

Social Development Through Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Responsibility: The Case of Lesbos in Greece

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Published online: 19 February 2013
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Abstract Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) origins are traceable back to concepts such as Green Economy, Sustainable Development, etc. These terms do not differ conceptually from each other, but remain consistent throughout their usage in alternative socio-economic discourse grounded on the same principles. CSR measures the social responsibility of entrepreneurs, linking them with various criteria (social, environmental, etc.). This is in the light of the importance given to entrepreneurial activity in the development process. In effect, CSR has already been established and implemented in practice by various Entrepreneurs and is promoted by global organizations such as the E.U. However, in Greece CSR is not well established, compared with other European countries. The point of interest is to see is how these developmental concepts of social responsibility are being applied in Lesbos. In order to find out about all these, a qualitative research will be conducted via the purposive sampling method, consisting of 5 semi-structured interviews.

Keywords CSR · Social responsibility · SME · Local development · Certification

Introduction

Socially responsible business behavior is a broad term describing the need for sustainable and socially responsible economic development. This forms the context

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within which Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has progressively been shaped and developed. As with its predicators, the concept is quite wide encompassing a number of beliefs (principles), rules and guidelines. While from one point of view it can be argued that CSR is a fixed and standardized term; its implications are potentially vast: the holistic problem of creating conditions for sustainable development.

This paper comprises 3 levels: theory, methodology and analysis. The first level includes 3 thematics about the conceptual framework for the wider principles and structures of CSR. The first chapter will consist of a brief introduction concerning the creation of terms such as sustainability and CSR as parts of a broader approach to environmental and social responsibility, generating some basic guidelines and principles. This will be followed by the formal structure of CSR, focusing on its internal and external dimensions, as well as its implementation and standardization through the formulation of specific codes of conduct. Proceeding further, there will be a comparison between alternative entrepreneurship principles and those of CSR, in the context of social development and sustainability.

The section on methodology will contain a description of the processes followed during the research with reference to the research hypotheses, research tool, sampling method and sample needs as means to answering the hypotheses. Matters of deontology will also be put on the table in order to proceed to the analysis itself, thus enabling conclusions to be drawn and answers formulated to the questions posed at the beginning. The bibliography will mostly consist of material drawn from articles and formal internet sites in keeping with the shifting nature of the subject under discussion.

From the concept of sustainability and social responsibility to CSR

The basic concept of CSR does not lack theoretical background. Over the past two decades terms such as sustainable development, green and social economy have become popular as conceptual handles for integrating environmental issues and social justice into the world of business and marketing. Within the context of these terms there has been the development of environmental management, codes of conduct, corporate reporting and third party certification systems, for measuring and certifying business responsibility. Underlying the multiplicity of terms and definitions is a common conceptual frame: that of sustainability and responsibility and their integration into entrepreneurship (Courville 2004, p. 210).

The expansion of the traditional reporting framework to take into account social and environmental behaviour as adjuncts to financial performance, has created a number of new terms related to social responsibility. It is little wonder then that the terminology used to identify each meaning lacks clarity and can be confusing. CSR, basically, is just another term used to describe and guarantee the incorporation of issues such as human and labour rights, community relations and environmental planning into business ethics and practices (Consumer Protection in the Global Market 2002). The importance of these terms was highlighted with the introduction of concepts such as civil society and globalization, which created a new set of actors and stakeholders (Bell 2002).

CSR as a term remains consistent and shares the same values as Sustainable Development, a term that was brought to the spotlight by the UN's Brundtland Report and its implementation through the Triple Bottom Line approach (Ebner and Baumgartner 2006). These principles have been confirmed through a number of guidelines set by various independent global organizations. CSR is not a *sui generis* or merely a conceptual term as Social Responsibility. On the contrary it has been established through a number of initiatives, declarations and strategic policies (mainly the UN's Global Compact and sustainable development), based on a set of universally accepted principles.¹

Organizing and Standardizing CSR

Guidelines of this kind have been adopted by various organizations and institutions. Beside the institutional and conceptual framework, CSR as a term refers to a fixed and standardized type of Social Responsibility. Within the boundaries of this definition, and in the wider bibliography, it consists of two dimensions (internal, external) each complementing the other. The first category includes working relationships with employees; emphasis being given to their well being, safety, training and working conditions. In terms of employment growth, the priorities lie in creating sustainable jobs and matching wages with the economic and social needs. On the other hand, the external dimension focuses on the relations between enterprises, society, the environment and the local community (business partners, suppliers, customers, public authorities, corporate voluntarism and NGO's) (Al-bdour et al. 2010).

