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# Müge AKYILDIZ, Metin ARGAN Anadolu University, School of Physical Education and Sport, Eskişehir-Turkey mugeakyildiz@anadolu.edu.tr

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE** 

# LEISURE EXPERIENCE DIMENSIONS: A STUDY ON PARTICIPANTS OF ANKARA FESTIVAL

## Abstract

Experience in leisure is a key area because leisure experience has become to be seen as the primary outcomes of leisure participation involving interactions with others. In this sense, the purpose of the study is to present the results of a study examining leisure participants' experiences and experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions. The concept of leisure experience dimensions are discussed in the light of current literature followed by empirical findings on the subject matter. Results revealed three aspects, which are "feeling and think experience", "act and relate experience" and "sense experience". The results of the study suggest that these experiential dimensions of leisure have significant effects on experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions. The study has significant implications as to how well marketing practitioners and recreationist implement experiential marketing and experiential dimensions of leisure participants are because the subject matter is a study suggest in the subject of the study has significant implications as to how well marketing practitioners and recreationist implement experiential marketing and experiential dimensions of leisure practices.

Key Words: Leisure, Leisure Experience, Experiential Marketing, Festival

## Introduction

Leisure is a very important topic for many reasons. For instance, many people find their leisure more satisfying than their work; leisure can be a major source of pleasure and sense of achievement (Lu and Hu, 2005: 325). Leisure interests and skills are important in creating and maintaining a sense of self (Kleiber et al., 2002: 221). Leisure had to be perceived as freely chosen, to be enjoyable to the participant. Freedom of choice and enjoyability were crucial to an activity being considered leisure (Passmore and Davina, 2001: 68).

Leisure researchers have moved away from studying what people do and how and when they do it, and have found more ecological validity in studying the underlying quality of their leisure involvements. This perspective is not new, but rather one that has been offered for many years. Progress has been made in identifying and characterizing the salient dimensions of these leisure experiences (Barnett, 2005: 131).

Leisure experiences have become to be seen as the primary outcomes of leisure participation involving interactions with others (including both human and non-human elements in the environment). This is, leisure experience is an emerging state of mind evolving from interactions between an individual and others in the environment. A wonderful leisure experience is what leisure participants want as well as what leisure resource managers try to provide (Lee, 1999b: 17-18).

This is a key area because facilitating leisure experience is the most important goal in providing and delivering leisure services (Lee, 1999a). Leisure experiences have four necessary characteristics: freely chosen, intrinsically satisfying, optimally arousing, and requiring a sense of commitment (Mokhtarian et al., 2004). In terms of leisure participants, having an enjoyable experience during leisure is often the ultimate goal for them. What they want is leisure activities and services that dazzle their senses, touch their hearts and stimulate their minds. So they want leisure products and services to deliver an experience (Lee and Shafer, 2002: 290-291).

In this sense, the present research seeks to further explore and expound on the dimensions of the leisure experience and to identify the relationship between the leisure experience dimensions and the experiential satisfaction, recommendation intentions. It is a fact that there are few studies that investigate leisure experience dimensions of the participants of open air music and dance festival. The review of the existing literature on aspects of leisure experience in Turkey reveals that there is limited research on the subject. In addressing this limitation, first, the study offers managerial guidelines for marketers and producers. Second, this study also aims to contribute to the limited existing literature on leisure experience dimensions of the Festival participants.

# **Literature Review**

Pine and Gilmore (1999) described experience as "when a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying series memorable events…" Experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way and they have always been at the heart of entertainment, from plays and concerts to movies and TV shows (Pine and Gilmore, 1999: 2). A new home, for example, offers features that provide joy and comfort, such as a spectacular view, a swimming pool, an exercise room, or access to golf or tennis. Each of these features creates an experience that actively and physically involves and connects the person to the home. Or an audience attending a live performance might be strongly engaged on an intellectual or conscious level with the performers and he/she might be participating in the moment, becoming caught up in the energy, standing, clapping along, and singing along...All

of these experiential features become part of the marketing experience that invite the person's attention, help close the deal and keep the customer satisfied (Marconi, 2005: 30, 52-53).

