

Liverpool 2018: European Capital of Culture Legacies, 10 Years On

First report, July 2016

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Overview

‘Liverpool 2018: European Capital of Culture Legacies 10 Years On’ is a longitudinal research programme dedicated to capturing the long-term effects of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) on Liverpool. Building directly on the evidence base established by Impacts 08, the ground-breaking programme of research that explored the immediate impacts of the year, the aim of Liverpool 2018 is to extend data collection relating to the following three important issues that were examined by the original research programme, with a view to determining the durability and evolution of effects observed in these areas:

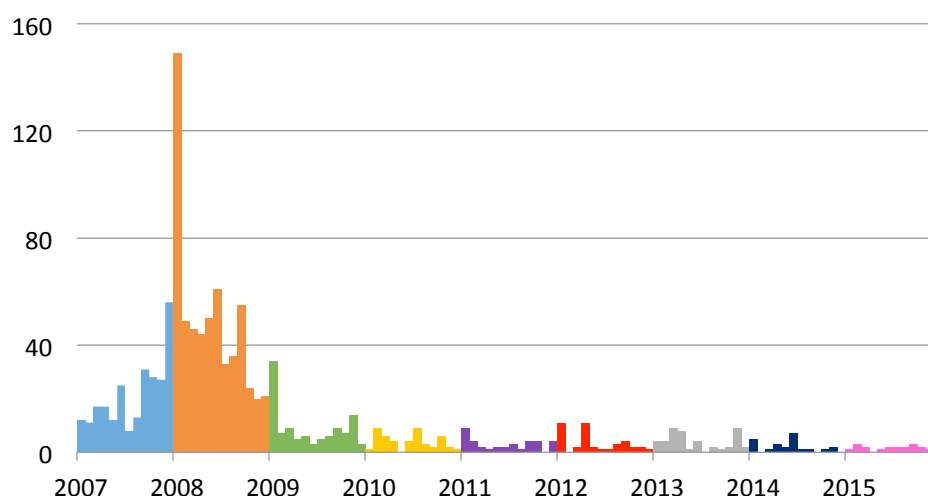
- City image and reputation
- City identity and local self-perceptions
- Cultural governance and leadership

This first report presents an overview of early empirical findings based on research conducted in the six months of the programme. Initial work has included content analysis of UK national newspaper coverage, the analysis of digital media and web analytics, interviews with key stakeholders and ‘veterans’ of the local cultural sector, and the collection of relevant local cultural governance and promotional documents. The findings presented here relate mainly to the first two of these research exercises and to the first of the three thematic areas under consideration.

Findings from press analysis

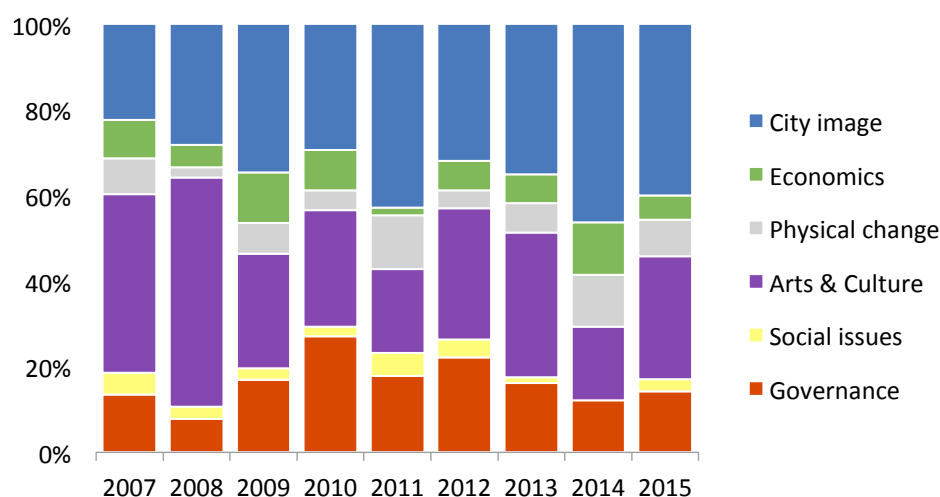
Although the press analysis component of the research programme will be expanded periodically to consider local and national coverage both of Liverpool in general and the Liverpool ECoC specifically, analysis so far has been restricted to an examination of national press coverage, published between the years 2007 and 2015, that explicitly references the Liverpool ECoC.

