An essay on the importance of space and place to bring honor to an enduring identity

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Abstract

Identity has been defined as separation and distinction between other schools and sometimes generally as internal cohesion and being deep-rooted relationship between shallowness and depth. Identity has big and small differences which cause to distinguish a place and recognize an environment and it creates a sense of interest and environmental sensitivity. Particularity of each environment means avoiding uniformity, diversity and attractiveness. It must also exist in arrangement of spaces and access to rooms and applications. Place and space are the most important factors providing the needs of human’s identity. To clarify demarcation and delimitation of place and consequently space makes it possible for them to provide people with safety and comfort for living by sense of distinction, stability and belonging to group. Architecture and urbanization of Iran have been formed to provide physical and spiritual comfort to human using conditions and capacities of natural environment and particular culture of each geographical region. Iranian-Islamic identity is a form of national identity in which national interrelation and cohesion are in accordance with political culture considered in framework of Islamic principles. This study has employed a descriptive-analytical method by reviewing the literature and exploring library documents. In addition, in regard with study on identifying elements of Iranian-Islamic architecture and two notions of Iranian identity and Islamic architecture (sacred), this research aims to affect this identity by sense of place and space.

Keywords: Bringing honor, Islamic architecture, space and place, identifying.
Introduction

Identity is not something abstract and separated from other issues related to it; for instance, identity of a city is related and indispensable to all numerous topics such as city inhabitants, their thoughts and beliefs, their life style, type of their relationship with other communities, their ideals and living patterns, their behavior and culture, and diversity of thoughts and worldviews (Elaraby, 1996). The concept of Islamic city appreciated an attributable model in wide area of Islamic lands, because it does not respond to socio-local diversity. Traditional Islamic urban structure largely depends on location and its design principles must be explored through order of nature as primary base for ideological religious-cultural formation and social rules (social organization) (Naqizadeh, 2007). Place and space are the most important factors providing human identity needs; to clarify, demarcation and delimitation of space and consequently space allows human-beings to acquire safety and comfort required for living through sense of distinction, stability and belonging to group. Time is another identifying factor; a person can claim to have identity when he ensures his continuity. Continuity is a sense of character stability over the time. The past is same as individual memory, and the history as collective one. Each person and group makes its continuity based on memory and history. Mankind feels the same while facing one of its identity components and knows that objectivity as objective continuity of its mind. This factor may be a space.

If physical characteristics of Islamic city and function of their elements express its visual Islamic identity, concerning role and function of physical elements become more necessary to remark its identity. Being neglected, Islamic identity and history get faded and replaced by elements with no vernacular flavor and they lose their previous functions (Movahed et al, 2012). Architecture possesses an identity that firstly reflects prominent values of society, secondly explains values which society tends to, and thirdly represents generative factors of its cultural identity (Tabasi, 2007).

Research methodology

In addition to literature review of identifying Iranian-Islamic architecture, books, documents and articles about conceptual cases of sense of place and space as well as issues related to identity and effective parameters of Iranian-Islamic architectural design are studied and discussed in this research.

Research hypothesis

This hypothesis can be brought up through investigation and recognition of identity factors:
- Today in regard with recognition of identifying concepts of Iranian-Islamic architecture and modeling Iranian architecture, desirable alternatives of Iranian identity and sense of belonging to architecture can be determined by adopting an appropriate and intelligent approach.
- Recognizing and explaining of Iranian-Islamic identity in architecture and urbanization of Iran. Due to existing neglect and vacuum in this area, this research may somewhat provide models to align with identifying architecture as an article.

Necessity and importance of research

Iran is a country with an old and valuable architecture. City represents culture of a society as a part of tradition of a nation. Architecture and urbanization have a long history in Iran. In traditional Iranian cities, traditional patterns of architecture and urbanization represent original and long-standing culture of these cities as a traditional one. Due to occurred changes and development of urban patterns, traditional architectural patterns and rich urban culture have been neglected in recent decades that results in incoherence and disruption of established fields in some aspects of living such as townscape and culture of society. In each country, existence of identifying architecture will be of that nation’s values.

Identity

Identity means reality of an object or person which includes its substantial attributes. Identity literally means character, nature and existence and it is attributed to God (Amid, 1984: 1984). In Moin dictionary, identity is stated as follows: 1. God's existence; 2. existence, presence; 3. what makes person identifiable (Moin, 1992: 5228). Ericsson (sociologist) divides concept of identity in two parts; the first, unifying with one itself and the latter, collaborating with others in some essential components. He knows identity as a control system creating a set of norms and anomalies in person. Stuart Hall also refers identity as a notifying process and it is cause of recognition (Hall, 2003).