Experiential marketing is being used by more and more businesses to forge experiential connections with customers. As it is stated "everywhere you look today, you see examples of experiential marketing" (Schmitt, 1999: 33), all competitors in industries come to adopt experiential view (Morgan, 2006: 305). One of these industries adopting experiential approach is leisure industries. Hull, et al. (1996), emphasized the important role of leisure experience in marketing area and noting, "experience is an important part of what recreationists say they want…and what recreation resource managers try to provide" (Lee, 1999a). This experiential approach in leisure has moved the emphasis of leisure services from focusing on functional features and benefits of recreation should not be viewed merely as an activity such as hiking, fishing, camping, etc. Instead, recreation should be conceptualized as a psychophysiological experience that is self-rewarding and enjoyable (Manfredo and Driver, 1996: 189).

Therefore, the question of what constitutes leisure experience has been of great interest in leisure research as reflected in a special issue of the *Journal of Leisure Research* (Vol. 30, No: 4). In the issue, leisure experience was conceptualized as focus of attention, perceptions of risk and competence, meanings associated with the challenges of leisure environments, satisfaction and absorption in the moment (Lee and Shafer, 2002: 290). According to this view leisure experience is an emerging state of mind resulting from interactions with others in the environment. This implies that the outcomes may not be the same across participants and leisure settings as the nature of interactions are believed to vary (Lee, 1999b: 17).

In this sense, the main aim of this paper is to present the results of a study examining leisure experiences, experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions. Because of the leisure marketing literature provides very little guidance on how recreationists could increase their customers' satisfaction with an experiential product such as live music or an open air festival, Ankara Festival was chosen as a research field.

Ankara Festival is an annual event organized by Ankara Buyuksehir Municipality since 2008. It was held at the <u>AKM</u> in <u>Ankara</u> for a two day chain of concerts, entertainment activities and dance shows with both national and international performers are featured at the festival. The festival grounds are large enough to support three stages, amusement areas for children, large food areas, shopping areas and several sponsor attractions for people for free of charge.

In this regard, this study conducted in Eskisehir, Turkey aimed to identify:

- (1) Leisure experience factors of a new scale,
- (2) Experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions,

(3) The relationship between the leisure experience dimensions and the experiential satisfaction, recommendation intentions,

(4) The differences of leisure experience factors according to demographic variables and individual differences (gender, age, family income status, marital status, education status and occupation) of the participants.

## **Statement of Hypotheses**

Based on the implementation, review of the literature, and discussions, two hypotheses were developed for empirical investigation of effects of leisure experience dimensions on experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions.

#### Experiential Satisfaction

From an examination of the literature, it follows that the leisure experience dimensions are positively associated with experiential satisfaction. Satisfaction is a post choice evaluative

judgment concerning a specific purchase selection (Westbrook and Oliver, 1991: 87). Customer satisfaction is at the heart of all marketing activities. Measuring and managing customer satisfaction is crucial for the survival, development and success of service industries (Tsaur et al., 2006: 51).

Experiential satisfaction is conceived of on the basis of the concept of service satisfaction, though it extends beyond service satisfaction in that it focuses on consumers' overall evaluation of their experiences after consumption. Thus, from an experiential perspective, experiential satisfaction reflects the satisfaction experienced from the service content associated with a specific transaction. Consumers compare their experiences with their prior expectations, which cause positive or negative disconfirmation. The emotional responses resulting from positive and negative disconfirmation form the basis for consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Therefore, herein the concept of experiential satisfaction is proposed based on an experiential perspective and it is defined as the result of consumers' evaluation of the contents presented by service providers (Kao et al., 2008: 166-167). According to Lovelock et al. (1998: 126) the important point is that "satisfaction is experience-dependent ... the person must experience the service to feel a degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction".

