



Conservation sensitivity: A case of Lubhu

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Abstract

This research intends to find the 'conservation sensitivity', defined as the attitude, awareness, and involvement of the community toward preserving their tangible or intangible heritage. The study concentrates on the Jatra of Lubhu which is a 700-year-old traditional Newari settlement just 6 km east of Patan Lalitpur, Nepal. It assesses the awareness, attitude, and involvement of the locals toward the conservation of traditional elements, rituals, and heritage sites. The methodology involves qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders, locals, and heritage experts and the quantitative method includes a questionnaire and survey with a sample size of 43 locals from predominantly Newari community. The majority of participants fall within the age range of 30-50 years old, reflecting lower-middle class socio-economic status who are tied to small-scale trades, local craftsmanship, and agriculture. The finding reveals that the majority of the people support the conservation of traditional elements such as monuments, temples, and traditional infrastructures. However, this study also shows us the broad theoretical discussion about the tension between conservation and development, underscoring the high need for a balanced approach.

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1. Introduction

The authenticity of a traditional city is ensured when its heritage, culture, and urban fabric are preserved. Heritage conservation plays a critical role in maintaining the identity of historic cities as argued by scholars such as [1], and [2]. The traditional city contains rare and sensitive materials and vulnerable historical and architectural elements that are irreplaceable and irreversible. This era of rapid and unorganized urbanization, urban expansion, and infrastructural development has often led to the loss of historically significant communities and identities. Hence, conservation sensitivity in the local people has never been this urgent. Conservation sensitivity advocates for the integration of the local community and emphasizes participatory practices for preserving historic monuments, revitalizing traditional neighborhoods, or safeguarding any other unique characteristics of a place. Conservation sensitivity is not just about the feeling of preserving the past, it is a way to integrate


the heritage into today and tomorrow in such a way that justifies its context, community, and value.

2. Objectives

This research aims to assess the level of awareness and attitudes of the local people of Lubhu toward the preservation of cultural and historical assets. The people of Lubhu have been following numerous traditions and cultural practices for centuries, and it has been their way of life. It will be unfortunate if centuries-old traditions are discontinued. The conservation of the heritages of Lubhu depends on the opinions and choices of local stakeholders. This study also explores how the locals value their heritage and participate or get involved in conservation efforts.

Although numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the historical and cultural significance of Newari settlements, there is little existing research that focuses on the perspectives of locals in the conservation of tangible and intangible heritage in rapidly urbanizing traditional areas such as Lubhu. The research will contribute valuable insights and information on effective

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conservation efforts in the area, thereby addressing the existing research gap.

3. Methodology

The study has adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive investigation. The qualitative method includes Semi-structured interviews with community members, heritage experts, local authorities, and representatives from non-governmental organizations. While the quantitative method includes a questionnaire and survey. The quantitative data collected has facilitated statistical analysis, helping to identify patterns and correlations that inform the perspective of locals on heritage conservation and sensitivity.

The survey targeted the Newari community focusing along the main stoppage points of Jatra Route with a total sample size of forty-three respondents. The participants were selected using purposive sampling specifically targeting households directly impacted by the activities along the Jatra Route. The questionnaire included a mixed type of questions including yes/no, long-answer, perspective-based, and Likert-scale questions, ensuring a range of responses. The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire survey enabled statistical analysis, helping to identify patterns and correlations that inform the perspective of locals on heritage conservation and sensitivity.

4. Scope and limitations

This study is perspective and condition-based, focusing on understanding the current context and viewpoints of the locals and strictly emphasizing the core area of Lubhu along the routes of Jatra only. This area has been chosen for its cultural and historical importance, providing a concentrated view of conservation sensitivity among the locals within a highly relevant context. Due to practical constraints, the survey did not include every individual in the area. While this method allowed for an insightful analysis of core community perspectives, the exclusion of some individuals may have introduced a degree of bias in the results.

5. Research setting

Lubhu, a traditional Newar settlement in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal, is renowned for its cultural heritage and ancient traditions. The traditional Jatra routes hold a significant place among its vibrant cultural practices. This traditional Newar settlement is situated at tar land and lies around 6km east of Patan Durbar Square. It is located at 85°24" east longitude and 27°39" north latitude. It covers an area of 7.45 km² and the elevation

ranges from 3203 ft. at Godavari River (Wakhu) to 5208 ft. at Dhungakhani.