Identity of architecture

Character and identity of city is under influence of situation of region, cultural traditions, current activities in the city and the city's official identity resulted from past decisions about the city; so such differences should be specifically respected and it must be tried to maintain and strengthen them (Bahreini, 2007). Like identity of everything else, each city’s identity represents reality, character and originality. Characteristics of cities relied on geographical environment in which cities are built and cultural, social and historical aspects of those regions. Social and
cultural structures of each region have played a significant role in cities’ identity, so that it can be noted that each city’s identity expresses culture in the environment (Shamai & Poorahmad, 2006). Elements are sometimes so important to design and build cities so that they seem even more important than the city itself because they represent city’s identity, history and existential foundation and such structures are based on city’s traditions, culture and history (Hadafi, 2006). While speaking of relationship between architecture and identity, what comes to the mind is compliance or non-compliance with a region's historical and traditional architecture. To such people, similarity to past architecture of a region is the criteria for architectural identity. Historical connection to the past in terms of employing familiar forms is simplest solution to apply initially. In addition to considering positive points of this approach, it should be noticed that merely utilizing historical forms cannot restate different aspects of identity in city, but also formal initiatives is a part of strategies to sustain city's identity. In contemporary architecture, measuring identity based on its similarity with previous architecture could lead to falling into imitation (Mirmiran, 2004). According to Rappaport, identity is the ability to distinguish and differentiate an element from another one. He defines identity as a feature of the environment that does not change in different situations. These characteristics may be physical properties of the environment such as shape, dimensions, decorations, style, etc. or certain current activities in the environment or functions of an environment (Daneshpoor, 2001).

To define architectural identity, concept of identity must be explained first. Identity is a concept questioning characteristic of something and it is substantially different from “character”; because “character” asks about nature of elements and seeks for its inherent and natural properties and it is distinct from observer’s perceptions. Some do not consider this difference and assume identity is exactly the same as character or nature. Similarly, some do not discriminate “identity” and meaning (Schultz, 2003). Before modern architecture, concept of identity was not raised like now. Past architecture emphasized human dignity and architecture was seeking efficiency, reliability and beauty for respecting human’s position (Hojat, 2003: 65).

Sense of place

Identity of place is important because human would be frightened by not understanding itself and its relation to the surrounding world. Sense of belonging is a refuge and shelter to set human free from suspension. Accordingly, Lynch considers people’s perception and mental imagery of city so important and believes that sense of place and space links human and place and creates unity. Therefore, place contains a hierarchy from apathy about location to sacrificing for location. Totally, sense of place means people’s mental perceptions of the environment and their conscious feelings about their environment that interrelate person to the environment; so that it links and integrates person’s understanding and feeling to semantic context of the environment. From phenomenologists’ view, sense of place means to connect with location by

http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index
understanding symbols and everyday activities. This sense can emerge where the person lives and it may deepen and spread over the time (Relph, 1976). This sense causes a space to change into a place with particular special and sensory characteristics for special people. In addition to help feeling comfortable in the environment, sense of place supports people’s cultural notions and socio-cultural relations in a specific place and reminds people about past experiences and achieving identity.

![Figure 1. Sense of place, Azadi (freedom) tower as a symbol of the city, Tehran, Iran (Authors)](image)

