



Education as a global “soft power” for sustainable development

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyse various aspects of education for sustainable development (ESD) drawing attention to the approaching end of the UN Decade on ESD (DESD) in 2014 and to the necessity of the continuation of ESD activities. Defining the internationalisation of education as an ever more significant part of globalisation, the paper insists that the education should be recognised as the foundation for sustainable development and building of the global knowledge society.

Design/methodology/approach – The author presents a vision of the education as of a global “soft power” thus introducing a new understanding and a different application of the notion used mainly in a negative sense which, in author’s opinion, can serve as educational instrument and technology of attraction. The author’s methodology and approach take note of the basic principles of the globalisation theory and include the recognition of the fact that the contradiction between global interdependent problems of the planetary scale on one side and the existing rather fragmentary and desultory way of acquiring knowledge on the other side is the main challenge to the present and future quality of the human potential.

Findings – Considering ways how to continue the work on ESD after the end of the UN DESD in 2014, the author expresses a point of view that it should be an innovation project requiring state, public, law and financial support. United Nations Organization for Science, Culture and Education (UNESCO) Chairs have an important role to play as a new instrument of the global educational “soft power” inspired to promote knowledge and scientific experience worldwide.

Originality/value – Authentic experience of the UNESCO Chair creation and activity at the Faculty of Global Studies at Moscow State University is shown. The author having about 40 years of experience of cooperation with UNESCO as a member of a group of experts at the Director General, later – as a diplomat at UNESCO and recently – as UNESCO Chairholder presents an original point of view based on personal findings and conclusions.

Keywords Global studies, Education for sustainable development (ESD),

Faculty of Global Processes (FGP), UNESCO Chair on Global Problems, UNESCO Chairs, “Soft power”

Paper type Research paper

Introduction – the notion of “soft power”

The notion of the “soft power” which has asserted itself in the political and scientific discourse comparatively recently is generally understood as a complex of ways, modes, methods and devices used to achieve results on the basis of their attractiveness and voluntariness as opposed to the “hard power” meant as one form of compulsion or another.

Many are inclined to feel a negative attitude towards this term, fortunately introduced to the active political vocabulary by the American Professor Joseph S. Nye Jr[1] in the beginning of the 1990s of the previous century (e.g. see Nye, 1990, 2004).

Meanwhile the notion seems able to have both a negative and a positive meaning depending on its content, as well as on the spheres and aims of its application.

At the same time we have to state that the possibility of “soft power” being used in the activities of international organisations is not sufficiently explored, although



it appears particularly essential for the United Nations as the main global political institution. This is also the case for its specialised agencies; above all, for the United Nations Organization for Science, Culture and Education (UNESCO) responsible for the spheres of defining and forming the future intellectual profiles of humankind in various ways.

One of these multiple spheres is education. The value of education grows explicitly in the contemporary world considered in a vast amount of scientific works and materials as a post-industrial or information society presumably built on information and knowledge rather than on wealth and power.

Education, formerly being rare and difficult to access, has now become quite common and easily accessible for people in developed countries. Without acquiring a good education it is becoming ever less possible to get a decent job and to secure an acceptable quality of life.

Moreover, even a good basic education – once received – is not sufficient for an entire lifespan nowadays. It is necessary to continue learning, thus filling up one's store of knowledge.

The UNESCO concept of a life long education has become a reality. Some time ago the last gap has been filled by the initiative of Russia; this was education in the age range from 0 to 6 years. A plan of action to develop pre-school education for children of the smallest age has been elaborated and approved at the UNESCO World Conference on this subject in September 2010 in Moscow (UNESCO, 2010; Moscow, 2010). The human being became the object of the Life Long Education concept from the cradle to the grave.

The significance of a complementary education is growing continuously, especially of a complementary higher education; understood as additional volumes of knowledge which are not contained in basic courses and programmes, but which are required and able to raise the value of the future specialist thus opening up paths to success for him (e.g. the Millennium Development Goals, cf. Altmann *et al.*, 2013).

What is UNITWIN?

An important step forward in the promotion of complementary education on a global level was enacted in 1991 when the General Conference of UNESCO at its 26th Session took a stand for the development of inter-university cooperation in the main spheres of activities of the organisation, and established the UNITWIN Programme (UNITWIN – university education twinning and networking scheme) for this purpose. This programme was about the creation of an additional university education system through the establishment of UNESCO Chairs and Networks in the framework of the Programme (UNITWIN, 1991).