Figure 1. Volume of UK national press coverage mentioning the Liverpool ECoC.



As Figure 1 reveals, national coverage of the Liverpool ECoC has unsurprisingly declined since the event year itself, when press attention peaked around events such as the opening ceremony, the Paul McCartney concert in June, and La Princesse in September. Instead, in recent years, spikes in national coverage mentioning the Liverpool ECoC have appeared to closely coincide with developments relating to the UK City of Culture programme, a programme which was itself inspired by the Liverpool ECoC.

Figure 2. Thematic focus of UK national press coverage mentioning the Liverpool ECoC.



An examination of the thematic focus of this coverage, as presented in Figure 2, reveals a growing focus, in recent years, on questions relating to governance (i.e. finance, management, and policy issues) that seems to be linked to discussions on the management of the cultural sector at a national level, as well as a proportionally greater focus on the image of the city.

Figure 3. Attitude of UK national press coverage mentioning Liverpool ECoC to main themes of coverage.

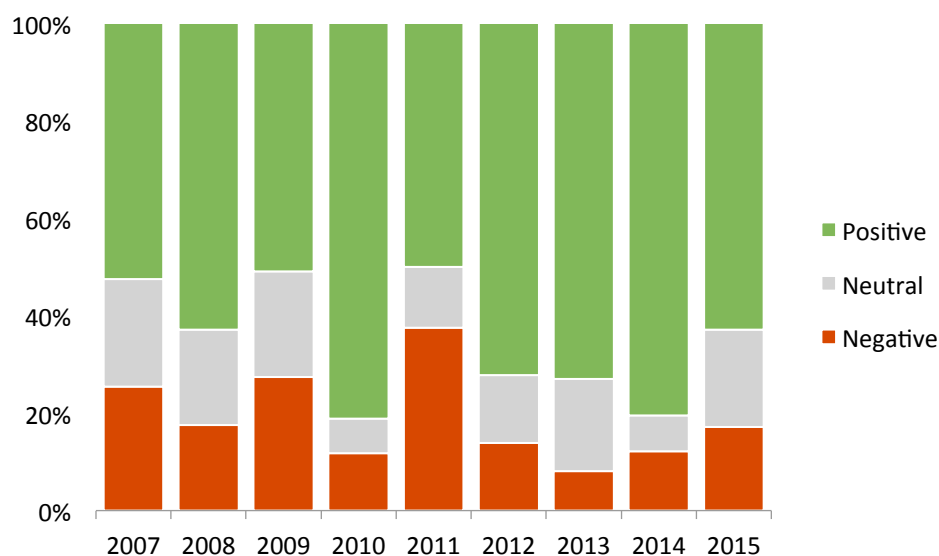
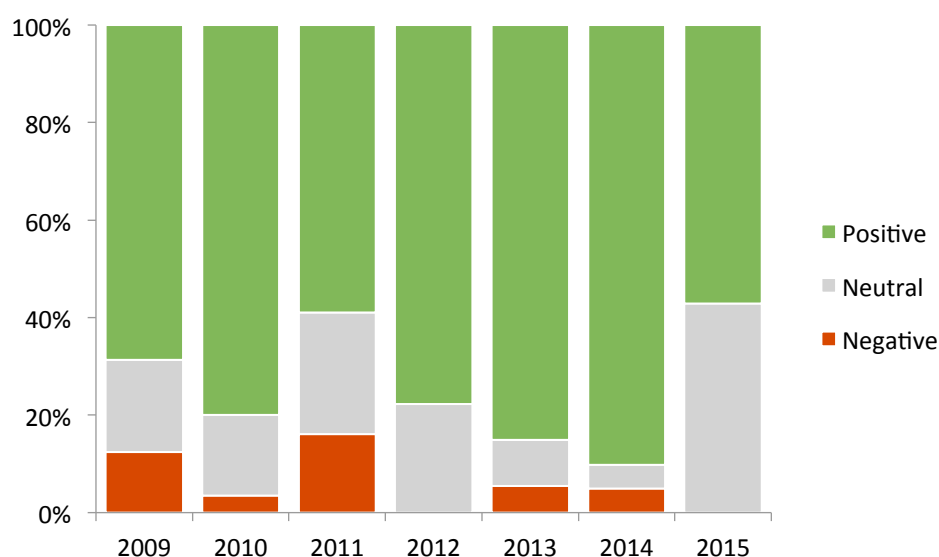


Figure 3 and Figure 4, meanwhile, reveal the persistently positive inclination of national press coverage of the Liverpool ECoC – whether in relation to the main themes of the coverage (Figure 3) or its disposition towards the event specifically (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Attitude of UK national press coverage mentioning Liverpool ECoC to Liverpool ECoC.