Sense of place not only results in coordination and proper function of architectural space and human, but also causes security, enjoyment and emotional perception of people and is helpful in identifying people and their sense of belonging to the place. From phenomenological view, the most significant experience of place are notions of expressing sense of place, terms of liking place and character of place; and sense of place means immaterial properties or character of place; historically, sense of place almost meant spirit of place; spirit of place was used to hold religious celebrations and ceremonies where visitors must pay close attention to rituals. Therefore, location of performing such rituals was changed to a special place and this respect differentiated them from the other and it was called spirit of place; it was based on live and dynamic awareness of environment, religious repeat and a sense of friendship with place (Brinckerhoff, 1994). Culturally, sense of place means that space analysis can be experienced as a common cultural symbol by most people. In fact, people relate locations to cultural characteristics so that a location may stimulate human experience and remind about cultural concepts and meanings. In many places, there is no relationship between space and person through experience. Sense of belonging to mythical places inexperienced by human may be created as previously perceived social and political meanings (Richardson, 1963).
Table 1. Criteria related to evaluating and creating sense of place and place identity from thinkers’ attitudes (Kashi & Bonyadi, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raised criteria related to evaluating and creating sense of place and place identity</th>
<th>year</th>
<th>thinkers</th>
<th>o</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience, human’s attitude, observer’s mind and intention, and culture</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>Ian Nairn</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual and collective values, primary expectations, experiences, human’s intentions and targets, spirit of place, time, social interactions, activities and interactions between human-place and human-human, stimulus (visual, hearing, smelling, moving, touching stimulus, memory, imagination, prediction)</td>
<td>196 &amp; 2007</td>
<td>Edwa rd Relph</td>
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<td>Events and accidents, materials, shapes, colors and textures</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>Norberg Schulz</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Being recognizable, memorable and obvious</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>Kevi n Lynch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size of place, degree of enclosure, contrast, scale, human proportions, distance, texture, color, smell, sound and visual diversity</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>Fritz Steele</td>
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<tr>
<td>People’s experience, attitudes, people’s behavior and participation</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>Sham ai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semantic structures, attitudes, worldviews, individual characteristics and people’s connections to place</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>Yang Xu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vitality and diversity</td>
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<td>Monte gomery</td>
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<td>Symbolic and emotional concepts</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>Stevanovic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kind of relation to place (biographical, spiritual, ideological, fictional, favorable and dependent)</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Jennifer Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place quality, place stability and reliability</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Circu s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context and base, availability of services and facilities, location of place in urban context, relation of place with its surrounding</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Bont o</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation, landscape, individual interlock, physical character, ownership, originality, inhabitants, comforts, nature and private and public spaces</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Salvesen</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Relation between people-place and people-people, scale and physical factors</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Preti</td>
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<td>Management and planning, time</td>
<td>200</td>
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From view of environmental psychology, humans need specific sensory, emotional and spiritual experience regarding their living environment. These needs can be achieved through close interaction and identification of the place they live in. Sense of place has different levels. Hummon has introduced five kinds of sense of place including ideological originality, unconscious originality, relative location, place alienation and placelessness (Hummon, 1992).
addition to help feeling comfortable in the environment, sense of place supports people’s cultural notions and socio-cultural relations in a specific place and reminds people about past experiences and achieving identity (Falahat, 2006). Belonging to place is more than emotional and cognitive experience and also includes people’s cultural opinions that link them to the place (Altman & Low, 1992). Individual and collective values affect quality of sense of place, and also sense of place influences values, attitudes and particularly people’s personal and social behavior particularly in places and people usually participate in social activities with respect to their sense of place (Canter, 1971). And at the end, it must be noted that role of architecture is to present physical characteristics of the place which allows a person to live in and residence means a calm presence in a safe location (Sime, 1986). Place identity is understood as a link between human and place through culture, historical background, collective memories, type and nature of construction technology, functions, signs, forms and urban symbols and visual and physical features (Aminzadeh, 2006).

Physical factors, activities and meanings are three main factors forming identity of places. Two first factors may be more easily understood, but important element of meaning is more difficult to understand. Meanings of places may have root in physical layout of objects and activities, but meanings are not merely result of these factors; humans’ primary expectations, experiences, intentions has a key role as an observer and user (Relph, 1076).

![Influential factors on sense of place](http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index)

**Figure 2. Influential factors on sense of place (Montgomery, 1998: 97)**

**Space**

“Particles of space represent what space tends to be”. Louis Kahn

In Moin dictionary, space means: vast place, wide land, arena; the place occupied by the earth in the solar system. The term “place” is used in both definitions that shows space has place, or it is the place which one can enter in; so space is surely an empty place (Moin, 2002).

Space, Space, the time (eternal light), the sphere, above the sky (altitude of time), the sky;
spatial, spatial, temporal, spherical, timeless, universal (usually three-dimensional), place, location, width; distance, being far, being away, (newspapers etc.) space for advertisement; (slang) freedom, privacy, (mathematics) space, distance; (music) space or gap between two notes; (printing and writing) the distance between two words or two lines or two rows (Arianpoor, 1998). Identifying man-made environment in context of nature has been always very easy. Both of nature and architecture have order, but orders of these two are structurally quite different. Mankind utilizes general mental patterns to create space.

**Space in architecture**

Human’s dependence on space has deep roots. This dependence results from the need for understanding human social relationships in order to gain meaning and rule over the world of events and phenomena. Human makes relationship between itself and objects. This means that it adapts itself of objects through physiology and provides compatibility. Since human’s movements are done in space, so space does not represent a particular aspect of relation among human-beings and among human-beings and the environment; but also it is a comprehensive form of all relations and includes them. So it may be emphasized that space is only one aspect of general relation.