Lubhu is situated on the shortest road connecting Patan and Panauti (Kabhre) and has long served as a market center for the local area. This route was quite active prior to the completion of the Araniko highway. According to historical records, practically every house in Lubhu used traditional handlooms to manufacture textiles. Weaving was the primary occupation of Lubhu's populace during the Malla period, so the town was also known as Textile Town. Agriculture was the secondary occupation because Lubhu's hinterland and surrounding areas were good for agricultural operations [3]. Lubhu has a significant cultural legacy, which includes religious events, dances, and feasts. The old Guthi system has been formalized to support the town's religious and cultural traditions [3].



Figure 1: Lubhu (extracted from Google map, 2024)

6. Literature review

6.1. Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes Tangible Heritage (movable, immobile, and underwater), and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) (practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artefacts, sites, or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebrations, etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings [4].

6.2. Jatra and festivals

Jātrā translates as 'festival', but is also related to the term yātrā, which conveys a sense of sacred travel or pilgrimage which can be conveyed with the term 'journey' or 'procession' [5]. Festivals, Jatras and Mela as the

(Australia ICOMOS, 2013), community involvement ensures the cultural significance of a place is maintained, allowing interventions that align with local values. Cultural sensitivity in conservation requires a deep understanding of the local context and traditions. It involves respecting the practices and ways in which communities interact with their heritage. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972) stresses that cultural heritage is more than just physical structures and that intangible aspects, like traditional knowledge, must also be preserved.

6.6. Conservation sensitivity, Community participation and Stakeholder involvement

Conservation Sensitivity has been a focal point in understanding the sustainability of cultural heritage. Conservation has been significantly influenced by the community’s sense of identity and connection to its heritage [14]. People-centered approaches create a community-based strategy for managing heritage properties related to religious beliefs, traditions, social networks, and daily life in local communities [15][16]. When local traditions and rituals are integrated into development programs in a region with rich cultural legacies, the conservation sensitivity of the residents increases as highlighted in the research by [17].

Similarly, research by Chirikure, 2010 suggests that the involvement of local communities in heritage conservation improves a sense of community and ownership thereby ensuring sustainable conservation initiatives [18]. However, a study conducted by [19] argue that the participation of the locals should be context-specific since demographics such as caste, ethnicity, and socio-economic dynamics significantly influence levels of engagement, which is relevant in the case of Lubhu’s predominantly Newari community.

The involvement of stakeholders, such as governmental bodies, local authorities, experts, and locals is required to coordinate the conservation efforts and urban development goals. Collaborative frameworks are essential for bringing together diverse stakeholders to overcome problems between conservation and development [20]. A study by [21] highlights that the involvement of stakeholders can bridge gaps in resources and knowledge, however, it can raise trust issues and create power imbalances. In the case of Nepal, [22] underscores the weakness of government-led conservation policies since they often overlook the views of the locals, resulting in disorganized initiatives that don’t connect with the community.

7. Findings

The data collected from the survey of 43 respondents presents significant insights into the Lubhu’s community’s attitudes and sensibility towards the conservation of traditional elements, rituals, and heritage sites. The findings can be divided into several key areas- conservation sensitivity, responsibility for conservation, and the future of Lubhu as a traditional town and pedestrianization.

7.1. Demographics

Out of the 43 participants in the survey conducted in Mahalaxmi Municipality, Ward No. 8, 23 were male, and 20 were female. Majority of the respondents were between the ages of 30 and 50, with the majority belonging to the Newar caste and practicing the Hindu religion. The number of respondents at jatra stoppage points was highest in Nasadhya and lowest in Dhasi as shown in Figure 4. The distribution of respondents from each stoppage point depended on the number of houses and inhabitants. Since Nasadhya and Buspark have more houses, more people were selected for the survey from those areas. Meanwhile, due to migration following the destruction of houses along Dhasi Tole, only one inhabitant was surveyed.