Findings from digital media analysis

Since around 2007, Google search trends have been researched as a way to ‘predict the present’, albeit with mixed results (Hal Varian, Hyunyoung Choi, 2009). The classic example of this is Google Flu – a tool launched in 2009 and closed in 2015 that demonstrated both the potential value, and risks, of applying big data to real-world analysis.

Currently, Google offers two main tools to analyse search trends:

1. **Google Trends** can provide data on the volume of a given search query over time, with data points for a particular moment within a time series representing the total volume of searches for the query within a region for that point in the time series, divided by the total number of all queries within the region during that point in the time series. Google Trends normalises the initial date in the time series to zero, with the maximum value in the time series normalised to 100 (*Predicting the Present with Google Trends*, p.3).
2. **Google Correlate** looks for patterns within search queries and has been used to test the approach to searches in Google Trends, verifying the popularity of certain keywords and their patterns.

The following two graphs, which present search trends for the Liverpool Biennial and the Everyman Theatre, demonstrate how Google Trends works and highlight some of the caveats associated with its use.

Figure 5. Pattern of searches for ‘Liverpool Biennial’.

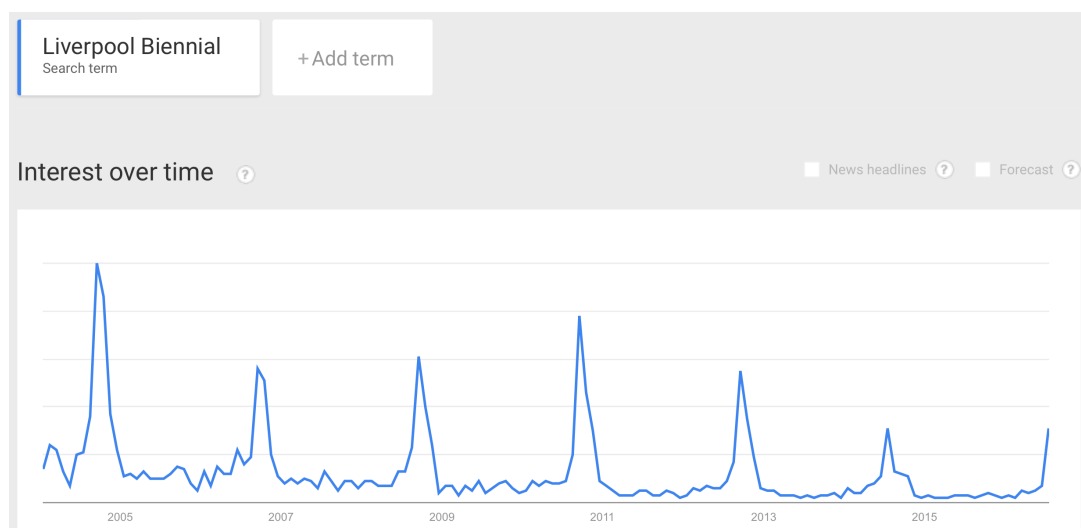
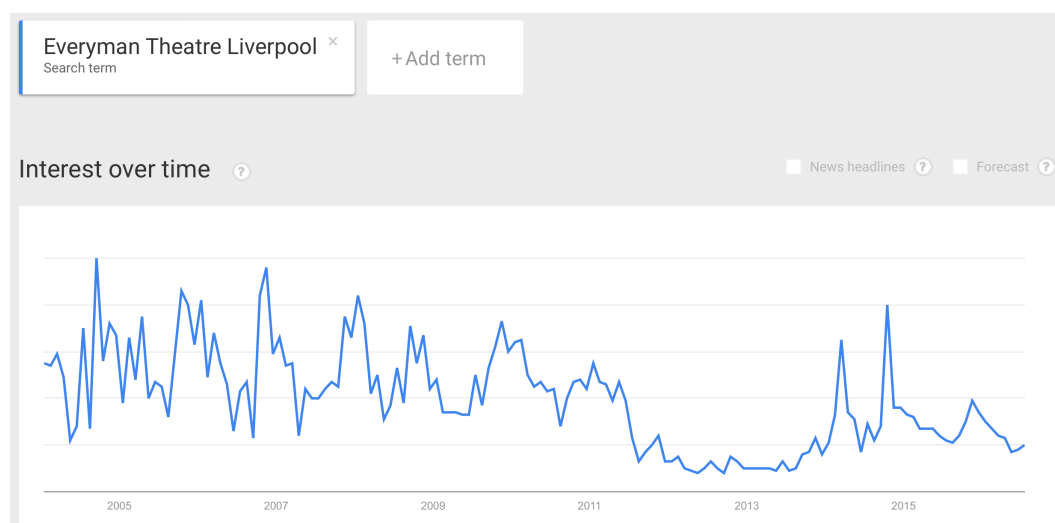


