

Reframing Smart Governance in West Java: Embedding New Public Service Values in Digital Transformation

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi implementasi smart governance berbasis paradigma New Public Service (NPS) dalam konteks transformasi digital di Provinsi Jawa Barat. Berbeda dengan penelitian sebelumnya yang lebih menekankan aspek teknis dan efisiensi, studi ini menawarkan kebaruan dengan membingkai ulang tata kelola cerdas melalui nilai-nilai NPS, yaitu keterlibatan warga negara, ko-kreasi, transparansi, dan akuntabilitas publik. Dengan desain metode campuran konkuren, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif guna memperoleh pemahaman komprehensif mengenai dinamika antara inovasi layanan publik digital dan tata kelola yang berpusat pada warga. Komponen kuantitatif melibatkan 278 responden yang menilai efektivitas, inklusivitas, dan responsivitas layanan publik digital melalui kuesioner terstruktur. Sementara itu, wawasan kualitatif diperoleh dari wawancara mendalam dengan delapan informan kunci, terdiri atas pembuat kebijakan, birokrat, tokoh masyarakat, dan pakar tata kelola digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun inisiatif digital di Jawa Barat telah meningkatkan efisiensi dan akses layanan, masih terdapat kesenjangan dalam partisipasi warga, pemerataan akses data, dan adaptabilitas kelembagaan. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori tata kelola digital dengan mengajukan kerangka smart governance yang terlokalisasi dan berakar pada nilai-nilai demokrasi. Secara praktis, penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan literasi digital, koordinasi kelembagaan, perlindungan data warga, serta mekanisme partisipatif yang lebih inklusif untuk memperkuat tata kelola digital berbasis kepercayaan di Jawa Barat.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of smart governance within the paradigm of the New Public Service (NPS) in the context of digital transformation in West Java Province. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize technical efficiency, this research offers novelty by reframing smart governance through NPS values such as citizen engagement, co-creation, transparency, and public accountability. Employing a concurrent mixed-methods design, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between digital public service innovation and citizen-centered governance. The quantitative component involved 278 respondents who assessed the effectiveness, inclusivity, and responsiveness of digital public services using structured questionnaires, while the qualitative component drew insights from in-depth interviews with eight key informants, including policymakers, bureaucrats, community leaders, and digital governance experts. The findings reveal that although digital initiatives in West Java have significantly improved service efficiency and accessibility, gaps remain in citizen participation, equitable data access, and institutional adaptability. The study contributes to the theoretical discourse on digital governance by proposing a localized framework of smart governance rooted in democratic values and collaborative public service delivery. Practically, it recommends strengthening digital literacy, institutional coordination, data protection policies, and inclusive participatory mechanisms to foster trust-based and citizen-centric digital governance in West Java.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 25 08 2025
Revised: 02 09 2025
Accepted: 08 09 2025
Published: 08 10 2025

KATA KUNCI

Tata Kelola Cerdas; Layanan Publik Baru; Transformasi Digital; Partisipasi Warga; Pemerintah Daerah

KEYWORDS

Smart Governance; New Public Service; Digital Transformation; Citizen Participation; Local Government

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has redefined the landscape of governance in the 21st century. Across the globe, governments are leveraging technology to improve service delivery, enhance transparency, and strengthen citizen engagement. Yet, digital transformation is not merely a technical endeavor; it constitutes a profound institutional and cultural shift that challenges traditional bureaucratic paradigms.

Smart governance, increasingly prominent in public administration discourse, emphasizes the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to facilitate inclusive, efficient, and responsive governance. Moving beyond e-government, it encompasses participatory decisionmaking, data-driven policy, and cross-sector collaboration (Scholl, 2021). In essence, smart governance seeks not only to digitize processes but also to foster accountable and adaptive institutions.

However, the deployment of digital tools requires a normative compass that prioritizes public interest. The New Public Service (NPS) model, introduced (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000), advocates for a shift from market-driven logics of New Public Management (NPM) toward citizen-centric governance that values participation, trust, and collaboration. Within the context of smart governance, NPS provides an ethical and democratic framework to guide digital initiatives toward more inclusive outcomes.

