

The Participatory Budget Experiment in Delhi and Warsaw: A Comparison

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to compare the two fresh and in-progress experiments in participatory budget on local level in two state capitals: New Delhi in India and Warsaw in Poland. As of now, the recently chosen AAP government has introduced participatory budget as an experiment in 2015 in 11 legislative assembly constituencies of Delhi. In Poland, however, such exercises have been introduced in a number of cities in all of their administrative areas and therefore the exercise straddles the Polish political divides. Therefore, I would like analyse how can the Warsaw participatory budget experience be relevant and inspiring for the ongoing Delhi participatory budget exercise. This paper was originally presented and the 'Economics and Politics of Local Governments: The Indian Experience' conference, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata, December 28-29, 2015.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to compare the two fresh and in-progress experiments in participatory budget on local level in two state capitals: New Delhi in India and Warsaw in Poland. Participatory budget (hence PB), an idea of growing popularity, has been introduced both in number of cities in Poland in recent years, as well as in Delhi by the AAP government in 2015. However, the fact that a few annual rounds of PB have been completed in Poland means that some feedback is at hand, while in Delhi the first annual cycle has not come to an end at the time of writing and therefore an exhausting summary of it is not available to me. It should also be added that while so far the information on PB in Delhi comes mostly from media and political declarations, in Warsaw the progress of PB is rather transparent, with information on the available funds, proposals, vote results and final distribution of funds being available with neighbourhood councils. Therefore, I will analyse how can the Warsaw PB experience be relevant and inspiring for the ongoing Delhi PB exercise, mostly in technical terms. However the fact that I am also dealing with the criticism of the PB solution in Warsaw means that I must also make reference to a general debate in Poland on how participatory budgeting – and citizen’s budget – should look like. At this point, when dealing with the general idea, it is also worth pondering how the PB in Delhi can be a role model for Warsaw.

2. A short history of participatory budget implementation in India and Poland

The first city in the world to introduce participatory budgeting was Porto Alegre in Brazil. As of now, it has been implemented in many cities globally. Some consider the case of Płock city, where NGOs were given an opportunity to compete for grants from a newly created fund in 2003, as the earliest case of PB in Poland (Sorychta-Wojczyk 2015, 424). The first genuine PB in Poland was introduced in Sopot in 2011 and then replicated in many Polish cities and towns. Therefore, the exercise is not spearheaded by a specific political movement, it straddles the Polish political divides as it has been introduced by governments of various parties. Warsaw, the country’s capital, was in fact one of the last ones bigger cities to join the fray (the first annual PB exercise to include all districts has been completed in 2015).

In India, politically speaking, it was the new Aam Aadmi Party that called for the introduction of PB of recent in a loudest voice. Historically, however, the idea of participatory governance in India is much older and one of the earlier examples is the Swajal project that had been started in 1996 (Singh, 2014, p. 682). In Delhi, the attempt at greater people’s participation was made through the 1998-initiated *Jan Bhagidari* (‘People’s Participation’) but this project was based on including citizen’s representatives in the process of urban planning (rather than letting the population decide) and has been criticised as allegedly strengthening middle class domination (Ghertner 2011, 516). One might also look for its general ideological roots in the old Gandhian *panchayati raj* concept. It should be noted, however, that *panchayati raj* was conceived of (and to a certain limited degree, also realised) as giving more power to local structures and not institute a process of involving the population of an area in the actual budget (or other law-making) vote. As far as municipal and city budgets are concerned, previous central governments-initiated project, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission also hinted at consultations with the local population, just like its new incarnation, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, does. Therefore, the idea of a rising level of consultations with the people is used by at least some of the main parties. It, however, remains rather vague and here, again, the distinction between consulting people and letting them decide should also be noted. The new Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is certainly more vocal in advocating direct democracy than the main parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress. Arvind Kejriwal, the AAP leader, has stressed the need for self-governance both in cities and in the villages. The idea of a participatory governance sessions in village councils (gram sabhas) and municipal neighbourhood councils (mohalla sabhas) appears in his book, *Swaraj* (Kejriwal, Swaraj, 2012, p. 26-29, 70). For Kejriwal, smaller peoples’ projects are better than large-scale central government programs (Jaffrelot, 2014). Kejriwal’s idea of PB in Delhi fits in well not only with his party’s focus on direct democracy but also his call for decentralisation. I shall get back to this point later.