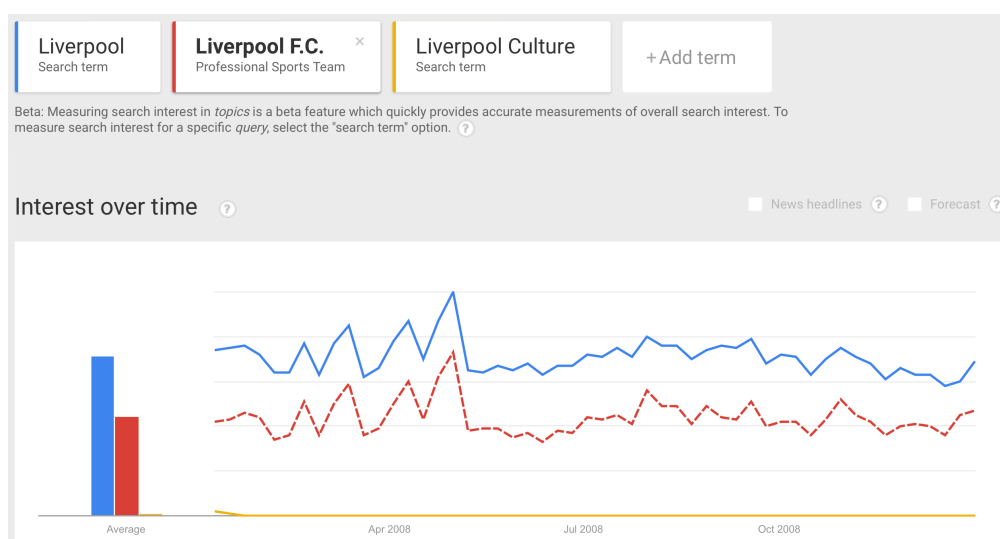
Figure 6. Pattern of searches for ‘Everyman Theatre’.



As Figure 5 shows, the Liverpool Biennial enjoys a cyclical surge of searches every two years, beginning in July and lasting until October, that coincides with the event life cycle. The Everyman Theatre, by contrast, suffered a slump in searches between 2011 and 2014, as Figure 6 shows, that can be explained by the closure of the theatre for redevelopment during this period.¹

Another caveat in the case of Liverpool is the enormous presence of football-related news that influences many searches. Indeed, even in 2008, the year of the ECoC, the peak in Google searches for ‘Liverpool’ was almost certainly attributable, as Figure 7 shows, to the UEFA Champions League semi-final featuring Liverpool.

Figure 7. Searches for ‘Liverpool’, ‘Liverpool F.C.’, ‘Liverpool Culture’ in 2008.



¹ However, it could also be noted that the fact that the closure of the Everyman is so evident from the graph suggests that people were looking specifically for this venue, rather than a generic ‘theatre’.