In Indonesia, digital transformation has gained momentum, particularly at the subnational level. West Java Province has emerged as a frontrunner in advancing smart city programs, open data initiatives, and digital citizen engagement platforms. These initiatives illustrate the potential of technology to enhance service delivery while also raising important political and social questions concerning inclusivity, accountability, and trust (Axelsson & Granath, 2018).

Despite these advancements, several challenges persist. Many initiatives prioritize technical efficiency over meaningful democratic engagement, leaving digital platforms perceived as transactional rather than participatory. As (Charalabidis et al., 2022) argue, digital governance requires an interdisciplinary foundation that integrates public administration, information systems, and policy studies. Another pressing concern is digital inequality: disparities in access to devices, connectivity, and digital literacy continue to limit the inclusiveness of digital services, particularly among marginalized groups. Ensuring equity in digital transformation is thus not only a technical issue but also a governance imperative.

Issues of trust and accountability further complicate the digital transition. Public concerns regarding data privacy, surveillance, and algorithmic bias have grown increasingly salient (Gustafsson & Wihlborg, 2013; Khan et al., 2020). Without robust frameworks for citizen oversight and data governance, digital systems risk becoming instruments of control rather than empowerment. Addressing these issues requires shifting from technology-centric reforms to people-centric approaches that emphasize dialogue, participation, and shared responsibility (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

Within this paradigm, citizens are not passive recipients of services but active co-creators of public value. Governments must therefore design digital systems that foster participation, deliberation, and collaborative problem-solving (Revest & Liotard, 2023; Waller, 2017). However, entrenched bureaucratic hierarchies and risk-averse cultures often resist the agility required for digital innovation, underscoring the need for institutional reform and leadership capable of bridging technical expertise with democratic values (Väyrynen et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated digital adoption, compelling governments to digitize services under urgent conditions. In West Java, this experience revealed both the opportunities and vulnerabilities of digital governance: while new services in health, education, and citizen engagement proliferated, structural inequalities and ethical concerns surrounding data use also intensified (Revest & Liotard, 2023).

Against this backdrop, this study argues that embedding NPS principles into smart governance is critical for ensuring that digital transformation in West Java is inclusive, participatory, and trust-based. Unlike previous studies that largely focus on technical or efficiency-driven aspects of digital governance, this research reframes the discourse by integrating NPS values into the analysis of subnational digital initiatives. It seeks to fill a key gap in the literature by examining how West Java's digital transformation reflects—or falls short of—citizen-centric governance, drawing on both citizen perceptions and institutional practices.

Methodologically, the study employs a concurrent mixed-methods design, combining survey data and in-depth interviews to triangulate findings. This approach allows for both quantitative measurement of accessibility, inclusivity, and responsiveness, and qualitative insights into institutional challenges, cultural dynamics, and leadership practices.

The findings aim to contribute to theoretical debates on the intersection of smart governance and NPS in non-Western contexts, while also offering practical insights for policymakers seeking to institutionalize democratic and citizen-centered digital reforms. In doing so, this study challenges the efficiency-driven narrative of digital transformation and repositions smart governance as not only a technical solution but also a democratic project rooted in public trust and collective resilience.

Furthermore, this study situates digital transformation within broader debates on public value and democratic governance. It challenges the dominant efficiency-driven narrative of reform and calls for a recalibration toward value-driven and citizen-centered innovation. In doing so, it echoes (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013) critique of techno-centric governance models and highlights the need for a more democratic orientation in digital reforms.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The literature review synthesizes key theoretical perspectives on smart governance, the New Public Service (NPS), and digital transformation. The methodology outlines the concurrent mixed-methods design, sampling strategies, and analytical techniques. The results and discussion present empirical findings from West Java and interpret them within the theoretical framework, examining both the successes and the persistent challenges of digital initiatives. The conclusion summarizes key insights and offers explicit policy recommendations.

Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of aligning digital innovation with democratic values. It argues that smart governance must be grounded not only in technology but also in trust, inclusivity, and citizen empowerment. For governments navigating the complexities of the digital age, the NPS paradigm offers a guiding framework for more humane, participatory, and accountable governance.

In this process, academia plays a critical role. Scholars must engage in rigorous inquiry, provide evidence-based insights, and collaborate with practitioners to co-create knowledge. Only through such partnerships can digital futures be built that are not only smart but also just. As the digital public sphere continues to expand, governments have a responsibility to ensure that all voices are heard. As (Karatzogianni et al., 2016) remind us, digital technologies can either

strengthen or weaken democracy—the outcome depends on how they are designed and governed.

This study therefore calls for a deliberate and ethical approach to digital transformation—one that situates citizens at the center, values diversity, and fosters collective resilience. It is, above all, a call to reframe smart governance in West Java through the lens of the New Public Service.

Literature Review

The concept of smart governance has emerged as a central theme in contemporary public administration, closely linked to digital transformation, citizen engagement, and the creation of public value. At its core, smart governance refers to the strategic use of digital technologies to enhance the efficiency, responsiveness, and transparency of government functions (Scholl, 2021). Yet, recent scholarship cautions against viewing smart governance as a purely technical or managerial endeavor. Instead, it must be conceptualized as a socio-political process grounded in normative frameworks such as the New Public Service (NPS).

The foundational work of (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000) marked a paradigm shift by rejecting the managerialism of New Public Management (NPM). NPS emphasizes democratic citizenship, community collaboration, and the ethical responsibility of public servants, aligning with the principles of digital democracy in which technology enables dialogue, participation, and co-creation (Edelmann & Virkar, 2023; Waller, 2017). In this regard, NPS offers an ethical compass for reorienting digital initiatives away from efficiency-driven logics toward citizen-centered governance.

Empirical studies highlight both the potential and the limitations of digital platforms. (Adnan et al., 2022), in their review of e-participation, demonstrate that while digital tools improve accessibility, meaningful deliberation often remains absent, pointing to the need for participatory mechanisms that go beyond one-way communication. Similarly, (Axelsson & Granath, 2018) caution against technocratic approaches in smart city projects, calling for more inclusive and horizontal forms of engagement. These insights converge on a research gap: the need to examine how digital initiatives actually embed civic engagement and NPS principles in practice.

The literature also underscores the importance of institutional and ethical dimensions. (Charalabidis et al., 2022) emphasize that digital governance requires robust organizational, sociotechnical, and ethical foundations, while (Edelmann & Virkar, 2023) identify trust, digital inclusion, adaptive regulation, and data ethics as emerging priorities in sustainable governance. Studies on open data and digital co-creation further demonstrate how citizen-generated applications can foster co-production and enhance legitimacy (Waller, 2017). Yet, these innovations depend on governance mechanisms capable of safeguarding privacy and preventing misuse.

The relevance of NPS in digital governance is evident in both global and Indonesian contexts. International research underscores the risks of inequality, surveillance, and weakened accountability in digital transitions (Revest & Liotard, 2023). Meanwhile, Indonesian studies highlight progress as well as persistent divides. (Soselisa & Puturu, 2021) illustrate the application of NPS principles in local digital identity services, while (Ningtyas, 2017; Subekti et al., 2022) note improvements in accessibility but warn of structural inequities that constrain inclusiveness. These works suggest that while NPS

provides a normative framework, its operationalization in practice remains uneven and underexplored.

From a theoretical standpoint, (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013) propose the Digital Era Governance (DEG) model, emphasizing integration and user-centric services. Although DEG shares affinities with NPS, it does not fully capture the participatory and ethical dimensions emphasized in the NPS paradigm. Similarly, the rapid digitization spurred by COVID-19 (MARTA-CHRISTINA et al., 2021) revealed both opportunities and vulnerabilities, reinforcing calls for more resilient, participatory, and ethically grounded governance.