These policies and principles are being incorporated into businesses everyday operations through specific codes of conduct which detail and utilize the CSR concept and guidelines. These codes are described and defined according to the adopting bodies and actors who are responsible for drawing them up and thus share the same principles (Bondy et al. 2006).

Formal CSR implementation, however, is dictated by the context of the global market, where quality needs to be defined, controlled and assured through the acceptance of specific standards and procedures set by independent third party organizations in accordance with a particular methodology. In this context, innovations such as CSR reflect the entrepreneurial need for adjustment to local trends and conditions, contrasting the dependence in modulations and certifications (Deligiannis 2004, p. 215).

Alternative Entrepreneurship and CSR

Apart from formal CSR implementation, there are cases where these principles are placed at the core of business planning. Alternative entrepreneurial activity focuses not only on profit, but also on quality and sustainability, the major components of CSR. An exemplary example is alternative tourism and social entrepreneurship,

¹ Overview of the UN Global Compact, (2012) <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/index.html>. Accessed 3 June 2012.

within which Social Responsibility aspects are integrated (Laloumis et al. 2012). Although the implementation of CSR relies on formulation and standardization, its concept is wider, albeit it has yet to have a universally established definition. Within the existing spectrum of definitions, the concept of alternative entrepreneurship is, in many ways, pioneering the development and practice of CSR, using approaches that are more intuitive than formalized. Unfortunately, these kinds of entrepreneurial activities lack the resources and information compatible with a CSR certification process and its management (Taddei and Delecolle 2012).

An interesting case is social entrepreneurship, which, as a concept, is oriented towards solving social problems. Its basic principles are voluntarism and ethical behavior, whilst focusing on social missions. Although social enterprises and CSR are grounded on the same principles (Social Responsibility, sustainability) they have distinct conceptual approaches. Social economy expresses a radical perspective about profit, its distribution and the entrepreneurial organizational structure. On the other hand, CSR, as a strictly defined concept, is based on a rigorous organizational framework regarding its implementation. It is not directed towards specific social problems, but rather constitutes a more general approach to improving the business climate within which enterprises operate. In this case the ultimate goal is still the maximization of profits, thus deploying CSR as a competitive and comparative advantage (Mitra and Borza 2010).

Social enterprises and alternative entrepreneurship in general, are integral parts of the sustainable social development process; a term referring to the human dynamics of a community, market or political level (local, regional, national, European) to create conditions and social structures for inclusion, cohesion and empowerment of the local society (World Bank 2004). All these can be located on the European institutional framework in which CSR is integrated as a policy instrument for the Lisbon Strategy objectives for sustainable growth, emphasizing in the role of social development through SMEs and their innovations, as well as the significance of structuring partnerships with the other local social agencies (COM(2001) 366).

Methodology Description

Research Goals

The purpose of this research is to evaluate and examine the conceptual framework of CSR as it is applied in Lesvos at a time of crisis. Lesvos, as an island, has many unique dimensions regarding its entrepreneurial activity, with implications for the implementation of CSR and the wider concept of social responsibility. CSR is a very broad concept, made up by a various set of rules and standards defining and eventually certifying social and environmental responsibility. Based on these, our research hypotheses are: (1) what are the characteristics of CSR in Lesvos and how is it applied, focusing mainly in the difference between certificated CSR and the wider term of social responsibility? (2) What are the possibilities of social local development through CSR and social responsibility? (3) How the economic crisis affects the implementation of CSR and social responsibility?

Research Tools and Sampling

The specific research is qualitative and will be conducted via semi structured interviews. The main reason for following this methodology is mostly because of the research goals and their focus on the case of Lesvos, aiming at the production of data rather than their collection. Furthermore, the interview method is more flexible, deeper and adjustable in accordance with the sampling needs (Kyriazi 2003: 83-84).