Previous studies have tended to focus exclusively on the effects of the emotional experience in leisure on satisfaction (Tsaur, Chiu and Wand, 2006), and the effects of experiential qualities consisting of immersion, surprise, participation and fun in the theme park on satisfaction (Kao, Huang and Wu, 2008). Maccarthy et al.'s (2006) study indicate that satisfaction can be ascertained from the dive itself: water clarity, number and quality of swimthrough (underwater limestone caves where a diver can enter one part and exit another), type, color, volume of marine life. But this study considers all dimensions of the leisure experience and proposes that leisure experiences lead to experiential satisfaction. This approach would provide a more holistic appreciation of experiential satisfaction. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1:* The leisure experience dimensions of (a) feeling and think experiences (b) act and relate experiences and (3) sense experience relate positively to experiential satisfaction.

#### **Recommendation Intentions**

Customers' willingness to recommend is a powerful indication of loyalty. Most studies use repeat purchases or repurchase intentions as an index of service loyalty, though more recent studies have employed consumer preferences, word-of-mouth and praise as means to measure loyalty intentions (Kao et al., 2008: 167). On the basis of the existing literature, recommendation intentions are selected herein as measures of loyalty intentions.

When customers are loyal to a service provider, they are pleased to recommend the service to other customers, such as friends, family members or colleagues (Kao et al., 2008: 167). In the *Journal of Strategic Direction* [Vol. 24, No. 10 (http-1)], it is stated that if a consumer actively feels positive emotions in association with a brand then they are more likely to develop loyalty to it. In this sense, it can be said that feeling or emotional experience has a positive effect on loyalty or recommendation intentions.

In addition to this assumption, Ozdemir and Culha (2009) found that festival area factor (it was measured by such items; the facilities of festival site are sufficient, atmosphere of the festival site is good, there are several events within the festival, the festival area is clean, the festival program is well organized, resting areas are adequate) has a direct positive effect on satisfaction and loyalty. Based on these findings, it is assumed that festival area factor can be seen as a sense experience of the participants. Because, sense experience comprises atmospheric features, place characteristics, ambient service environment and aesthetical components.

Therefore, it is expected that sense experiences comprising atmospheric features of the festival, feeling and think experience related to inner feelings, emotions and thoughts resulted from festival participation, and act and relate experiences comprising lifestyles, interactions, bodily experiences and relations have a positive effect on intention to recommend. Based on this assumption the hypothesis developed for leisure participants was as follows:

**H2:** The leisure experience dimensions of (a) feeling and think experiences (b) act and relate experiences and (3) sense experience are positively associated with the recommendation intentions.



Figure 1. Research Model

#### Methods

#### **Research and Questionnaire Design**

Since research in this area is quite limited and new, this led researchers to develop a new scale. Items that consisted of the domain of leisure experiences emerging during the festival were adapted from Schmitt (1999); Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007); Tsaur, Chiu and Wang (2006); Borrie (1995); Chao (2003); Cotte (1998); Manfredo and Driver (1996); Kao, Huang and Wu (2008) with some modifications and wording revisions to fit our empirical case. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a group of 67 open air concert participants who were judged to be representative of the target population. After some procedures of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, a scale of 24 items was proposed. Dependent variables included two single-item measures relating to satisfaction, and intention. Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, "5 = strongly agree" to "1 = strongly disagree". The respondents were also asked to indicate their gender, age, education status, occupation, income status and marital status.

#### Sample

 explanations in filling out the questionnaires, the researcher helped the respondents to fill out the questionnaire. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, 317 of which were completely answered, resulting in a return rate of 63.4 percent.

In the first part of the questionnaire, leisure experiences of the participants were measured. The second part included demographic variables and individual differences (gender, age, family income status, marital status, education status and occupation).

#### Results

## Characteristics of Sample

A total of 317 questionnaires were achieved after the effort of data collection. The sample profile indicates the gender of respondents is dominated by males (%52.7); respondents who are 19-25 years old occupy almost half of the sample (%47.3). Of the sample, % 45.7 of the participants was students, % 54.9 was in bachelor degree and % 73.8 was single. About % 40 of the participants' family income status is 325 dollars and below (see Table 1).