In order to isolate Google search results linked to Culture Liverpool and the impact of the ECoC, it was verified – by comparing results from various different search terms – that ‘Liverpool Culture’ is the best combination of keywords. A general overview of searches for ‘Liverpool Culture’ appears quite similar to the press analysis volume distribution, with a huge spike in January 2008 and generally higher volumes of searches in 2008 than in preceding or subsequent years. By looking at year on year trends, shown in Figure 8, it appears equally clear that the opening of the ECoC in January 2008 prompted a huge numbers of searches for Liverpool and culture. At the same time, the volume of searches remained high throughout 2008, though in a range more comparable with other years. Furthermore, as Figure 9 demonstrates, the volume of searches generated by the Liverpool ECoC appears to be something of a record when compared against other ECoCs from recent years.

Figure 8. Year-on-year comparison of searches for 'Liverpool Culture' in 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2015.

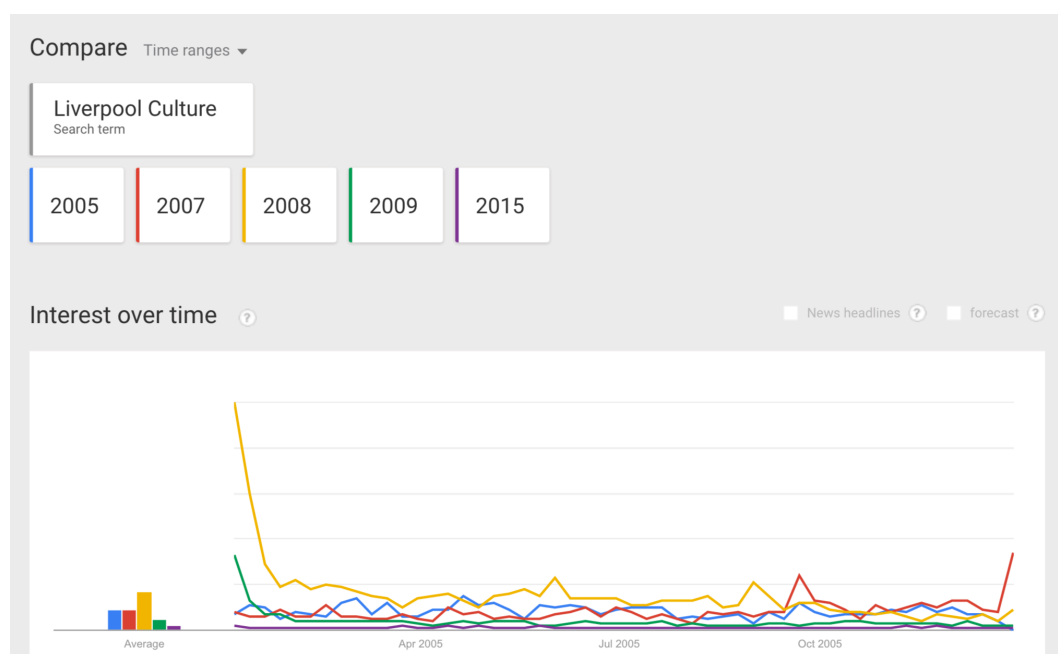
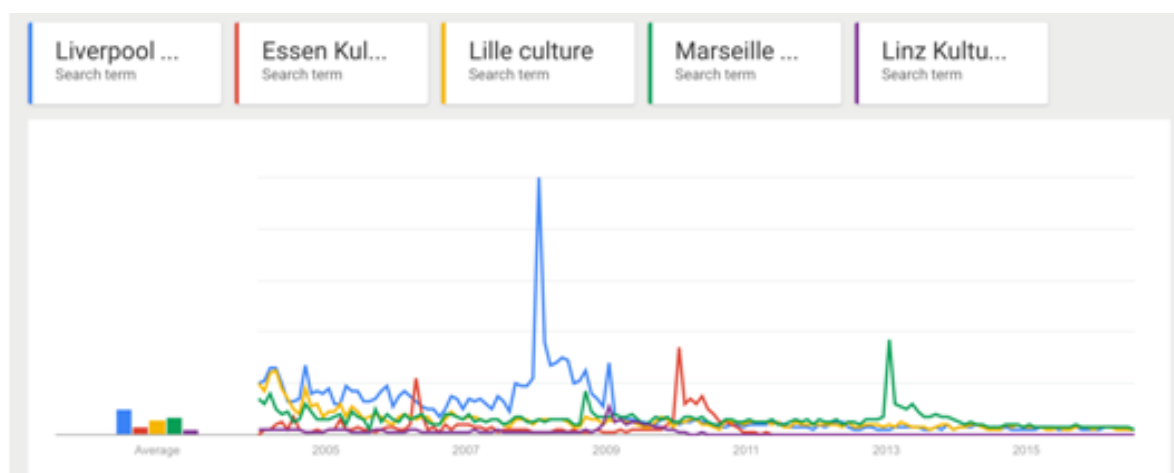