In this research, the main sampling method is the purposive. The issue with purposive sampling is not the representativeness of the sample, but its ability to provide answers for the cases that were set in the first place.² The interviews were taken through a tape recorded, except the cases of the two cooperatives, which were conducted telephonically, as there was no possibility for a face to face interview. For that reason these two interviews do not have a transcript, only some notes.

More specifically, the sample consists of different cases and interviewees (5). Based on to our research hypotheses and theoretical background, we tried to find cases that are close to sustainable and social development, the core of social responsibility. First there are the developmental partnership structures of the island, which through their daily function include other third party certifications, and are by definition close to CSR, such as the Regional Fund of the Northern Aegean. The second case consists of two interviews with the Directors of two local women's cooperatives, those of Mesotopos and Petras. Prior to these interviews, a separate interview was conducted with the Chamber of Commerce, which gave us valuable information about the implementation of CSR, social responsibility and entrepreneurial activity in Lesvos. With this information and through the Chamber of Commerce we came in contact with the rest of the sample. Finally, our sample ends with the case of EPOM; the only enterprise in Lesvos that formally uses a CSR certification system, something necessary in order to get a wider picture of the subject under discussion.

Analysis

1st Interview: The Chamber of Commerce of Lesvos and Limnos

About The Chamber of Lesvos and Limnos

The Chamber of Commerce of Lesvos acts as a local coordinating body/nursery for entrepreneurship, promoting the concept through a number of initiatives including conferences, information services and research by implementing programs for SMEs. This agency is also one of the most crucial local partners for SMEs. In the following interview the interviewee was a formal external associate of the Chamber in matters of social responsibility.

² Purposive sampling: An overview, <http://dissertation.laerd.com/articles/purposive-sampling-an-overview.php>. Accessed 9 November 2011.

The Conceptual Frame for CSR in Lesvos

According to the interviewee, the concept of CSR is a subject of discussion for entrepreneurship, especially in places like Lesvos. In concrete terms, he actually defines CSR as a more specialized adjunct of a similar concept, that of social responsibility; a responsibility enterprises have towards the local society in which they interact, by returning a proportion of the profit they exact through a variety of channels. CSR requires a set of standards that an SME in Lesvos find it difficult to afford, mainly from an economic point of view. Most of the enterprises are quite small, the vast majority being family based, thus employing a small number of employees. This kind of entrepreneurship and business culture define not only the concept of CSR, but also the whole spectrum of interactions that take place between the local actors and enterprises.

The Implementation of CSR and Social Responsibility in Lesvos

The business climate for enterprises in Lesvos dictates a number of rules. The most important of them is to use local staff and products for wider entrepreneurial activity, thus stimulating local development. A very crucial component relates to the social relationships within the island. Lesvos not only as a business environment, but at a broader societal level is distinguished by close social interactions between the local authorities and actors, as well as the enterprises themselves. More specifically, there is no clear distinction between the social and business profile, as they are considered one and the same by the local society.

Social responsibility, as it was underlined in the interview, can be seen through the balance that exists in the wider entrepreneurial structure. Everything seems to move in a predetermined way so as not to disturb this equilibrium and balanced climate. In this context, socially responsible behavior can be linked with the external aspect of CSR, thus aiming at improving the relations between businesses, on one hand, and the local community on the other. However, there is nothing about the internal aspect of CSR in term of working conditions, which does not seem to be taken into account. The small enterprises in Lesvos cannot afford the extra cost, which these actions would probably incur. At the same time, there are a number of examples, such as the women's co-operatives on the island, where there is an alternative perspective, focusing not only on profit, but rather more on a different set of values that are the basis of CSR, yet without having the ability to formally certificate them.

2nd Interview: Regional Development Fund of North Aegean

The Role of Regional Development Fund of North Aegean

The Regional Developmental Fund of North Aegean was created by the ministry of internal affairs in 1998, as the culmination of an initiative started in 1990. The principal function of the Fund is to finance structures and develop a series of other actions, including research, technical and financial support, whilst operating as

partner in a number of European programs. The Regional Development Fund of the North Aegean employs 6 staff and is chaired by the elected Head of the Region, with a permanent Director from whom this interview was taken.