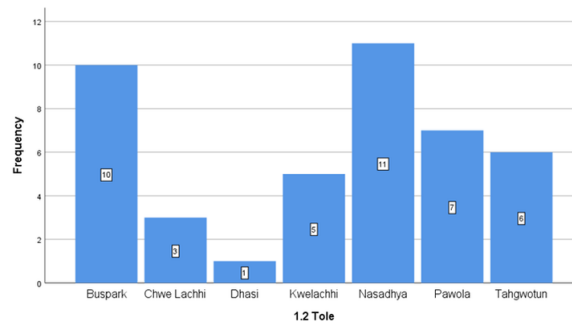


Figure 4: Bar chart showing Jatra Stoppage points vs Number of respondents

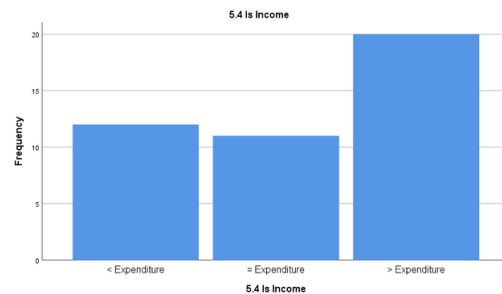


Figure 5: Bar chart comparing income to expenses and the frequency of respondents

As shown in Figure 5, out of the 43 people surveyed, 20 had an income greater than their expenditure, 11 had an income equal to their expenditure, and 12 had an income less than their expenditure. Thus, the majority of respondents were economically sound.

7.2. Conservation sensitivity

To examine the sensitivity on the topic of conservation in the people of Lubhu, the survey participants were asked their opinion about the conservation of traditional elements, necessity of rituals/ Jatra. And to further differentiate the significance of monuments in people’s perception, the respondents were asked which element should be conserved.

7.3. Conservation of traditional elements

A substantial majority (95.35%) of respondents showed support for conserving traditional elements and only 2 individuals opposed this view as shown in Figure 6. This infers the unity in the sensitivity towards conservation throughout all demographics and differences.

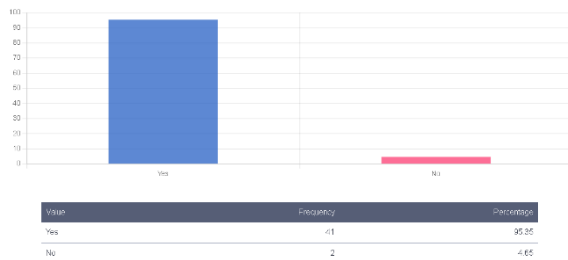


Figure 6: Bar chart showing respondent’s view toward conservation

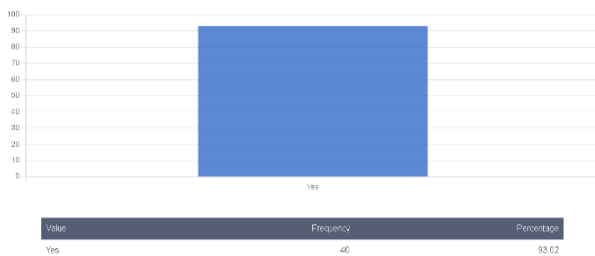


Figure 7: Bar chart showing respondent’s view towards the necessities of intangible cultural heritages

7.3.1. Necessity of Jatras/ Guthis/ Rituals

All respondents believed in the necessity of the Jatras/ Guthis/ Rituals to maintain the socio-cultural aspect of the town and their lifestyle as shown in Figure 7.

This overwhelming majority on the necessity of Jatra/Guthis/Rituals is because of these are integral parts of the lives of Lubhu’s residents, with the intangible cultural elements deeply intertwined with their daily existence.

7.3.2. Element to be conserved

Temple conservation received the most attention from respondents, with 24 numbers, followed by Pati with 21, monuments, Hiti, and Open Space Ponds with 17. Conservation of the Sattal was the least of their concerns, with only ten respondents as shown in Figure 8. Since the majority of people are Hindu, temples received the highest number of votes for conservation efforts.