3. The general comparison of Delhi and Warsaw exercises

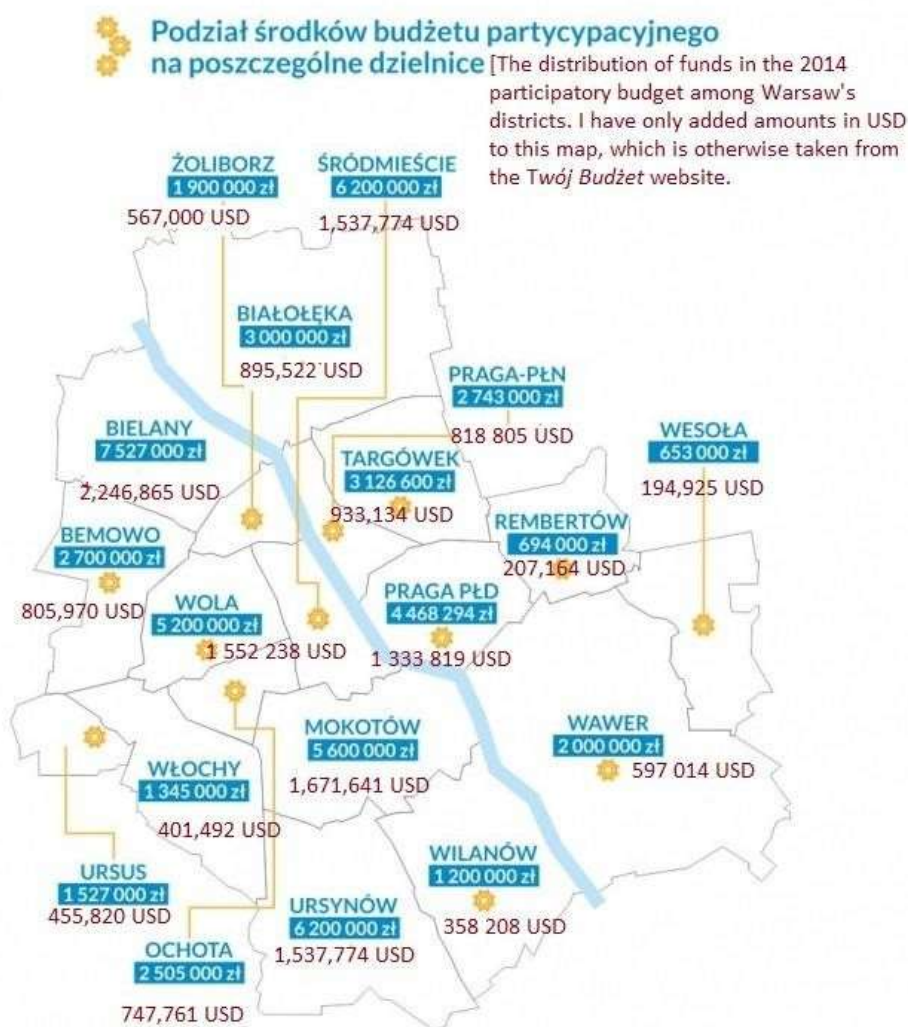
It should be first of all noted that contrary to the Warsaw experiment, the PB exercise in Delhi is envisaged as a cornerstone of a new system of local governance. In Warsaw, the voting takes place within the borders of existing districts of the city (called *dzielnica* in Polish). In terms of level and area of power, districts could be compared to municipal corporations in India, but arguably they have more power (on the other hand, Poland is not a federation and Warsaw is not a separated administrative territory within it, as Delhi is in the Union of India, which means the administration of Warsaw has less capabilities). Each district already has its established executive and legislative powers, as well as budgets. The novel solution is to let the citizens decide about how to spend a fraction of this budget. In nine of the districts, funds can be spent in any geographical way throughout the district following the vote of all district inhabitants. Six districts (Mokotów, Praga Południe, Rembertów, Targówek, Wawer, Włochy), however, allocate the PB funds to smaller regions comprising the district and these areas' inhabitants decide on expenditure in their territories. Three districts (Białołęka, Ochota, Wola) follow a mixed system: a portion of funds is allocated on the district level and another portion on a more regional level (Erbel, 2014). In the new, 2016 edition of PB in Warsaw all districts will have to distribute their funds to smaller neighbourhoods if their PB is bigger than 1 million PLN. It is the districts that decided to allocate the funds in such ways and it is for the district's governing body that decided how much of its annual budget should become PB. The existing governing infrastructure of a district, such as its office, its website, etc. helps to process and promote the PB exercise. The managing body of the PB in a given district is constituted from representatives of the districts inhabitants, representatives of NGOs, representatives of the district office, district government and auxiliary district units. The representatives of the first two groups are chosen through a lottery (in the first case: amongst those inhabitants that volunteered to join the body). It is therefore a merger of people's and governing bodies' representatives which does not amount to a creation of a new power structure nor does it decentralise the existing power structure; it only decentralises a part of the fund distribution process.