Certification Systems and Social Responsibility

The Fund does not have its own certification system for CSR. Despite that, it has adopted a number of other relative certifications such as ISO 9001, 14001 and EMAS. The first of these, ISO 9001 refers to quality control in both services and products. The other two, ISO 14001 and the European EMAS, are parts of a wider concept of environmental management. Implementation of these was not forced on the organization, but rather occurred as a series of voluntary actions aimed at enhancing and expanding the traditional scope of actions of the Regional Development Fund. It is worth mentioning that in Greece there are only two institutions in the wider public sector which use certification like this; the Regional Fund of Lesbos is one of them. All these actions were taken with a consensus among staff and the Director of the Fund on these issues.

Besides this, there were also plans to integrate CSR in terms of certification, however the unpredictable factor of the economic crisis radically limited this option. The main factor was the economic cost of certification, which as a procedure (hiring an independent organization to develop codes of conduct and to supervise their implementation) is highly costly. However, CSR was, and still is a goal of the Regional Fund of Lesbos, something that can also be seen in the official site of the organization. The crisis narrows further the spectrum of social responsibility in other sectors as well. For example, there is no clear section or department with responsibility for these kinds of actions, only work groups, which are formed voluntarily by the staff members who coordinate these actions.

Implementing Social Responsible Behavior

Apart from certifications, other actions have been taken. The first one is in accordance with the aspect of internal CSR concerning the relations with employees. The Fund as an organization, based on a more modern and energetic approach about employment, promotes lifelong learning, courses, conferences, etc. As for the external aspects there are many actions that contribute to justifying a case for unofficial CSR. These mainly, derive from the environmental perspective; thus aiming at recycling and alternative energy and reduction in the needs of the building (done in cooperation with the University of the Aegean). In addition there was tree re-planting to restore a local forest, through the work of volunteers. A beginning has also been made with voluntary groups such as the local fire brigade, by providing equipment like GPS, uniforms, etc. At a more structured level, these partnerships include also formal institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce of Lesbos and the University, as a means to run and develop successful programs and enhance the concept of social responsibility that is used to describe an unofficial implementation of CSR.

Another issue that encapsulates aspects of social responsibility is the promotion of a certain kind of entrepreneurship. As it was mentioned in this interview, as well as the previous one, emphasis is given to women's co-operatives on the Island.

3rd Interview: The agricultural Cooperative of Mesotopos

About the Cooperative

The following interview was with the president of the women's cooperative of Mesotopos, which was founded in 1998. Mesotopos is located in Lesvos, being one of its many small rural villages. The main purpose of the cooperative, according to its statute, is the reduction of female unemployment through the production and use of local products. Products such as pasta, jam and pastries are exported to other Greek cities, as well being sold in Lesvos.

The initial capital for the creation of the cooperative was gathered by the members of the cooperative itself, who also worked voluntarily for 2 years in order to gather a sufficient sum for its daily needs. In 2007 the cooperative was financed by the "Development Intervention Programme", which allowed an expansion of its structures, thus building three additional workshops, a showroom and a meeting place for additional personnel training. Aid to this movement, since it is very beginning, has come from local institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce of Lesvos and Limnos, the University of the Aegean, the Regional Developmental Fund of North Aegean, etc. As the interviewee claimed, support from these institutions was of the utmost importance, given the nature of the obstacles that were faced (economical, bureaucratic and technical).

Applying Social Responsibility and Certification Systems

One of the goals of the cooperative is the stimulation of local development through the usage of the accumulated social capital. Local electricians, drivers, farmers, carpenters and engineers are provided with incentives to stay and are constantly used by the Cooperative for its daily needs and function, thus strengthening the local labor market. In this case, social responsibility is being enhanced horizontally. Cooperatives in general represent the most essential, core CSR values, without having the means, however, to establish a certification procedure. One of the goals of the cooperative of Mesotopo's is to obtain ISO and HASP recognition, as a means to ensure and certificate the quality of their products. However, for a local cooperative this is very hard. CSR it is not even mentioned in the interview, despite the fact that it is being applied unofficially.