Emphasizing cultural factors, Naqizadeh and Aminzadeh also argue that forming elements and factors of cultures are of main factors defining space (Naqizadeh & Aminzadeh, 2003). Bruno Zevi introduces architecture as art of space, and space as nature of architecture, but he does not specify nature of the space. He has a realistic impression of space. In his opinion, it does not matter how beautiful are facades and walls of a house, church or palace, they are only containers and shape the box and entity and contents are interior spaces. Zevi refers architectural essence as meaningful organization of space through process of enclosing; so from this point of view, space is a substance with the same extension that can be formed variably through determining limits. Generalizing concept of architectural space, Bruno Zevi also defines a new space as urban space. He believes that spatial experience of architecture continues in city, in streets, squares, alleys, parks, sports stadiums, and yards and in any place where human has enclosed vacuums and created closed spaces.

Bahreini argues that shape is the most significant characteristic of space (Bahreini, 1998). He explains concept of space in urban design as follows: in design process, concept of space is studied in regard with human and its behaviors originated from its culture. Of course, mentioned concept is general and at the same time, it tries to analyze qualitative cultural issues affecting human behavior and to turn it into dimensions and form of space (ibid: 320). Accordingly, Saremi debates that architecture itself deals with a mass of volumes having a particular form and we see architectural mass at first glance (Saremi, 1999).
Space is an intermediate to understand place. Perception of place can also be understood as space. Norberg Schulz discusses Heidegger opinion on space of place and he believes that place opens borders like space; Heidegger represents two-sided nature of space in more details. At first, he refers to the German word raum or space originated from raumen and notes that freedom of places is for human habitation. Place opens territory of assembled objects belonging to here. We must learn to understand that things really do not belong to place, but also they are places themselves; secondly, places are visualized by sculptural forms. These visualizations are figures revealing that place; so sculptural visualizations are apparent representations of existence in a work that are found in its place (Nesbitt, 1996: 435).

**Art of Iranian-Islamic architecture**

While talking about architecture in Iran, architecture is created as base and context of human life in which God has blown his spirit (the Quran) and its existence is not limited to material needs, but also it has various inherent hierarchies; from the needs related to physical set like eating and sleeping and shelter raised from material aspect of human’s presence to mental needs involving wide range of safety to interest, etc. and spiritual hierarchies of human’s presence with its related characteristics and demands in which human essence and nature is hidden. Various interpretations of Islamic urbanism have been proposed so far that has gradually been transformed by development of technology. Some theorists believe that Islamic city is the one located within Islamic geographical territory, and others know Muslim citizens as reason of choosing Islamic city and another theory is dominance of Islamic rules on city as the criteria (Mireh & Musavi, 2008). Space element in architecture of Islam era is for humans presence and based on that, other elements such as walls and building components acquired their identity. In addition to covered interior space, outdoor open and green space i.e. central courtyard are also of paramount importance in Islamic architecture. Moreover, in architecture of this era, ceiling is not designed like floor; floor is flat and even inspired by nature bed and ceiling is designed inspired by the infinite sky and galaxy. Regarding Islamic architectural features that can make an international architecture, it must be said that theoretical wisdom of Islam as a potential and typical nature has accepted human-beings as eternal, everlasting, timeless, placeless principles based on revelation and words of God that is overall wisdom and on the other side, practical Islamic wisdom means putting everything in its proper and suitable place based on justice.

Islamic architecture is derived from language of the Quran and demonstrates depth and richness of Islamic civilization via spirituality. Therefore, belief in monotheism and faith in Islamic teachings are expressed as the idea of Islamic aesthetics in Islamic architecture. One of the reasons that architecture is confused to find its identity is that basic idea of this architecture has no clear identity now and today’s conditions are different from the past. At that time, a
certain philosophical thought was dominant but now, we encounter uncertain identity in thoughts. Of course, it should be noted that mirror-like reflection and mere imitation of architectural relics of the past regardless of the origins and uses of its spatial and physical characteristics would be useless and even destructive.

Figure 3. A view of porch of Shah (Imam) mosque in Isfahan, Iran (Authors)

Semantic relation of sense of place and geometry in Iranian-Islamic architecture

Using geometric drawings has a long history in art and architecture of Iran. Geometric schemes –particularly after advent of Islam– has been used to define size of building and to obtain optimal proportions. In Shia culture, Iranian-Islamic architecture is worthwhile heritage obtained from previous generations and its valuable examples in planning system of design and management of Iranian historic cities can be seen and recognized properly. Certain geometric patterns and numbers and their associated proportions play a symbolic role in architectural innovation as references to concepts of cosmology.