In Delhi, however, the AAP government is establishing a new unit called *mohalla sabha* ('neighbourhood council') that would be a gathering of local population of 'about 500-1000 families'. The funds for the functioning of the *mohalla sabha* are to come from the Citizen-Local Area Development Fund' which is also a new fund first promised by AAP in 2014 and therefore initiated by the city's legislative assembly (no author, *AAP moots 'Citizen-Local Area Development Fund'*, 2014.). The neighbourhood would choose the projects to finance in a vote during the general assembly. The AAP project in Delhi is therefore more ambitious considering its starting point. It is, however, also presumably more difficult to realise. The Warsaw projects are to be funded from established district budgets. Warsaw – and Poland as such – also does not have an equivalent of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, which many consider inefficient and to which, according to some, PB is the new alternative. The Local Area Development Scheme funds are similarly available in India for state legislative assembly members and municipal corporations. If PB is an alternative to development schemes and if it would imply the abolishing of the former than it would indicate a much more profound change than the one introduced in Warsaw. The new AAP government has initiated its Delhi Budget in early 2015 in which a Swaraj Fund was envisaged and it is through this fund that PB would be founded. Therefore, contrary to Warsaw, it remains less clear whether the Delhi budget will meet its goals and whether this will not affect the PB as well.

The PB experiment in Warsaw has been taking place a little longer than Delhi. Is it, however, more broad? It would seem so theoretically, as entire Warsaw is covered by the exercise. It should be remember, however, that Warsaw is much smaller than the National Capital Territory of Delhi. As of 31st December, its population was more than 1.7 million (1,735,442 inhabitants as of 31st December 2014; Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2015, 109) while that of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD) was more than 16

million (16,314,838 according to the 2011 census). There are 18 districts in Warsaw, all covered by the participatory budgeting, while in Delhi so far 11 constituencies were covered by the exercise. Taking into consideration the sheer size of NCTD, it is understandable that the experiment was first initiated in a limited number of areas; the same, in fact, had happened in Warsaw before PB was extended to cover the entire city.

In Delhi, each of the 11 constituencies receives 200 million INR (around 2 993 000 USD as of 29 November 2015 exchange rates). In Warsaw, the funds for PB are a percentage (1% to 2% in 2015 edition, 0.5% to 1.1% in 2014) of the district's total budget. The district that received the biggest funds to distribute through participatory budgeting in 2014 was Bielany, getting 7 527 000 PLN (2,246,865 USD)(see map below). Even in this case it is less than the funds earmarked for a constituency in the Delhi exercise, while the cost of any public work in Warsaw is certainly higher.



Source: <http://twojbudzet.um.warszawa.pl/w-dzielnicach>

[Since this is a budget based on the funds that had been earmarked in 2014, I have used the December 2014 exchange rate, overall for the entire month, using the Polish National Bank website. This method is far from perfect due to the current fluctuation of the USD-PLN exchange rate.]

It should be noted that Warsaw such as has better infrastructure than most of Delhi's areas (although Delhi had a much more developed subway but such projects do not come under the purview of participatory budgets and are not considered here). AAP government in Delhi had first initiated preliminary PB sessions in three areas of Delhi, much different from each other in terms of the financial situation of their inhabitants: West Vinod Nagar, area near Sanjay Jheel and Pocket F in Mayur Vihar. According to the media 'A look into the top five works voted on priority basis by citizens shows obvious class-centric concerns. Presence and level of engagement also differed accordingly.