The programme was developed to become an effective instrument enabling society to raise its potential through the exchange and application of knowledge as a strategy for developing cooperation between educational and scientific research establishments and centres. The programme introduced to the university community a real possibility of uniting its efforts with UNESCO in order to reach the goals of the global agenda. Universities and other higher educational establishments and organisations from the university education sector were to become the main participants in the programme.

The experience obtained during more than 20 years of the implementation of the UNITWIN Programme allows the consideration of the UNESCO Chairs and Networks

institute as an instrument of “soft power” of a global application which UNESCO possesses in the humanitarian field, similarly to how the United Nations possess the ability to use “hard power” in the field of constraints and conflicts.

The task of forming the respective knowledge potential as the basic resource of human beings in contemporary times defines the essence of contemporary political technologies which can be used constructively or destructively for society.

The UNESCO chair as an instrument of the global educational “soft power”

The American Sociologist Alvin Toffler, as one of the Theorists of the information society, perceives its social base in the broad stratum of people linked to the creation, collection, dissemination and processing of information. He calls them the “cognitariat” (from “cognitio”, in Latin: knowledge); being convinced that knowledge is the most effective source and instrument of power. Both wealth and the means of physical violence are, in his opinion, based on knowledge (Toffler, 1990).

Many researchers categorise the political technologies into the three following categories:

- means – changing the interaction of participants in society or on a world scale through introducing new “rules of the game”, norms, laws and approaches;
- methods – securing the planting of new knowledge, values, conceptions and the forming on this basis of new directives and convictions in the participants’ consciousness; and
- ways – allowing the manipulation of people’s behaviour.

The UNESCO Chair as an instrument of “soft power” obviously falls in the second category, forming *the cognitariat* in the spirit of educational and scientific principles, moral values and priorities of UNESCO.

UNESCO Chairs and Networks have proved to be effective in member states in relation to the creation of innovative programmes of education forming new ideas on the basis of analytics and research. Existing university programmes could additionally be improved through the inclusion of new content, international experience, cultural diversity and the use of contemporary educational technologies.

The flexibility of the programme has enabled the universities to better respond to the needs of those new to the educational process.

An important element was the creation of networks and network sections of existing chairs recommended by UNESCO, at least as a no-less effective means of UNITWIN programme development than the establishment of new chairs.

UNESCO Chairs joined the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) in 2005-2014 and began to play an active role in the process of the internationalisation of education as an ever more important part of globalisation.

It is a two-way process, because it represents both the source of incoming international experience and information as well as the possibility of coming out with own contributions and of participating in international programmes in addition to projects; all with generally world-scale cooperation.

The term globalisation entered into general use relatively recently. Today this notion is one of the most frequently applied to the description of social and political processes in the contemporary world. The concept of globalisation is becoming ever more widely spread. In the course of its development, notions of global economics, global ecology and global education were formed.

The key role of the educational intellectual process for the future destiny and the continued existence of humanity

At the turn of the new twenty-first century, many researchers following the Russian scientist Academician Nikita Moiseyev emphasised the problem of the relationship between man and the biosphere as the main problem of present times (Moiseyev, 2000). Somewhat later, it came to be understood as the key role of the educational intellectual process for the future destiny and the continued existence of humanity. The French philosopher of the seventeenth century, Blaise Pascal, promoted the following appeal: "Let us try to think in the correct way". Concerning global problems his demand still seems to be valid today.

It became clear that the contradiction between global interdependent problems on a planetary scale on one side, and the existing rather fragmentary and desultory way of acquiring knowledge on the other, is the main challenge to the present and future fulfilment of human potential.

An international commission on education in the twenty-first century known as the Delors Commission established four well known present-day basic educational principles for the future: to learn to learn, to learn to make, to learn to be and to learn to live together. In practice they can be combined with the four basic factors which, according to the World Bank, are necessary for development:

- qualified personnel, well-educated and possessing respective know-how competencies;
- universities and scientific research institutions with respective laboratories;
- networks of communications between educational and research centres; and
- information structures.