	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Gender			Age		
Male	150	47.3	18 and <	33	10.4
Female	167	52.7	19-25	153	48.3
			26-30	57	18.0
Occupation			31-35	32	10.1
Student	145	45.7	36-40	23	7.3
Laborer	21	6.6	41 and >	19	6.0
Public Official	57	18.0			
Manager	17	5.4	Marital Status		
Self employed	27	8.5	Married	83	26.2
Tradesman	14	4.4	Single	234	73.8
Other	36	11.1	0		
			Income Status		
Education Level			325 USD and <	127	40.1
Primary School	4	1.3	326-648 USD	87	27.4
Secondary School	101	31.9	649-1295 USD	68	21.5
Bachelor Degree	174	54.9	1296-1942 USD	25	7.9
Post Graduate	38	12.0	1943 and >	10	3.2

**Table 1.** Demographic Information Regarding Participants' Characteristics

# Leisure Experience Dimensions

There was a total of 26 scale items that could influence or determine dimensions related to leisure experiences; thus principal component factor analysis was used to sort out and classify these variables as well as to convert them into main factors. To apply factor analysis on items underlying the experiences of participants, it is necessary to test the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (Odabasi and Argan, 2009; Zhang et al., 2003). For the experience variables, Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) was 0.928, indicating that the sample was adequate for factor analysis (Odabasi and Argan, 2009; Kaiser, 1974). The Bartlett Test for Sphericity (BTS) was 3915.841 (p<0.001), indicating that the hypothesis variance and covariance matrix of variables as an identity matrix were rejected; therefore, factor analysis was appropriate.

According to principal axis analysis, three factors had an eigenvalue greater than 1.0, explaining a total of 54.109 percent of the variance. The findings indicate the emergence of three factors regarding to leisure experience. These factors were labeled as "feeling and think experiences", "act and relate experiences" and "sense experiences".

In the factor analysis, the percentage of the variance explained by each factor indicates the relative significance of the factors. Accordingly, the first factor, labeled feeling and think experiences, explained a large part (% 40.092) of the total variance, having a greater significance than the other two factors. The items of feeling and think experiences factor were related to the participants' inner feelings, emotions and thoughts that engage participants emotionally and creatively. This factor contained nine items. But, the result of internal consistency analysis indicated that if one of the items was deleted, the alpha coefficient would improve from 0.77 to 0.86. This item was "I felt bored at the Festival" and it was deleted.

The second factor, labeled act and relate experiences explained 8.854 percent of the variance. Act and relate experiences factor contained eleven items, all relating to lifestyles, interactions, bodily experiences and relations. It showed high loadings for the items.

	Factor			Eigenvalues	
Factors	Loadings	Mean	S.D.	(% of	Alpha
	(β)			variance)	( <b>a</b> )
Factor 1: Feeling and Think Experience (8 items)					
I think that color scheme at the festival area was compatible.	.514	3.48	1.10		
I enjoyed the smells and the sounds of the nature.	.642	3.11	1.31		
The festival's atmosphere caused me to feel more intense					
emotions than ever.	.730	3.29	1.21	9.622	
I felt myself wrapped in a different mood.	.732	3.18	1.27		.86
I had so much fun that I lost track of time.	.646	3.52	1.28	(40.092)	
Music town appealed to my creative thinking.	.583	3.24	1.17		
All the activities at the festival stimulated my curiosity.	.536	3.37	1.14		
I think that subject of the festival and my lifestyle matched					
up with each other.	.473	3.05	1.23		
Factor 2: Act and Relate Experience (11 items)					
My view of life has changed.	.576	2.43	1.27		
I gained a new perspective on life.	.604	2.78	1.27		
All activities at the festival inspired me to think.	.616	2.86	1.21		
All activities at the festival inspired me to generate new					
meanings on life.	.621	2.79	1.25		
I like to share festival experiences with others.	.503	3.65	1.14		
My experience at the festival makes me want to change my				2.125	
life style.	.660	2.73	1.28	(8.854)	.90
I think that the festival atmosphere will create a long-term					
behavior change.	.695	2.69	1.25		
I think that atmosphere of the festival reflects a lifestyle.	.580	3.18	1.25		
I like to buy some souvenirs from various stands in the					
festival area.	.646	3.63	1.16		
I felt I belong to a group by participating in the festival.	.713	3.16	1.28		
I felt I got a social identity by participating in the festival.	.688	2.85	1.30		
Factor 3: Sense Experience (5 items)					
The atmosphere of the Festival area tried to engage my					
senses.	.468	3.76	1.03		
Performers at the festivals had a nice voice.	.713	3.93	0.97	1.239	
Music volume level was not disturbing.	.782	3.53	1.22	(5.163)	.78
Sound quality was clean and clear.	.779	3.54	1.11		
Body language of the performers at the festival impressed					
me.	.497	3.52	1.06		
Cumulative % of variance				54.109	
Internal consistency of the scale (24 items)					.93
S.D. Standard Deviation					
l= strongly disagree 5=strongly agree					
				· · ·	