Social responsibility in this case revolves around local development and the stimulation of the local market, giving emphasis to transparent procedures regarding the relationships between the Cooperative, its members, its external associates and of course its suppliers, as well as the local community. A very important goal is to promote and preserve the history and tradition of the wider area through the promotion of local products. The cooperative has managed to become an essential local actor and a founding member of a number of local initiatives such as the

“Developmental Cultural Society of Mesotopos”. The members of the cooperative are also encouraged to progress to seminars and engage in additional training. Emphasis is also given to quality, as well as the capability for social inclusivity. The financial crisis and its side effects (reduced customer demand), affected the cooperative directly, reducing its overall production and the disposal of its products. As a result the cooperative has decided to reduce the amount of production and expand its range of products, in order to adjust to the current conditions.

4th Interview: The Women Cooperative of Petra

About the Cooperative

In this case, the cooperative’s main objective is the development of tourism in Petra. The women’s cooperative was created in 1983 by the Council for Gender Equality as a means to mobilize the women of the wider area, whilst distributing local products. In the following interview the interviewee was the president of the cooperative.

In order to achieve these goals a group of women have created a restaurant and several guesthouses which operate mostly during the summer vacation period. With the financial support of the Council for Gender Equality, 20 women converted their houses to reception areas. Over the years the cooperative has been financed by several programs enabling significant improvements such as making the guesthouses fully equipped. In addition, a special restaurant was built to use various local products and promote their wider distribution. A significant factor was the recognition by the Greek Tourism Organization (GTO) of the cooperative as a pioneer in tourism promotion and development. Being a cooperative, it was initially treated rather cautiously by the local actors (local government), until the the Chamber of Commerce of Lesbos and Limnos and the Manpower Employment Organization gave their full support.

Applying Social Responsibility and Certification Systems

Social responsibility can be identified in the very nature of the cooperative, which is, as before, at the centre of the developmental procedure itself. Social and sustainable development is by definition a core CSR principle. Given the fact that we are examining cooperatives, this implies a reduced capacity for certification systems, not just because of the cost, but also due to the lack of information, albeit that ideas such as equality and sustainability are amongst the founding principles of its statute. The only certification possessed by the cooperative is that of the GTO, which was awarded in recognition of both its principles and its success. Emphasis is therefore given to local products, which are displayed as parts of the local history and tradition. The cooperative, as a local actor, also employs a number of local workers and suppliers as means to further enhance and stimulate the wider concept of local development. The costs, the decision making procedure and profit distribution are based on the principles of the cooperative movement: distribution of profits is based on the needs of each member, the costs are divided equally and the

decision making process is implemented through the general assembly. Special bonuses are awarded for training the members such as seminars organized in interaction with other relevant cooperatives in Germany, France, Cyprus, Brussels, Turkey and Syria through the programme “Exchanging ideas” and “NOW”. Despite its success, the cooperative has been severely affected by the crisis. According to the interviewee, since 2008 the cooperative has begun to dissolve and deteriorate. Many women have left discouraged by the constant struggle to maintain and preserve the cooperative’s main objectives and functions.

5th Interview: EPOM

About EPOM and its Activities

The last interview was with the Plant Manager of EPOM in Mytilene. EPOM as an enterprise was created as a local cooperative for ouzo production. After gradual expansion, it was taken over by the French multinational company of Pernod Ricard, which specializes in alcoholic beverages. With this expansion the company was renamed EPOM, thus becoming better known and much more competitive with the availability of new sources of capital funding. However, the company is still based in Mytilene, where it maintains its operations for ouzo production and distribution. At the same time as a company, it employs a large number of employees (160 in Greece, 28 in Mytilene).

Organizing CSR and Codes of Conduct in Lesvos

In terms of CSR, it is probably the only company in Lesvos that uses an official and generally accepted certification system such as the SA 8000. From the research that took place for the sampling needs, none of the respondents could think of another enterprise on the island that officially used CSR and had applied actions at that level. This use is not of course a random occurrence, but has its origins in the parent company of Pernod Ricard itself, as it is the company’s policy to include CSR in every country the group expands its operations into. In order to certificate CSR, the company has formulated some codes of conduct and guidelines, thus creating a wider *CSR platform*, including all matters of socially responsible behavior such as environmental issues, relations with stakeholders, employees, suppliers and the local community.