According to the authors, these factors define a new society of knowledge where rights and responsibilities should be harmoniously combined for effective activities aimed at sustainable development.

The Commission member Dr Roberto Carneiro from Portugal, President of the Lisbon Catholic University, pointed out the importance of the link between globalisation and the local roots for sustainable development. Professor Edgar Morin from France saw such a link as a kind of a shuttle movement of knowledge between global and local levels (Bindé, 2001, pp. 202-205). Roland Robertson used the term of "glocalisation": an artificially constructed word, created to express the interconnectedness of the global and the local level (Rauch, 2013).

Global education for sustainable development (ESD)

Despite certain differences in approach, there is nevertheless quite a broad common understanding among various researchers that global ESD is an important priority in the context of global problems and that its content should basically embrace the forming of conceptions with regard to human values, systems and universal problems in the framework of global history.

The notion of global education can be applied at different levels:

- on the global level of interaction and mutual enrichment of national educational systems of states and cooperation between international organisations, structures and scientific research centres;

- on the national level through the organisation of the educational process in conformity with the contemporary international educational standards, the best of experience and practice; and
- on the level of concrete educational structures (universities, institutes, centres, colleges, schools, faculties, classes, etc.) by means of inclusion in their educational programmes and the teaching of contents forming a global way of thinking and comprehension.

In the ever more interrelated and interdependent world of our time, global education for development is gaining a special significance not only as a teaching process, but more importantly as the advancement of understanding to mass consciousness of how crucial global processes embracing the planet are for the future of humankind. This understanding should include a comprehension of the necessity of searching without delay for adequate responses to emerging global challenges, requiring solutions equally as urgent as the situations in different spheres vital for human beings appear dangerous.

Global education is increasingly gaining ground as an effective means of forming the mentality and conditions for sustainable development, the notions of the ecology of the mind and of the ethics of the future.

Though ESD is sometimes being interpreted as an advanced ecological education, it represents in reality a much broader notion. The Bonn declaration, the final document of the UNESCO World Conference on ESD in Bonn (Germany) in 2009 stated as the task of primordial importance for ESD the necessity of providing by its means the whole richness and wealth of values, knowledge, skills and competences needed by the humanity for its future existence and progress.

It states that the understanding of the special role of education is a decisive factor of change and of the unique status of ESD as an institute of civilisation.

In any case, it is clear that after the end of the UN DESD in 2014 the problem will not disappear and will remain on the global agenda. It will be necessary to continue working on ESD, to develop new efforts and to undertake new steps to achieve further results.

Khanty-Mansiysk International Conference and Declaration on ESD

In order to discuss the results of the Decade, and to pave the ways for ESD beyond 2014, the International Conference on ESD was held on 22-24 May 2013 in Khanty-Mansiysk, Russian Federation.

The of the Conference's participants analysed the activities in the framework of DESD, presented various initiatives, experiences and ideas and determined areas for ESD continuation beyond 2014.

They adopted the Khanty-Mansiysk Declaration and Recommendations for ESD follow-up. It was confirmed that the concept of sustainable development is connected with the deep understanding of the state of and prospects for the development of humanity, and education was recognised as the foundation for sustainable development and for the building of the global knowledge society.

In the Declaration the participants stated: "The process of globalisation inevitably leads to the revision of the traditional value systems and to the search for a new world outlook. In the conditions of the world crises, the formation of a new paradigm of education providing social functions for education systems to secure the human quality of life became an important result of DESD" (Khanty-Mansiysk, 2013a).

It was emphasised that the principles of continuity and globality of education, of inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary character of studied subjects, of inclusive and innovative methods as well as the humanistic orientation and integration approach were mandatory preconditions for the new type of quality education.

The increasing importance of UNESCO Chairs for the humanitarian mission of educational institutions and the role of the network-based cooperation, in general, were recognised and new global educational technologies have an important role in that process.