While the lower income group areas voted for essentials like sewer systems, aadhar cards [ID cards], ration cards, middle and upper income segments reflected their own peculiar needs such as CCTVs, rain water harvesting structures, "menace of monkeys and dogs", among others. However, the twin consistent demands in all three public meetings was quality of drinking water supplied and poor sewer systems.' (Deshmane, 2015). Similar exercises in other areas, such as Patparganj, Tilak Nagar and Dwarka also pointed out that the issues with which the inhabitants would like to deal first are sewage systems, clean water supply, general cleanliness, road and park maintenance, CCTV systems and dealing with the threat of stray dogs (No author, 'AAP conducts participatory budget meetings in six constituencies', 2015). In another meeting, a 'library, dispensary, road repairs and CCTV cameras' were chosen in a vote (No author, 'Delhi trials participatory budget initiative', 2015).

Such issues as electricity and water availability are not considered in the PB debate in Warsaw, also because virtually all of households in the city would have access to them. Similarly, one of the areas under PB in Delhi, Karawal Nagar, has chosen to form and finance seven teams of unarmed security teams (Mohalla Rakshak Dal) that would patrol the neighbourhoods during the night (no author, 'Karawal Nagar gets its own Mohalla Rakshaks', 2015). Such security solutions were seemingly not even considered in Warsaw (although projects pertaining to amenities that help in keeping security, such as establishing or fixing lanterns were considered). Most of the projects submitted in the capital of Poland deal not with crucial infrastructure but with secondary one or additional facilities, including those for a select section of citizens (playgrounds) or even animals (such as birdhouses). In other words, citizens of Warsaw in general are in a comfortable situation in which they can already choose additional amenities, the basic infrastructure having been usually already provided or being provided through other means. However, an important number of projects deals with basic transport infrastructure as well, such as roads, pavements, bus stops.

Overall sectional spending by type of facility from PB 2015 in Warsaw

Type of facilities	Percentage of total PB funds
Pedestrian and cyclists' communication	15.77%
Sport and leisure	13.99%
Support for physically and mentally challenged	13.26%
Parks, etc.; ecology	11.11%
Playgrounds	8.71%
Pavements and pedestrian crossings	7.96%
Kindergartens	7.95%
Culture	4.68%
Small architecture	4.32%

Wifi	3.22%
Streets and parking lots	3.10%
Supplying libraries with books and journals	2.25%
Classes, talks on various subjects	1.22%
others	0.76%
Funds not used	1.70%

Source: the *Twój Budżet* website, <http://twojbudzet.um.warszawa.pl/>

As per the Warsaw PB rules, the vote is arranged once and apart from the project that received the biggest number of votes, the next ones chosen are the ones for which there is both enough money in a given budget, following the decreasing number of votes received. Not enough data is available at the moment regarding the PB experiment in Delhi but it would so far seem that also in this case more than project can be chosen during a given vote. In 2014, 2 200 projects were submitted throughout Warsaw, out of which 1 360 qualified to the voting stage. A total of 98.65% budget money was spent. The PB experiment in Warsaw offers voting rights not only to those eligible to vote in elections, but to every inhabitant, including children. The children can also author projects. It needs to be noted, however, that the voter turnout in the 2015 round of participatory budget in Warsaw was rather low. The total number of votes cast across the city of 1.7 million inhabitants was 148,814. The biggest voter turnout according to the *Twój Budżet* website was in the Ursynów district (15.51% of inhabitants) and the lowest in Bielany (4.83%)(the data on district population is based on the 2013 Central Statistical Office data). Across Poland, the turnout since 2014 in most of the areas in which PB is undertaken has not crossed 10% (Kiełbowski, 2014).

4. Examples of criticism

The PB exercise in Warsaw is too fresh to yield academic scrutiny of it. Therefore, I will base this section on comments in the press and some analysis made by think-tanks. As the voice of praise are largely known, I will focus on instances of criticism.