All these issues come under the authority of the special department for human resources in Athens, within which CSR and other certifications are united in one common platform for reasons of convenience. Despite this, there is a dynamic relationship between Athens and the factory/offices in Mytilene. CSR is designed in such a way (there is a special recommendation in the wider CSR platform) as to bridge that distance, functioning on the basis of a bottom up approach, allowing everyone to make suggestions and recommendations for the implementation of CSR and the wider function of the company.

Internal Aspect of CSR

Based on the model of SA 8000 and the *CSR platform* the company has taken many steps to strengthen its ties with employees, regardless of their position in the production activity. Personnel at all levels of the company do voluntary work for the local community. For example, an action about the information on the side effects of alcohol consumption by young people. At the same time, each employee, whatever their status, can suggest, recommend and complain officially to the company. Also, there are a number of bonuses (local products), that are given to employees. In parallel with these, there are some basic and fundamental standards about working conditions regarding health and safety.

External CSR Aspect

The external aspect of CSR is the most important for the company, including all the external relations with the environment, suppliers and the local community. Special attention is given to the local suppliers, providing special bonuses for the production of the most basic materials used in ouzo production (glukanisso for example in the village of Alisveri). In addition, there is a CSR day once a year for all the employees of Pernod Ricard (18,000), when they do voluntary community work, in the context of the wider term of corporate voluntarism.

Conclusion

Corporate Social Responsibility as a concept is interpreted into a variety of approaches that are sometimes contradictory. In this research we tried to examine the concept as it is manifested in the particular case of Lesvos. On one hand there is the globalized entrepreneurial term of CSR, and on the other, lies its implementation on a relatively small Greek Island.

Now, at the conclusion stage of this paper, it is time to answer the research hypotheses that were set. The first one is about the characteristics of CSR in Lesvos. CSR is a global trend that has specific standards and rules related to the organization issuing certification. These organizations require some standards, which are based on very specific guidelines and predetermined procedures, that small enterprises on Lesvos cannot afford to subscribe to. These procedures and their certification are so expensive as to be out of reach for the classic family based enterprises of the Island. It is no coincidence that only EPOM uses a system like this. EPOM is now under the control of a multinational corporation that uses CSR as a policy instrument and as a means to achieve a higher level of integration with the local society and the wider national market.

On the other hand, social responsibility is a wider term that can be used to describe a looser implementation of some CSR principles. There are enterprises that develop social responsibility by incorporating the wider culture into the enterprise's daily activity, without having the means to promote and certificate it in the more formal sense, for example the women co-operatives of Lesvos or even the much larger

Regional Development Fund of North Aegean. Similarly, the characteristics of wider local entrepreneurship activity demand responsible business behavior. That responsibility comes with the need for a stable entrepreneurial climate, with enterprises using local products from specific suppliers, being on good terms with the local community, with less emphasis on terms of employment standards.

In the second hypothesis about the role and contribution of social responsibility and CSR to local development the answer is quite clear, with the connection between these two terms being apparent even at a conceptual level. CSR promotes sustainable development (see European Commission's green paper for its promotion). The cooperatives that were mentioned were created for that sole purpose. All these socially responsible actions, whatever their magnitude, are integral parts of the social development process, adding to local social capital. However, it must be noted that comprehensive entrepreneurial structure, in terms of organization (for example EPOM) produces the best results. Entrepreneurship activity in general is linked with development through the support that it provides to the local community. CSR is just an entrepreneurship enhancement that, if used properly, can create conditions for engendering a better climate between society and businesses.

Finally the last hypothesis about the crisis is the easiest to answer. The financial crisis has severely affected social responsibility. Not only has it reduced the capacity for such actions, but it has CSR certification procedures impossible. The enterprises that follow CSR or social responsibility do it voluntarily. However, the crisis has damaged the very fabric of entrepreneurial activity. In a situation where many enterprises have been forced to reduce their budgets and activities, the very first actions that have been sacrificed are those relating to social responsibility. Entrepreneurial activities such as the cooperatives are in a very vulnerable position, as they find it very difficult to cope with these new conditions, being, by definition, linked to an alternative set of principles, rather than focusing solely on profit. As a result, social responsibility loses one of its key drivers, something that can only be overcome by increased support from the general public towards such actions, as well by the inner entrepreneurial voluntarism.

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