Figure 8: Chart showing respondent’s view towards the conservation of different cultural elements

7.4. Conservation accountability

To address the accountability the people of Lubhu carry towards conservation, the survey participants were asked their opinion on who should carry the responsibility for the conservation of traditional elements, if they are willing to pay for conservation of monuments, and their willingness to participate in conservation activities.

7.4.1. Responsibility for the conservation of traditional elements

32 people believed that the government must conserve the sensitive traditional elements in an ancient town, while 15 believed it was the community’s responsibility. Guthi and Partnership have moderate support, with 8 and 5 responses respectively. Guthi Sansthan has the least support, with only 1 response as shown in Figure 9.

7.4.2. Willingness to pay

Out of 43 respondents, 25 are willing to pay for the conservation of the monuments, the traditional elements, whereas 17 seemed reluctant as shown in Figure 10.



Figure 9: Chart showing respondent's view towards the responsibility of conservation

This data denotes the extent respondents of willingness to contribute towards conservation, and with the current economy, about 40 percent of people willing to contribute monetarily is a substantial consensus on the support of conservation.



Figure 10: Bar chart showing respondent's willingness to pay in conservation of the heritages

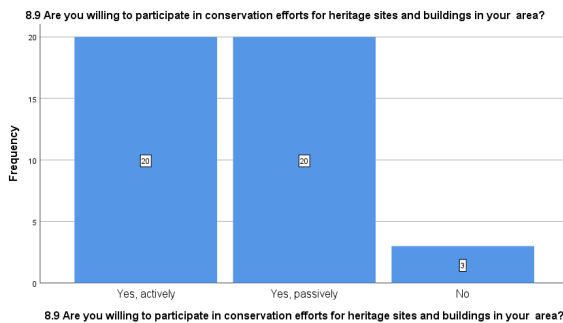


Figure 11: Bar chart showing respondent's willingness to participate in conservation

7.4.3. Willing to participate in conservation efforts for heritage sites and buildings

20 people are willing to actively participate in conservation efforts for heritage sites and structures, while another 20 are willing to participate passively. 3 people showed no interest in participating as shown in Figure

11. The majority of people's willingness to participate further substantiates that the people of Lubhu feel responsibility towards conservation, especially heritage sites and buildings.

7.5. Pedestrianization and the future of the traditional settlement

The respondents were queried on their opinion on pedestrianization of main road, and the data was cross tabulated with respondents of different toles to identify if the attachment to the main road is the cause of the different opinions on the subject matter.

7.5.1. Opinion on pedestrianization of the main road

As illustrated in Figure 12, 29 participants responded in favor of wider roads with two-way traffic while 8 thought one-way traffic was the best solution. 4 people were positive about the pedestrianization of the main road, while 2 people thought the idea was fine but only during the Jatra.

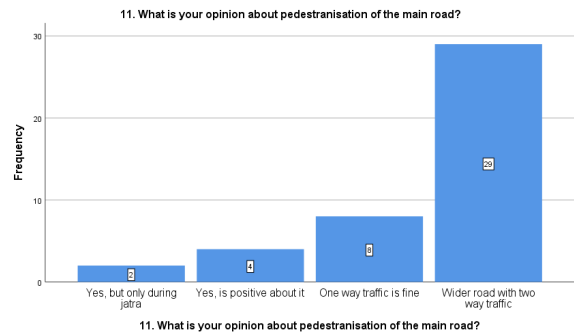


Figure 12: Bar chart showing respondents' views towards the pedestrianization of the main road

7.5.2. Opinion on pedestrianization of the main road vs Tole

Only 1 respondent supported pedestrianization of the major road in the Buspark, while 4 respondents thought one-way circulation was fine. Similarly, 1-1 person from Kwelachhi, Nasadhya, and Tahwontun supported pedestrianization, while the majority preferred two-way larger highways, with 3, 9, and 4 respondents from each tole respectively. Two people in Chwelacchi thought pedestrianization was fine, but only during Jatras and festivals. All 7 respondents from Pawola tole supported 2-way circulation and wider roads, as shown in Table 1.