In the recommendations addressed to international organisations, UNESCO member states, governmental structures, educational community and institutions, the Conference particularly called upon the UNESCO Chairs:

- to train specialists with a new type of world vision that would be able to take well-balanced integral decisions in the interest of society, economics and the environment bearing in mind global, national and local considerations;
- to develop partner relations to intensify interaction and cooperation for the purposes of sustainable development through joint programmes, academic exchanges and the organisation of student mobility;
- to ensure more active use of the creative potential of scientists, tutors of higher educational establishments and practicing pedagogues in network-based interactions as they relate to the ESD issues; and
- to continue with studies ensuring further inter-disciplinary assessment of the role of the value aspects of education in the formation of a spiritual, culturally developed personality as a prerequisite for the sustainable development of society (Khanty-Mansiysk, 2013b).

Practical steps are needed to create new instruments of ESD “soft power”

However, with all the importance of expressions of will by the world community, practical steps are needed to follow the declarations and recommendations of international conferences and meetings.

As the positive experience of the UNITWIN Programme implementation shows, concrete programmes and projects on the international, regional and national levels can be invented in order to create new instruments for ESD. To become instruments of “soft power” they need to be attractive, to seduce and to provoke interest rather than to oblige or impose.

There exists the problem of the alienation of education from the personality of the recipient of that education. School, in the sense of all levels of education, has always been (and remains in many respects) an institute of compulsion and constraint. The overcoming of this can be considered a very important reserve for ESD and for education as a whole.

There should be elaborated, introduced and subsequently implemented programmes to raise the profile, attractiveness and prestige of education with both knowledge sources and recipients being the centre of attention.

A system of material and moral preferences is needed for comparing more educated people to less educated ones. A higher quality education received due to the higher level of the educational institution, of its personnel and due to the work done by recipients of its knowledge should be rated more highly than a lower quality education.

This means that it is necessary to overcome equalising attitudes and approaches and to improve for this purpose the system of external distinctive indications of the quality of education received, such as degrees and other gradations of the current and final attestation documents and proceedings, more differentiated assessment, etc.

It should be understood that as soon as the high level of education received and knowledge acquired cease to be a distinctive feature of exclusivity in society, the motivation and the interest in obtaining the education also go down.

Any approach to the education of the future should include at each stage the understanding that any compulsory obligation detracts from any move of attractiveness. For Russia such a necessity to switch the education from patterns of compulsion to rails of attractiveness can be incorporated in the process of its own on-going development.

Among the theoretical models applied at the end of the 1980s to explain globalisation processes, there was the theory of modernisation. This theory advocated the necessity and the possibility of introducing a modernist ideology and practice in less developed countries in order to achieve progress in them. Based on modernism and modernist consciousness, it was associated in various forms with the contradictory process of globalisation through the whole of the twentieth century.

In the context of the theory of modernisation, the global process of civilisation presents itself as a subsequent transformation of traditional civilisations into innovative civilisations. In this context the inclusion of a country in the world's intellectual and economic relations in the capacity of a consumer of foreign innovations is considered as a superficial globalisation, whereas a profound, deep-going globalisation means a country's ability to secure firm positions on global markets of those that produce innovations for its own technologies. In this respect, the difference from classic modernisation processes becomes clear when compared to those of so called post-modernisation in which a mechanical transfer of modernising models and schemes in countries of traditional civilisations promotes superficial globalisation only, or promotes merely an illusion of modernisation while destroying the foundations of a traditional society.

Russia, having great experiences, skills and traditions in education adopted by many countries and peoples can comfortably turn to a new course in the stream of its own geopolitical interests. Neither neglecting nor absolutising foreign patterns, Russia has to resort to national development codes. This includes intellectual and moral values to be developed by means of education as the instrument of a positive and constructive "soft power" in the service of society.

In this sense, the famous Siberian code could be seen as representing a mysterious and enigmatic ability to lead the country out of the most difficult situations, overcoming them with dignity and success to the surprise and admiration of the world.

According to the great Russian Scientist and Founder of Moscow University Mikhail Lomonosov, the might of Russia will be increased by Siberia. Today this does not only mean natural resources like oil and gas, but may be more important for the future the intellectual potential which could be built on the ways of the development of education and of a closer educational cooperation on a regional and international scale.

A kind of a road map should be established and followed in order to proceed from education as a necessity for gaining instruction and qualification – sometimes boring and dull – to education as an attractive and desired participation in obtaining knowledge of high quality and value.

The Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU) opens new perspectives for ESD

For the oldest (founded in 1755) and the most famous university in Russia, the Lomonosov MSU new perspectives were introduced with the adoption in November 2009 of a Federal Law which established the special status of Moscow and St Petersburg State Universities as flagships of the Russian higher education system subordinated directly to the President of the Russian Federation. This law allows them to enjoy the right and the privilege to elaborate and introduce advanced innovative courses, programmes and technologies of education without having to undergo any bureaucratic procedures (Law of the RF, 2009).

The Rector of the Lomonosov MSU, Academician Viktor Sadovnichy, being a world known expert in ESD, initiates and leads manifold activities to raise the quality of education and to make it progress through advanced technologies and approaches.

It was due to his initiative that the Faculty of Global Processes (FGP) of the MSU was established in 2005 as the first and the only higher educational structure in the Russian Federation until now, preparing specialists in international relations with knowledge of global problems.

The FGP and the UNESCO Chair on global problems as new instruments of ESD global “soft power”

The FGP is elaborating problems of global education and of ESD with scientific results reflected in a number of advanced research studies and publications (Abylgaziev *et al.*, 2010; Ilyin *et al.*, 2012; Grinin *et al.*, 2012; Shestova, 2011 and other works and studies). They are included in the teaching process at the Faculty through the innovative courses “Sustainable Development as a Global Process” and “International Relations in the Context of Global Processes” elaborated and introduced in the educational standard of the Faculty under the scientific direction of the Dean of the Faculty, Professor Ilya V. Ilyin, and the Scientific Head of the Faculty Professor Igor I. Abylgaziev.

The UNESCO Chair on Global Problems and Emerging Social and Ethical Challenges for Large Cities and Their Population at the FGP of the Lomonosov MSU was established in accordance with the Agreement between UNESCO and the Lomonosov MSU signed by the Director General of UNESCO, H.E. Mrs Irina Bokova, and the Rector of the MSU Acad. Victor Sadovnichy in Moscow on 28 September 2010.

The Chair became the first, and for the time being the only, one devoted to global, social and ethical challenges and the specific problems of large cities and their population among more than 700 UNESCO Chairs existing in approximately 130 countries all over the world.

A milestone for the development of the Chair was the visit of the UNESCO Director General H.E. Mrs Irina Bokova to the Lomonosov MSU on 9 September 2011.

During the visit a solemn inauguration of the Chair took place in the presence of high guests and university professors and students.

The inclusion of the Chair in the formal structure of the university as its integral part was very substantial for the Chair's further development. In accordance with the decision of the Scientific Council of the MSU from 16 April 2012, the UNESCO Chair was established as the full-fledged chair of the FGP. By this, the Chair obtained the status of an educational and scientific university subdivision with all the respective rights and obligations together with its status as a UNESCO establishment.

Since the beginning of the Chair's activities its work has been developing in two main directions. The first direction includes the organising, holding and further

developing the results of international scientific conferences and other events and actions on global problems.

The second direction involves educational programmes and scientific research at the Chair, and in its Sections with publications on the results, through the elaboration and introduction of educational cycles of various volumes and predestinations and through the realisation of the main project “The City in the Context of Global Processes” was implemented. This was followed by the next central project “The Global Urban Systems” (Abylgaziev *et al.*, 2011; Sassen, 2001; Grübler *et al.*, 2012).

The innovative courses “International Relations in the Context of Global Processes” and “Emerging Global Social and Ethical Challenges for a Large City and its Population” elaborated at the Chair were included in the educational standard of the Faculty. Articles and studies to advance ESD approaches and goals and to present new educational information and network technologies were prepared and published. Student and post-graduate research studies were elaborated at the Chair on various aspects of ESD, “soft power” and its educational instruments.

According to UNESCO recommendations, the Chair embarked on the creation of a network through the establishment of its branches as network sections on the various relevant issues of global social and ethical challenges. The first sections of the Chair established at the St Petersburg State Baltic Technical University and at the Saratov State Technical University very actively joined the work of the Chair. They organised seminars, events, conferences and other activities, released publications and managed to incorporate themselves in the structures of their universities. At the Saratov Section, a TV and Film Centre was established.