In summary, the literature converges on three key insights: (1) digital transformation in governance must prioritize democratic engagement and public value beyond efficiency; (2) trust, data ethics, and inclusivity are foundational for sustainable digital governance; and (3) participatory mechanisms such as co-creation, open data, and crowdsourced policymaking are essential to operationalize NPS values in practice.

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain. Much of the existing research is conceptual or focused on macro-level trends in developed contexts. There is limited empirical evidence on how NPS principles are implemented in subnational digital initiatives in the Global South, and little is known about the lived experiences of citizens and frontline officials in navigating these transitions. This gap is particularly salient in Indonesia, where provinces such as West Java are recognized as pioneers of digital innovation but remain underexamined in the academic literature.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing how digital transformation in West Java reflects the principles of smart governance and the NPS paradigm. By integrating citizen perceptions with institutional practices, it provides both theoretical contributions to the discourse on digital governance and practical insights for policymakers seeking to design inclusive and trust-based digital reforms.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a concurrent mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive analysis of smart governance initiatives in West Java within the framework of the New Public Service (NPS). The mixed-methods approach integrates quantitative and qualitative data collected simultaneously, enabling triangulation of findings and a deeper contextual understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The concurrent triangulation design allows quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered in parallel, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation. This design was selected to capture both measurable indicators of digital service performance and the nuanced experiences of stakeholders engaged in governance (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2015).

A structured survey was administered to 278 respondents residing in urban and semi-urban areas of West Java. Proportionate stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation across age, gender, education, and frequency of digital service use (Neuman, 2011). The questionnaire, adapted from validated instruments, measured: (1) accessibility of digital public services, (2) citizen satisfaction, (3) perceived transparency and accountability, and (4) opportunities for participation and feedback. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, and a pilot test confirmed reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$) (Hair et al., 2021). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and inferential techniques including Pearson correlation and multiple regression (Field, 2013).

The qualitative component consisted of in-depth interviews with eight purposively selected informants, representing diverse perspectives: two provincial government officials, two public service managers, two civic tech experts, and two community leaders. A semi-structured interview guide explored institutional goals, organizational culture and leadership, citizen involvement in digital policymaking, and perceptions of inclusivity, equity, and public value. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes, were recorded and transcribed, and analyzed thematically (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) following (Braun & Clarke, 2006) six-phase framework. NVivo software was used to ensure consistency in coding and analysis.

Integration occurred during interpretation, where survey data and qualitative narratives were compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence. This triangulation enhanced the validity of findings by linking citizen perspectives with institutional practices.

The study adhered to ethical standards: informed consent was obtained, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and approval was secured from the university's institutional review board.

While the concurrent design strengthens validity, limitations include potential response bias in self-reported data, limited generalizability beyond West Java, and the evolving nature of digital governance, which may affect findings over time. Despite these constraints, the mixed-methods approach enabled a holistic exploration of the interplay between digital systems, citizen experience, and public value, making this study a significant contribution to the literature on smart governance and NPS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents and analyzes the results of the study, organized into three thematic subsections: (1) Inclusivity and Accessibility of Digital Public Services; (2) Citizen Engagement and Participatory Governance; and (3) Institutional Readiness and Trust in Digital Governance. Each theme integrates findings from both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews and is interpreted in light of the theoretical framework of Smart Governance and New Public Service (NPS).

Inclusivity and Accessibility of Digital Public Services

The survey results show that 78% of respondents rated digital services in West Java as “accessible” or “very accessible,” with an average score of 3.94 (SD = 0.62). Respondents highlighted ease of access to services such as identity documentation, public complaint systems, and health registration platforms. Yet, disparities emerged: peri-urban respondents reported greater difficulties with internet speed, application usability, and device availability.

Qualitative interviews reinforced these findings. A community leader from a suburban district remarked: *“Kami punya aplikasi, tapi sinyal lemah dan warga masih bingung cara pakainya.”* Civic tech experts noted that while the number of applications has increased, most lack usercentered design, particularly for populations with limited digital literacy or linguistic diversity.