7.6. Conservation attitudes vs Housing preference

To identify the relationship between conservation attitudes and housing preferences, the people were surveyed

Table 1: Table illustrating the preferences of the respondents based on each stoppage

Tole	Prefers One-Way Traffic	Prefers wide roads with two-way traffic	Prefers pedestrianization but only during the festivals/jatras	Positive about the pedestrianization
Buspark	4	5	0	1
Chwe Lachhi	0	1	2	0
Dhasi	1	0	0	0
Kwe Lachhi	1	3	0	1
Nasadhya	1	9	0	1
Pawola	0	7	0	0
Tahgwotun	1	4	0	1
Total	8	29	2	4

on their preference of building and that data was cross tabulated with their opinion on traditional element’s conservation and their willingness to participate in conservation activities.

7.6.1. Preference of building

A simple question about the preference of the building was asked to the families in the survey area which was typically categorized into new buildings (framed structure) and Old Buildings (Traditional Style/Newari Style). Most families preferred the buildings to be old traditional Newari styled because of the thermal comfort, while few preferred new framed structured buildings for safety purposes as shown in Figure 13.

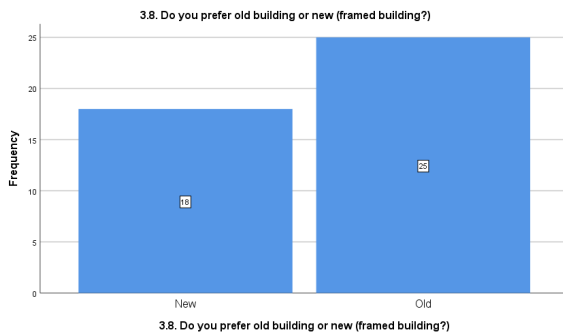


Figure 13: Bar chart showing the preferences of building styles

7.6.2. Interest in conservation vs. Housing preference

As presented by cross tabulation data, those who prefer old buildings were more likely to support rehabilitation efforts, showing that out of those favoring old buildings, 24 agreed on conservation compared to only 1 who did not. But the respondents who prefer new (framed building) also showed a consensus in support of rehabilitation of traditional elements, as 17 agreed on conservation

with only 1 who did not. Table 2 shows that people’s conservation sensitivity is not connected to their housing preferences.

Table 2: Table illustrating preferences of traditional/new building types

Rehabilitate	New	Old	Total
No	1	1	2
Yes	17	24	41
Total	18	25	43

7.6.3. Willingness to participate in conservation vs. Housing preference

As presented by cross tabulation data, those who prefer new (framed) buildings were more likely to be willing to participate in conservation efforts for heritage sites and buildings, showing that out of 18 of those favoring new buildings, 10 agreed to actively participate, 8 agreed to participate passively. However, the respondents who prefer old buildings also showed a consensus on willingness to participate in conservation efforts for heritage sites and buildings, of 25 participants 10 agreed on active participation, 12 on passive participation with 3 did not.

Table 3: Table illustrating the willingness of the respondents to participate in Conservation vs. Housing Preferences

Willingness	New	Old	Total
No	0	3	3
Yes, actively	10	10	20
Yes, passively	8	12	20
Total	18	25	43

Table 3 substantiates the previous claim that participant’s conservation sensitivity is not related to their

housing preferences. Regardless of whether individuals prefer traditional Newari-style homes or modern framed buildings, the shared consensus on conservation reflects a deep-seated cultural identity that transcends architectural preferences.

8. Data analysis and discussion

The ongoing talk of expanding the main road, a key east-west axis connecting open spaces, Chwe Lachhi, Kwe Lachhi, and Buspark, has put Lubhu's traditional Newari houses and historical identity at risk. While the majority now supports road widening, this marks a drastic shift from a decade ago when 64% supported pedestrianization [3]. This is likely influenced by the 2015 earthquake which led to the demolition of traditional homes, non-traditional redevelopment, and migration to adjacent town planning. Residents along the main road largely oppose the expansion, citing low compensation and the adequacy of current conditions, while those unaffected mostly favor it. Many believe road expansion will revitalize Lubhu's economy and modernize the settlement, but there is consensus that this should not come at the expense of monuments and public open spaces, even if many old houses are in poor condition.