First of all, it has been pointed out that the percentage of budget set aside for PB in Warsaw is small, the projects need to be realized within one financial year and there is no PB for projects that would cover the entire city. As a result, it is simply impossible to undertake bigger projects through PB. In comparison, in another Polish city, Łódź, there is an ongoing PB exercise both on the local and city level and the funds earmarked for PB cannot be more than 25% of the total budget for a given locality or the entire city (while in Warsaw it has been so far not more than 2% of district's budget)(<http://budzet.dlalodzi.info/jak-to-dziala/>). Secondly, the process of the project valuation and verification has been met by some criticism. Since the inhabitants may not know the exact costs of the elements of project, it is finally for the office workers to assess the more exact costs of the projects. As one office spokesman admitted, a majority of submitted projects are undervalued (Czaplicki, 2014). Moreover, some have criticised the verification process which is done in the district office and which led to many projects being reject.

Thirdly, some claim that the entire PB exercise would be used by the district offices to push through less popular projects as projects of the people, instead of taking responsibility for them by including them in the general budget. This has been most often claimed regarding the project of building homes for the poorest in Warsaw's Bemowo district (Erbel, 2013). It is impossible to confront this charge without insider's knowledge, but some of the victorious projects do not seem to be ones which the district offices would want to clandestinely promote through PB.

A more general claim, however, is that PB means not only shared funds but diluted responsibility. 'I can't understand', says Zbigniew Modrzejcki, the author of one of the PB projects, 'why children in the kindergartens play on playgrounds that haven't seen renovation for more than 10 years. Still, I think it is a misconception to fill in the reduced budgets of institutions using the funds from the projects of the inhabitants' (Gašior, Krawczyk, Majewska, 2014). In another words, the discussion now includes not only debating what projects should PB include but what should be the district's main responsibilities regarding the (larger) portion of the budget not covered by PB. Many found it unjust that a number of renovation and upgrade works had to be proposed through PB while it should be the district office's responsibility to deal with them anyway. Similarly, some claim that while the PB exercise does create public awareness it is in fact used to make the people feel more free, but focus on this limited number of funds and entertain their possibilities regarding them, taking less note of wrong policies of the governments. Such allegation is very difficult to verify. The PB exercise also means that the projects of the inhabitants have to compete with those of the institutions such as schools which may perceive PB as a chance to upgrade their facilities (Gašior, Krawczyk, Majewska, 2014).

The point about the relation of the PB budget to the remaining part of the budget can be related to Delhi as well. If the inhabitants chose, for example, to fix a problem with the sewage, it may be said that the problem should have been dealt with by the authorities anyway. On the other hand, if some main facilities are lacking or are of inferior standards, it may be considered prudent to consult the people which facility should be taken care of firstly. In this respect, there are two approaches to PB: one assuming that it should mainly include additional facilities based on the imagination and the needs of the people (while the basic facilities should be taken care of by relevant authorities), and the other assuming that the people should have a say in the funding of basic facilities.

5. Can Warsaw serve as a role model for Delhi?

Firstly, the PB exercise in Warsaw can be transparently monitored by everybody on the Internet. The overall material is available on the *Twój Budżet* ('Your Budget') website and districts' websites.

Secondly, the Warsaw exercise included endeavour to inform the citizens about the new exercise and how it works, including the campaign in the traditional media and on the Internet. AAP's PB campaign also received a lot of media attention and the However, the preliminary OB exercise in some areas of Delhi involved using posters giving an e-mail address to which suggestions could be send (no author, 'AAP lines up 2nd round of participatory budgeting discussions from today', 2015). Arguably, the Warsaw campaign had a broader reach. For example, one can even download a model of a school lesson about the participatory budget which the teacher can download and realise in his class. On the other hand, it may be debated how much this is needed. It may be assumed that due to the different character of society in India and in Poland either different means of a successful awareness campaign should be applied to India or that the ones currently applied in Delhi aren't better. Arguably, in some ways citizens need to be less motivated in India (for example, voter turnouts are higher than in Poland). Moreover, many may value direct contact campaigns and less citizens, especially the poor ones, would have access to the Internet. It is possible that the campaign of AAP leaders that included primarily meeting people and talking to them about the upcoming participatory budget exercise was a better solution.