Vulnerable groups—older adults, persons with disabilities, and low-income citizens—reported lower levels of digital service usage. One NGO informant emphasized the absence of inclusive features such as screen readers or simplified interfaces. This gap between technological provision and user empowerment reflects concerns in (Charalabidis et al., 2022; Malhotra et al., 2020) regarding sustainable digital inclusion.

Notably, only 41% of respondents believed digital services were “fairly distributed,” suggesting that digital access is still mediated by socio-economic status. This finding resonates with (Revest & Liotard, 2023) argument that equity must be embedded in digital policy design.

These findings extend Smart Governance theory by demonstrating that digital service efficiency does not automatically lead to inclusivity—validating NPS’s emphasis on equity and citizen-centered design.

To bridge digital divides, West Java needs to adopt universal design principles, expand digital literacy programs, and provide multiservice access through hybrid channels (online, offline, and assisted). These measures are critical for ensuring no citizen is left behind in the province’s digital transformation.

Citizen Engagement and Participatory Governance

Survey data indicate moderate levels of engagement: 52% of respondents reported having used online feedback mechanisms, but only 23% felt their input influenced policy decisions. This suggests a gap between participatory rhetoric and actual governance outcomes.

Interviews revealed that digital platforms often function as one-way channels. A policymaker admitted: *“Kami menerima banyak masukan lewat LAPOR, tapi tidak semua bisa ditindaklanjuti karena keterbatasan SDM dan SOP.”* Such practices undermine the NPS principle of dialogue and co-production (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

Community engagement initiatives were frequently described as symbolic. Online consultations rarely provided feedback loops or public summaries, eroding citizen trust and reinforcing (Karatzogianni et al., 2016) warning that digital platforms can replicate hierarchical dynamics if not managed inclusively.

An exception was noted in Bandung’s participatory budgeting platform, which allowed residents to propose and vote on projects. However, this mechanism had limited visibility—only 12% of respondents reported participating in it. Engagement disparities were also evident: youth and urban residents were more active, while rural residents and older adults were less involved.

These findings highlight the tension between Smart Governance ideals and bureaucratic inertia. They affirm NPS’s proposition that citizens should be treated as active co-creators of public value rather than passive recipients.

To operationalize participatory governance, West Java should institutionalize civic panels, integrate deliberative design workshops, and embed feedback loops into mainstream digital platforms. These mechanisms can transform passive digital users into active civic partners and restore citizen trust in government responsiveness.

Institutional Readiness and Trust in Digital Governance

The third theme examines the organizational and cultural dimensions of digital transformation in West Java. Survey results revealed that only 36% of respondents “strongly trust” local government institutions managing digital services, while 44% expressed concerns regarding data security and potential misuse.

These concerns were confirmed in interviews. A senior digital manager admitted: *“Kami belum punya kebijakan perlindungan data yang memadai. Ini memang tantangan serius.”* Informants also noted the absence of dedicated digital governance units and the reliance on outsourcing for platform development, often without parallel investments in internal capacity-building.

A culture of risk aversion within the bureaucracy further constrains innovation. One civil servant remarked: *“Kita masih takut salah. Kalau eksperimen gagal, bisa dimarahi atasan.”* This mindset discourages experimentation and contradicts the adaptive, agile orientation required for digital reform (Alvarenga et al., 2020; Karatzogianni et al., 2016; Revest & Liotard, 2023).

On a more positive note, training programs for civil servants in digital skills have begun to emerge in West Java. Yet these initiatives remain fragmented and are rarely tied to performance indicators or career advancement, limiting their institutional impact. Leadership has proven pivotal: respondents praised leaders who championed open government and digital inclusion, citing initiatives such as *Sapawarga* as examples of strong political will and cross-agency collaboration.

However, policy continuity remains fragile. Changes in leadership frequently lead to shifting priorities and discontinued programs, underlining the importance of institutional frameworks that transcend individual administrations. Citizen trust is further undermined by opaque procurement processes and limited communication about data usage. Transparency dashboards exist but remain underutilized, and public awareness of data protection policies is low. These gaps highlight the urgency of codifying governance frameworks grounded in accountability, ethics, and public trust (Gustafsson & Wihlborg, 2013).