Moreover, the overwhelming agreement in preserving monuments and rituals highlights the settlement's recognition of the importance of preserving their cultural heritage. This also showcases a general shared understanding that these practices are integral to their cultural identity and lifestyle. Striking support in favor of conservation of Jatras and ritual further substantiates the people's attachment to intangible heritage of Lubhu and it is because they regard it as not just festivals but their way of life. Temples received the highest attention because they are cultural and religious focal points that relate to peoples' and the overall town's identity. Closely following temples, Patis hold the most attention for conservation because they mark as the social focal points of open spaces in Newari settlements. According to Thapa's study [3], the conservation of traditional elements received an overwhelming majority of 99 percent support, and this consensus is reflected in this study as well. This demonstrates that there has been a consistent awareness of and commitment to heritage conservation among the population.

Furthermore, the majority of families preferred the buildings to be old traditional Newari styled because Newari houses provide more thermal comfort and are associated with their cultural identity, while few preferred new framed structured buildings for seismic safety. However, the research shows that people's conservation sensitivity is not connected to their housing preferences. People who prefer framed houses also

showed equal sensitivity and accountability for conservation, as people who prefer traditional houses which reveals a shifted paradigm in identity of Lubhu in people's point of view. The reconstruction of houses following the 2015 earthquake significantly altered the neighborhood's architectural landscape. Once a cohesive Newari settlement characterized by rows of traditional Newari houses, the town has transformed drastically and no longer resembles its former self. Although the majority of respondents expressed a preference for traditional houses, no homes have been reconstructed in the traditional Newari style. This is primarily due to financial constraints, as building houses in the Newari style is considerably more expensive.

Lastly, the majority of people having a consensus on the opinion that the government should be responsible for conservation hints at both governments' inaction and local's avoidance of taking accountability towards conservation. However, the community and Guthi are next to government in majority, which suggests that there is a strong sense of community in Lubhu in taking accountability for conservation of traditional elements. The respondents of the survey also displayed willingness to provide economic support for conserving monuments and heritage, which further substantiates this sensitivity and sense of accountability for conservation of Lubhu's heritage. No initiative has been seen to encourage people to rebuild their houses on traditional style.

The data presents a strong collective consciousness and sensitivity toward preserving cultural heritage in Lubhu. While temples and Patis are primarily prioritized for conservation, there's a sizeable willingness to contribute financially and actively, irrespective of housing preferences. The government is seen as the primary stakeholder by the participants, but community-driven initiatives have growth potential. Balancing infrastructure development like two-way roads with cultural conservation remains a critical challenge.

9. Conclusion

This study reveals that the majority of people place significant value on and support the preservation of their local heritage. They express strong opinions regarding the importance of cultural heritage and its various elements, emphasizing its role in shaping community identity and continuity. Moreover, there is an evident willingness among individuals to contribute not only financially but also through active participation in heritage conservation efforts.

However, the findings also highlight a notable divergence in perspectives. On one hand, there is a desire to embrace modernization and its accompanying benefits, while on the other, there is a clear recognition of the

need to conserve historical and cultural assets. This divide shows us the broad theoretical discussion about the tension between conservation and development, underscoring the high need for a balanced approach.

The shifting paradigm in Lubhu's identity exemplifies this challenge. As the historical settlement moves into a phase of modernization, it faces both conflicts and opportunities. While modernization offers the potential for economic growth and enhanced living standards, it also poses threats to the preservation of Lubhu's rich cultural legacy. Achieving a balance between these competing priorities will require the adoption of a sustainable policy framework that integrates cultural preservation with economic development. This framework should include clear guidelines for zoning, building regulations, and heritage protection to allow for new infrastructure and make sure to safeguard historical sites. Community involvement is essential, ensuring that local perspectives are considered in decision-making processes. The sensitivity and opinions of the local population will play a decisive role in determining the long-term sustainability of Lubhu's cultural relevance and its economic prospects. Partnerships between government agencies and local communities immediately can foster innovative solutions that preserve cultural identity and support economic growth. With such awareness and collaboration, Lubhu can navigate these challenges and emerge as a model for the harmonious coexistence of tradition and progress.

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