Thirdly, the participatory budget in Delhi so far earmarked the same amount for each constituency. In Warsaw, as the funds for participatory budget are a percentage of the district's total budget, the funds available vary greatly from district to district. This makes the exercise more adjustable to the size and needs of the district. On the other hand, it is the district that decides how much of these funds to earmark for PB. The fact that in Delhi it was the NCTD government that made the funds available to *mohalla sabhas* means

that the intermediate level of power was circumvented and therefore it could not limit the funds. Fourthly, the participatory budget project in Warsaw gives citizens the chance to vote through the Internet. This option was in fact so far more popular as in 106 601 votes were cast electronically and 42 113 through the paper ballot in the 2015 edition. It may however asked again how much this solution would be applicable in Delhi where a large number of population does not have access to the Internet. Voting electronically is also more challenging in terms of verifying votes. In Poland, the verification is facilitated by the fact that every adult citizen possesses his ID card and every child gets its own number (called PESEL) upon birth.

Social and cultural aspects are important here as well. So far, it seems that AAP seeks to arrange for PB votes during the meetings of *mohalla sabhas*. It would be a social as well as political and economic event. In Warsaw it is also stressed that the PB experiment serves the cause of better community integration. However, no single assembly is held. Even those voting in a traditional way have 10 days during which they can come to the district office and cast their vote, so there is no moment for which the entire community gathers to discuss PB. For those calling for a greater community building in Warsaw the solution from Delhi, based on an assembly meeting, could seem attractive. It is, however, difficult to imagine such an assembly in a district of more than 100 000 inhabitants. It would therefore be applicable only in case PB would be entertained on a more local level. Moreover, while a single assembly meeting may serve a social purpose, the careful process of preparing the project which involves finding other citizens to support it and may involve consulting the officials, is far too complex to be realised during a single meeting. The Delhi project so far seems to suggest that at least during the meetings the people are to come up with more general ideas, while in Warsaw they are to come up with much more concrete projects. While on hand the latter may be a bigger challenge for the citizens, it is also pointed that it leads to greater awareness and has an educative value.

6. Can Delhi serve as a role model for Warsaw?

While the Warsaw experiment seems to offer a range of solutions that may considered of technical nature, the Delhi experiment may be relevant for Warsaw in terms of a more general idea. As noted above, one of the stronger ways of criticising PB in Poland, including Warsaw, is that it does not amount to real participation, being instead a people’s vote on a fraction of budget. Earlier, the idea of participatory budget was termed as ‘citizen’s budget’ (*budżet obywatelski*) in Poland (Sorychta-Wojczyk, 2014, 424). Nowadays, some suggest that participatory budget is different citizen’s budget. The latter would be a much more radical idea of citizen’s direct involvement in budget planning. One of the NGOs dealing with urban issues in Poland, OSOM, suggests to differentiate between the two in such a way:

		participatory budget
Budget	entire budget [to be decided by the people], including more than 10%	A few percent of the budget at maximum
Method of [people’s] representation	Direct, voting during an assembly	Consulting projects, traditional vote
Administrative level	Cities divided into smaller, functional units	[larger] districts
The method of dealing with the funds	Direct [by the citizens]	Indirect [by the government]

Source <http://osom.org.pl/attachments/article/2/OSOM%20analiza%20-%20bud%20C5%BCet%20obywatelski.pdf>, p 4.

This is one but idea and possibly to radical in nature, at least regarding the solution to give all citizens the right to vote for the entire budget. But apart from this observation it may be noted that is exactly the idea supported by Kejriwal and his party (voting through the assembly, cities divided into smaller, functional units). Even the idea of people's involvement in the entire process of creating a budget is declared by AAP, as it claimed that in future the citizens could be even involved in decisions pertaining to taxes. As noted earlier, the PB in Warsaw – and throughout Poland – did not weaken the district powers and indeed in some ways even strengthened them (sharing the responsibility with the citizens and arguably enhancing the popularity of district authorities). The AAP's experiment in Delhi is meant to be a part of a much broader decentralisation effort that circumvents municipal corporations. It remains doubtful to mean whether any such radical reform would be undertaken in Poland. If, however, it will happen, than the Delhi exercise may as well become one of the role models.

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