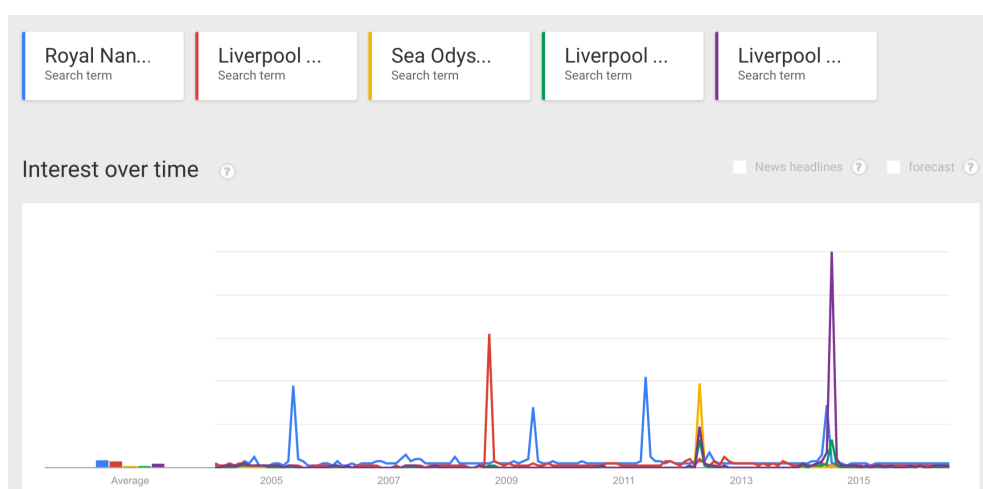
Figure 9. Worldwide searches for 'Liverpool Culture', 'Essen Kulturhauptstadt', 'Lille culture', 'Marseille culture' and 'Linz Kulturhauptstadt'.



Note: For each city, test searches were conducted using the following search term combinations: '[name of the city] culture'; '[name of the city] culture [in the local language]'; and '[name of the city] European Capital of Culture [in the local language]'. Each query for each city was repeated using three geographical settings: worldwide, UK, and the ECoC hosting country. This graph presents, for each city, the search term combination that was found to be most appropriate, using a worldwide search focus.

In the case of the Royal de Luxe events with which Liverpool has come to be strongly associated, the term 'puppets' has scarcely been used in online searches, with people generally instead looking for 'spider' and 'giants'. The mechanical spider, besides the interest generated in 2008, was searched for again in 2012 in relation to the *Sea Odyssey* event, which generated a similar level of attention both nationally and internationally to the original spider; although as Figure 10 shows, by far the most searched for Royal de Luxe event has been the *Memories of August 1914* event in 2014.²

Figure 10. Searches for 'Royal Nantes' (blue), 'Liverpool spider' (red), 'Sea Odyssey Liverpool' (yellow), 'Liverpool puppets' (green), 'Liverpool giants' (purple).



² Unlike *Sea Odyssey* in 2012, this latest event has generally not been captured in our press analysis thus far, due to the apparent diminution, by 2014, of an explicit link between the ECoC and Royal de Luxe events in the public imagination.

Conclusion

Although still at an early stage, the Liverpool 2018 research programme is already providing evidence that reaffirms and builds on the findings of Impacts 08 in relation to the image impacts of the ECoC. Analysis of national press coverage, for example, demonstrates the positioning of Liverpool, in recent years, as a successful example of culture-led regeneration in the context of the UK City of Culture programme; whilst analysis of Google search trends reveals how the opening ceremony of Liverpool 2008 was the most searched for moment in the searchable history of the ECoC programme across all European hosts. Additional work is now required to further explore these image impacts, as well as to assess the impact and legacy of the ECoC on approaches to cultural governance and local perceptions. This work will be reported on over the coming months.

Acknowledgements

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