Discussion on foundations of applying geometry in architecture takes a lot of time but a short brief about these principles can help to understand position of geometry in architecture. In Islamic art, all creatures are understood via geometry, numbers and letters (Akkach, 2005: xviii).
Iranian architect has always noticed greatly positive aspects of architecture (such as logic, principles of stability, technical and scientific issues of building, human scale, using vernacular materials, savings, etc.). Correct way to achieve the type and shape of covers and load bearing parts and their location and size was difficult so that architect was completely predominant in their amount and quantity and quality (Rezezadeh Ardebili et al, 2013). Calculation and geometry were so important so that only first-class architects and popular and well-educated plumbers were called engineer. The most significant task of architect was spatial cognition, perception and visualization of static and dynamic forces in load bearing body of building by which proportions and dimensions of solid and empty parts were exactly determined. In addition to knowledge and experience of architect, his perspicacity and intelligence were also involved (Omranipoor, 2005). This type of geometry in design of covers and dimensions and proportions of solid and empty parts of building was technical use of geometry in architectural design.

Main cause of change of space is human’s location. Human’s displacement within the
volume creates a different situation in terms of human’s physical exercises. Spaces with different functions as well as relations of spaces follow human’s performance in these spaces. Dimension is one of characteristics of space that affects its quality; perception of space and even aesthetic sense also depends on dimensions. A form which seems to fit in specific size may appear inappropriate while becomes slightly larger or smaller. Feeling about dimensions is different in various ages. Children see spaces larger than adults. Open spaces appear smaller than closed spaces. That is because of analogous relationship in understanding dimensions.

Elements of space and geometry in architecture are less dependent on time and place because of more abstraction and receive more meanings in regard with human perceptual tools. Geometry is one of sciences employed to organize shape and body of space long time ago. Geometry is a science dealing with characteristics and relationships between shapes and sizes. Knowledge of proportions is also a part of science of geometry. Fundamental purpose of all theories about proportions in artistic work is to create a sense of order and organization among parts of a “visual composition”. Respect for proportions and geometry is considered as symbol of unity in most cultures and architectural styles and perhaps, the only reason is that understanding and conveying concept of unity is easier for our minds through geometry of numbers and shapes. For survival and coexistence, human needs to do its activities regularly. Most human activities have a spatial aspect. Organizing space starts with organizing human activities. We need to understand space mathematically to employ it in spatial construction and innovation which suits human.

Sacred geometry of patterns

Geometric patterns are like faces of multiplicity in unity for traditional architect. Repetitive patterns represent infinite and timeless ideas. Beauty and harmony observed in geometric patterns reflects a greater and deeper geometric order that is cosmic laws. Spiritual man seeks to explore geometric patterns as a mean to understand and reach God (Hejazi, 2008).
Discussion and summery

The most important influential factors of sense of place can be investigated in two categories of meanings and activities. Identity and beauty are included in category of meanings, and social interactions, sense of community and satisfaction are included in activity level. Moreover, quality of relationship and previous experiences also affect sense of place. Other factors such as quality of choice and relation to place and individual and social features also impact on sense of place. Effective factors of sense of place can be indicated by the model above. According to this model, physical properties of space affect users’ sense of place through effecting on social activities and interactions and enriching meanings and this process required a socio-cultural context to be understood. Overall impression of definitions of sense of place shows that sense of place is a result of human’s interrelation, mental imagery and environmental characteristics. On one hand, this concept has roots in subjective experiences such as memory, tradition, history, culture, society, etc. and on the other hand, it is affected by objective and external contexts such as design, landscape, smell and sound; it indicates that sense of place is a complex concept of human’s feelings about the environment and it emerges through adaptation and using place by human; it means that sense of place is not pre-determined but also it emerges via human’s interaction with everyday living place. Notion of Iranian-Islamic architecture – whether in terms of meaning or principles- is a perceptive subject, not an example. In terms of meaning, Iranian-Islamic architecture is a kind of architecture forming Iranian human’s life with the aim of promotion and sublimity of human’s presence, preparing for moving toward human perfection and meeting spiritual needs of human in which spirit of God has blown and it is potential representative of God on the earth; so that cultural features of Iranian person (in a detailed level, cultural features of people of city in which architectural work is formed) and
natural and geographical characteristic of Iran (in a detailed level, natural features of city and place where architectural work is formed in) are precisely concerned and considered. Therefore, the result is the architecture familiar with Iranian person primarily and it forms every moment of his life in regard with his characteristics.

When humans get used to a space over the time and acquire sense of belonging to it, this space becomes precious to them and they feel familiar and nostalgic in that space. This space is called place and it can be concluded that place is capable of making nostalgia. Place exists in mind beyond a physical subject but space has physical and material aspects. While space is seen as an open and abstract extent, place is a part of space which is occupied by someone or something and it has meaning and value; so that it has distinctive features from surrounding areas as a result of peoples’ interaction with the environment.
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