They were followed by the second Chair’s Section in St Petersburg at the Faculty of Business Communications of the Inter-Regional Institute of Economics and Law, by the section in Tbilissi (Georgia) at the Medical Faculty of the Djavachishvili Tbilissi State University, and by the Section in Kharkov (Ukraine) at the Faculty of International Economic Relations of the Karazin Kharkov State University.

Further network sections of the Chair are in the process of forming at the Rostov-on-Don South Federal University, at the Ekaterinburg Ural State University, at the universities of Beijing and Tchendu in China and at the Kyung Hee University in Seoul (Republic of Korea).

Taking into account the ever more growing interest in global studies of students, researchers and the whole scientific community, the UNESCO Chair at the FGP of the MSU is being formed as a national, regional and international educational and scientific research centre on global problems and is searching for their solutions in the interests of a secure sustainable development. It includes, among its first priorities, the ESD and “soft power” characterised by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin as a complex of instruments and methods of achieving goals by attractiveness and conviction (Abylgaziev *et al.*, 2012; Putin, 2012).

The “soft power” exerted on people to form their world vision and behaviour presents itself as an important reserve able to qualitatively change approaches to ESD, moving this work forward beyond 2014. The transformation of the ESD from an abstract task for many to a concrete and attractive activity assumes respective changes in educational standards which should become more flexible and variable, include the teaching of development ideas, priorities and substitute methods of constraint by attractiveness.

As a matter of fact, the ESD development beyond 2014 is an innovation project requiring state, public, legal and financial support, sponsors’ grants, mass media

participation in making people understand the importance of this “soft power” instrument to positively change the shape of the world on the ideals and principles of the UN and UNESCO in the interests of sustainable development without military conflicts, social shake-ups and economic catastrophes. To implement this project, a big concerted work will be required.

Conclusions

Over the 20 years of the UNESCO UNITWIN Programme’s existence – which has enabled the establishment of UNESCO Chairs and Networks worldwide amounting at present to more than 700 in about 130 countries – it has been proved without any doubt that UNESCO has succeeded in inventing a new and effective educational instrument of global application.

It has also proved to be a scheme which contributes a great deal to the establishment of a world knowledge society, and to the promotion of UN and UNESCO ideals all over the world being financed mainly by host organisations in member states and by interested sponsors without pretending to big money from the UNESCO budget.

Global education is increasingly gaining ground as an effective means of forming the mentality and conditions for sustainable development. The understanding of the special role of education is a decisive factor of change and of the unique status of ESD as a civilisational institute.

A road map should be established and followed in order to proceed from education as a necessity of gaining instruction and qualification – sometimes boring and dull – to education as an attractive and desired participation in obtaining knowledge of high quality and value.

The UNESCO Chair can be seen as an instrument of the global educational “soft power” of international organisations under the UN Charter forming the knowledge society in the spirit of educational and scientific principles, moral values and the priorities of UN and UNESCO. It should be attractive, innovative and ahead of its time, offering opportunities for access to international scientific experience and knowledge exchange.

To further develop and expand the UNITWIN scheme, the establishment of networks on the basis of the existing UNESCO Chairs appears to be more effective than the creation of new chairs for similar problems.

The UNESCO Chair at the Faculty of Global Studies of the Lomonosov MSU, being the only UNESCO Chair in the world devoted to global problems and emerging social and ethical challenges for large cities and their populations, represents a unique project joined by other universities and scientific centres in Russia and in the other countries where the network sections of the Chair have been formed. It is open to all those interested in participating.

UNESCO Chairs should be actively involved in the development of ESD beyond 2014. It should be designed as an innovation project requiring state, public, legal and financial support, sponsors’ grants, mass media participation in making people understand the importance of this “soft power” instrument to positively change the perspective of the world on the ideals and principles of UN and UNESCO in the interests of sustainable development without military conflicts, social shake-ups and economic catastrophes. To implement this project, a big concerted work will be required.

Note

1. Joseph Samuel Nye, Jr (born 19 January 1937) - an American political scientist and former Dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, currently holds the position of Professor at Harvard University. He has explored transnational relations and world politics and pioneered the theory of “soft power” in the 1990s of the last century. More recently he introduced the notion of “smart power” as a combination of “soft power” and “hard power”. Co-founder, along with Robert Keohane, of the neoliberalism as the international relations theory. Member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, of the British Academy and of the American Academy of Diplomacy.

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