for foreigners and (18) leval of Russian language by the servicing staff.

The developed questionnaire includes 30 questions, divided into 3 parts. Part 1 consists of 9 questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and the goals and duration of their holidays in Bulgaria. Part 2 consists of questions for assessing the overall satisfaction of Russian tourists with Bulgaria as a tourist destination. The questions are constructed using the 18 attributes listed above. Part 3 includes questions about the desire to re-visit Bulgaria and about the intention to recommend for recreation to friends and acquaintances. These questions are placed at the end of the questionnaire and enable the respondent to evaluate the trip again as a whole. The questionnaire includs (a) multiple choice questions, and only one option could be chosen, (b) questions with a scale for assessing the satisfaction of tourists with different attributes, and (c) open-ended questions.

It is proposed to use a five-point Likert scale. This scale can be used to measure the satisfaction of tourists[25]

1 - Completely dissatisfied (the lowest score)
2 - Partially dissatisfied
3 - Satisfied, but could be better
4 - Satisfied
5 - Completely satisfied (the highest score)

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents can write comments, suggestions, and also answer questions: "What did you like in Bulgaria?", "What is important, but is not present in the questionnaire?"

4.2 Main results, proposals developed

The survey was conducted both in the field: (a) in the streets at Bulgarian resorts, in hotels and (2) online using survio.com online survey service. Period: from March to April 2017. The respondents were divided into two groups. The first group comprised employees of the Industrial Center of the Republic of Bulgaria in Moscow. They have been in Bulgaria before, they are familiar with the Bulgarian culture and many of them chose Bulgaria as their summer holiday destination. The second group included people were vacationing in Bulgaria. This segment was interviewed at Bulgarian resorts. The both groups represented economically active Russian population.

101 completed questionnaires were received, of which 3 were excluded from the sample (they contained missed answers). As a result, the number of valid questionnaires was 98. All people were about up to 30 years old. The difference in gender composition in the both samplings was insignificant (56% of women, 44% of men). The survey results were analyzed

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[25] Vagias, W. (2006): *Likert-type scale response anchors.*

using SPSS statistical data processing program (version 21.0) and using of quantitative methods of data analysis (factor and regression analysis) in order to identify the importance of attributes and their impact on the overall tourist satisfaction. The results of the analysis showed that 77% of respondents were generally satisfied with the trip to Bulgaria. Most of the mean ratings of the various components of tourist satisfaction with Bulgaria, as a tourist destination, range from 4 to 4.6. In the range above 4.6 there is an indicator of tourist satisfaction with the availability of restaurants, cafes and bars (average grade 4.7). However, the average rating of tourist satisfaction with three factors (airfare, travel cost and knowledge of Russian by the operating personnel) is below 4.0 (3.5 points, 3.8 points and 3.9 points, respectively).

This study also identifies factors that have a greater impact on overall satisfaction of Russian tourist. Such factors are related to services, the attitude of the local population, the security of stay in the country and the knowledge of the Russian language.

Based on the study results, available assessments of the destination's various components and the response analysis, the following recommendations were developed for local government authorities responsible for tourism at the destination. In particular, it was suggested that the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism should continue to improve the state tourism policy, primarily in terms of improving the infrastructure in the area of major tourist sites. Tourism business entities were advised to pay greater attention to innovations, improve the professional level of their employees (guides' competence level, knowledge of Russian languages) and expand their business to include the provision of related services. The general trend should focus on services in sector of ecological tourism, as well as rural and some other alternative types of tourism. In the tourist transportation area work should be organized to explore the possibilities of reducing transportation tariffs.

The positioning Bulgaria in the Russian market and raising the awareness of potential tourists should become another important focus area. The improvement of the aforesaid components will, in our view, drive a rapid increase in the level of satisfaction among tourists arriving from Russia and further increase of tourist flows to Bulgaria.

Conclusion

Tourism is one of the priority sectors of the Bulgarian economy, and therefore, particular attention should be given to the development of inbound tourism in the country, and it is critical to identify the factors affecting tourist satisfaction in order to improve them. The theoretical and methodological framework of the research comprises the works by domestic and foreign authors, regulatory documents, legislative instruments, data from science magazines, statistics issued by international organizations, as well as statistical data obtained from local state authorities in charge of the tourism industry. The survey was conducted both in the field (in the streets at Bulgarian resorts, in hotels), and online using Survio online survey resource. Once the data had been obtained, the survey results were analyzed using SPSS statistical data processing program. The practical significance of this study is that the factors identified can be useful in the development of practical recommendations for improving tourist satisfaction with a view to increasing the tourist flows to the country and developing a priority sector of the county's economy.

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