These findings reinforce NPS’s emphasis on trust and accountability as preconditions for democratic governance. They also suggest that Smart Governance frameworks must be adapted to include not only technological capacity but also cultural readiness, ethical safeguards, and institutional resilience.

To enhance institutional readiness and rebuild trust, this study recommends:

1. Establishing permanent digital governance units within regional government structures;
2. Codifying citizen data protection protocols aligned with global standards;
3. Incentivizing cross-sectoral and inter-agency collaboration; and
4. Embedding public value and inclusivity metrics into civil service performance evaluations.

By adopting these measures, West Java can transition from fragmented digital reforms toward a sustainable, citizen-centered governance model that reflects the normative aspirations of the New Public Service paradigm.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the implementation of smart governance in West Java through the normative lens of the New Public Service (NPS) paradigm. Employing a concurrent mixed methods design, it captured both citizens’ quantitative assessments and the qualitative perspectives of key institutional stakeholders. The findings contribute to the scholarly discourse by reframing digital transformation within a democratic and value-driven framework, moving beyond the technocratic and efficiency-centric approaches that often dominate digital governance.

The results demonstrate that while digital public services in West Java have improved accessibility and administrative efficiency, significant challenges persist in ensuring inclusivity and equity. Digital divides continue to hinder access for marginalized groups, underscoring the

importance of universal design, digital literacy, and multimodal service delivery. Platforms must not only function but also empower.

Citizen engagement remains limited. Although digital platforms have opened new avenues for feedback, these mechanisms are often underutilized or symbolic. The absence of feedback loops and transparency undermines legitimacy, weakening participatory governance. As emphasized in the NPS paradigm, authentic engagement requires deliberation, co-production, and mutual trust.

Institutionally, digital governance in West Java remains fragmented. Many agencies lack dedicated resources, standard operating procedures, and robust data governance frameworks. Bureaucratic culture remains hierarchical and risk-averse, constraining innovation and agility. These organizational limitations erode citizen trust and reduce the effectiveness of digital reforms.

Nonetheless, promising initiatives—such as participatory budgeting, civil servant training, and open government platforms—illustrate the potential for citizen-centered governance. Strong political leadership and cross-sectoral collaboration emerge as critical enablers of success.

Drawing from these insights, the study makes the following recommendations:

Institutionalize Inclusive Design – Apply universal design principles in all digital services, ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities, older adults, and low-income groups.

Strengthen Digital Literacy and Outreach – Deliver localized digital education programs and expand outreach to underrepresented populations.

Enhance Participatory Mechanisms – Establish civic panels, adopt participatory design methods, and integrate feedback loops to ensure citizen input informs decision-making.

Develop Ethical Data Governance – Implement robust data protection policies, transparency dashboards, and citizen oversight mechanisms.

Build Institutional Capacity – Establish permanent digital governance units, align incentives with digital performance, and foster inter-agency collaboration.

Ensure Policy Continuity – Develop long-term digital strategies supported by legislation and institutional frameworks to safeguard reforms across political cycles.

This study reinforces the relevance of the NPS paradigm in the digital era, demonstrating that effective smart governance must be grounded not only in technology but also in values of responsiveness, transparency, accountability, and trust. By embedding NPS principles into digital systems, governments can transform digital innovation into democratic and sustainable governance.

Further research should explore comparative subnational cases across Indonesia and other Global South contexts to identify context-specific enablers and constraints. Longitudinal studies are also needed to evaluate the sustainability of digital reforms over time, particularly in terms of institutionalization and citizen outcomes.

In conclusion, smart governance in West Java stands at a critical juncture. The technical infrastructure exists, but normative, participatory, and institutional dimensions require deliberate reinforcement. By reframing smart governance through the values of the New Public Service, policymakers and practitioners can advance a more equitable, inclusive, and democratic digital future—one that is not only smart, but wise.

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