**Table 2.** Factors and Items on Leisure Experience

Lastly, the third factor, labeled sense experiences, explained 5.163 percent of the variance. The items of this factor were related to the participants' sensory experiences through sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. This factor consisted of six items. But, the result of internal consistency analysis indicated that if one of the items was deleted, the alpha coefficient would improve from 0.62 to 0.78. This item was "The Festival lacks sensory appeal for me" and it was deleted.

All three constructs met the criterion that a factor loading should be equal to or greater than 0.46. The Cronbach alphas were greater than 0.78 and the total of scale reliability was 0.93. Factors, [feeling and think experiences (0.86), act and relate experiences (0.90), sense experiences (0.78)] had higher scores than the recommended level of 0.70 (Kim et al., 2003; Nunnally, 1978; Odabasi and Argan, 2009) (see Table 2).

#### Determinants of Experiential Satisfaction and Recommendation Intentions

To identify the relationship between the three leisure experience dimensions and the experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions, a multiple regression analysis was utilized. The enter variable selection method involving all three dimensions of leisure experience was conducted.

t				
	P	$\mathbb{R}^2$	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F
3,580	0.000**			
2.371	0.018*	0.39	0.38	66.615**
5.596	0.000**			
4.347				
	5.596	5.596 0.000**	5.596 0.000** 0.39	5.596 0.000** 0.39 0.38

**Table 3.** Regression Results on Experiential Satisfaction

\*p<.05; \*\* p<.01

As shown in Table 3, the results of the regression model indicated that the regression model was statistically significant (F = 66.615; p<0.01), and 38 percent of the overall experiential satisfaction was explained by the three aspects of leisure experience. The regression coefficients indicated that the aspects of sense experience ( $\beta$  = 0.317; p<0.01) exerted the strongest influence on the overall experiential satisfaction, followed by the aspects of feeling and think experience ( $\beta$  = 0.258; p<0.01) and act and relate experience ( $\beta$  = 0.149; p<0.05). In Table 3, the aspects of "sense experience", "feeling and think experience" and "act and relate experience" indicated a statistically significant relationship with the experiential satisfaction respectively.

#### Table 4. Regression Results on Recommendation Intentions

Factors		Dependent variable Recommendation Intentions						
	Std. ß	t	р	$\mathbb{R}^2$	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	$\mathbf{F}$		
Feeling and Think	0.350	4.824	0.000**					
Act and Relate	0.115	1.808	0.072	0.37	0.37	63.674**		
Sense	0.238	4.159	0.000**					
Constant		4.458	0.000**					

\*p<.05; \*\* p< .01

The second regression model considered intention to recommend the festival to others as the outcome variable, and the three aspects of leisure experience as predictor variables. The regression model was found to be statistically significant (F = 63.674; p <0.01), and 37 percent of the overall recommendation intentions was explained by the three dimensions of leisure experience. The regression coefficients indicated that the aspects of feeling and think experience ( $\beta$  = 0.350; p<0.01) and sense experience ( $\beta$  = 0.238; p<0.01) indicated statistically significant relationships with the overall recommendation intentions for the festival. The regression coefficients indicated that the aspects of feeling and think experience exerted the strongest influence on the overall recommendation intentions, followed by the aspects of sense experience. The results of regression analysis indicated that the aspect of act and relate experience indicated no significant relationship (p>0.05) with the recommendation intentions related to festival (Table 4).

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Since the service industries like leisure industry and experiential marketing have become popular in recent years, some industries have begun to provide activities and services that dazzle customers, touch customers feelings, promote customer think and make customers remember. This study discusses leisure experience dimensions and their effects on experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions.

This study developed a 24-item survey instrument to evaluate dimensions related to leisure experience. The results showed that dimensions about leisure experience could be conceptualized and measured as a three-dimensional construct comprising feeling and think, act and relate experience, and sense experience. These aspects could demonstrate that leisure experience is not only an absorption in the moment but also has many experiential dimensions. The scale exhibited ideal internal consistency and met rigorous conceptual and empirical criteria for validity. The results of this study revealed that feeling and think experience and sense experience are the most important dimensions of leisure experience, followed by act and relate experience.

The results helped to enhance the understanding of experiential dimensions in a leisure activity in several ways. Results revealed that there are many dimensions of leisure experience and these dimensions have an effect on experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions. These findings were judged to be interesting concerning the effects of leisure on experiential dimensions.

The results of multiple regression analysis indicated that the aspect of sense experience seemed to exert the strongest influence on experiential satisfaction in comparison to other aspects. This emphasizes the importance of the visual and sensory environment in leisure. The aspect of feeling and think experience, which refers to individuals' emotional and cognitive states, was identified as the second most influential aspect on experiential satisfaction. The second model of multiple regression revealed that dimensions of feeling and think experience and sense experience were significantly correlated with overall recommendation intentions. The dimension of feeling and think experience was identified as the most influential dimension on recommendation intentions. These findings regarding the relationships among dimensions of leisure experiences after consumption and recommendation intentions might be considered as new but not surprising to practitioners.

Based on the findings regarding experiential satisfaction and recommendation intentions related to leisure experience, it can be suggested that managers in the related leisure industries should pay more attention to the experiential dimensions of leisure. Moreover, the results show that each experience dimension of leisure has a positive effect on experiential satisfaction. At Ankara Festival, for instance, a desirable environment with full of sensory experiences leads its participants to a higher degree of satisfaction and triggers a favorable recommendation intentions. On these grounds, experiential marketing plays a crucial role in leisure for participants' satisfaction and recommendation intentions. Findings such as these may allow managers to have a better understanding of the importance of the experiential features of the leisure activities and how well they implement experiential marketing. Furthermore, they would have more specific ideas about how to design and plan their leisure events with "experience" concept to improve their success. In this regard, organizers or managers may provide a venue for a customer experience by using feel, think, act, relate and sense experiential marketing method.

In brief, the results of the current study are of interest to marketers and practitioners. In general, the information obtained, while preliminary, can be considered a first attempt in terms of evaluation of leisure experience during the festival employed consciously in Turkey. The study further provides some useful insights for managerial applications. First, marketers can apply their marketing-mix decisions according to these findings. Second, recreationists can use experiential qualities and they can provide to create holistic experiences for leisure participants.

#### Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

As with all research, this study is not free of some limitations, and it suggests avenues for future research consideration. The current study focused specifically on a limited number of people. Future research on leisure experience could be extended to include a wider demographic base, both geographically and internationally, to further explore the extent to which the findings are generalizable.

The respondents in the study were limited to those who live in a single Turkish city. Furthermore, the focus on Turkish people places the research in a particular cultural context. Consequently, the results may not adequately represent the total population in Turkey. Although the sample was appropriate for a survey on leisure experience, the results may differ if other people in different regions or leisure area are studied. In future studies, many regions providing leisure opportunities should be examined to compare consumers' experiences in leisure.

Further researches may apply our conceptual framework to tourism and service industries, such as theme park, hotels, restaurants, in which experience plays a crucial role for customers' future intentions and satisfaction to examine whether this consequence varies with the industrial difference. This effort would provide a great helpful insight to clarify the influence of experiential features on service industries.

The next interesting area that should be investigated is the dimensions of leisure experience in different countries. Different countries have different cultural and social implications and different habits regarding leisure. Therefore, a different assortment of experience aspects can provide interesting results and new insights into leisure experience, which should be studied in future research. A future study that compares different samples of countries with special leisure habits can shed light on this issue.

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