

**THE EXPLOITATION OF MOUNTAIN SPACE
THROUGH SPORT AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES.
CASE STUDIES: THE VIA MARIA THERESIA MARATHON
FROM THE CĂLIMANI MOUNTAINS AND THE COLIBIȚA
BIKE FEST FROM THE BISTRIȚA ARDELEANĂ GORGE
AND THE COLIBIȚA DEPRESSION**

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ABSTRACT. The mountain area, through its geographical characteristics, has numerous resources that can be utilized through leisure activities which contribute to the improvement of health and physical condition. Among these activities there are the mountain marathons organized in recent years in numerous locations in the Romanian Carpathians. Such a marathon is the Via Maria Theresia Marathon from the Călimani Mountains organized on a route with historical connotation set in the 18th century under the reign of Empress Maria Theresia and her son, Emperor Josef II. Likewise, there is a mountain bike competition in the Bistrița Ardeleană Gorges which brings together many bikers from all over the country. The present study analyses the geographical conditions which contribute to the organization of these events and their impact on the human body.

Key words: *Călimani Mountains, Bistrița Ardeleană Gorge, Colibița, Via Maria Theresia, mountain space, mountain marathon, mountain biking, active leisure*

REZUMAT. *Valorificarea spațiului montan prin activități sportive și agrementale. Studii de caz: Maratonul Via Maria Theresia din Munții Călimani și Colibița Bike Fest.* Spațiul montan, prin caracteristicile sale geografice, deține numeroase resurse care pot fi valorificate prin activități agrementale active care contribuie la menținerea sănătății și la îmbunătățirea condiției fizice. Dintre aceste activități, se remarcă în ultimii ani maratoanele montane, organizate în numeroase locații

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din Carpații Românești. Un asemenea maraton este și Maratonul Via Maria Theresia care se desfășoară în Munții Călimani pe un traseu cu încărcătură istorică amenajat în secolul XVIII sub domnia împărătesei Maria Theresia și a fiului său, împăratul Ioasif al II-lea. De asemenea, în Cheile Bistriței Ardelene se desfășoară o competiție de mountain bike care reunește mulți bikeri din toată țara. Studiul de față analizează condițiile geografice care contribuie la organizarea acestor evenimente și impactul asupra organismului uman.

***Cuvinte cheie:** Munții Călimani, Cheile Bistriței Ardelene, Colibița, Drumul Mariei Terezia, spațiu montan, maraton montan, mountain biking, agrement activ*

Introduction

The mountain area, through its geographical characteristics (landforms, climate, air and water quality, vegetation, landscape) is capable of supporting various sports and leisure activities (hiking, climbing, biking, horseback riding, canyoning, kayaking, canoeing, ski touring, alpine skiing, snowboarding, etc.) which can be relaxing, beneficial to the health, and help improve physical condition. Besides leisure activities, sport competitions such as mountain marathons and mountain biking competitions are taking place. Thus, to show the positive impact that such activities can have, the present paper had taken in two events carried out in the studied area of the Călimani Mountains in 2014: the Via Maria Theresia Marathon and the Colibița Bike Fest.

The Mountain Marathon is a sport activity that involves long-distance running in mountainous terrain, over a period of hours or days. Participants are grouped in teams of two or more persons, but there are situations where they run solo, as is the case of the class elite or experienced runners. The participants to the mountain marathons come from various social fields (pupils, students, athletes, intellectuals, workers, etc.), but all have in common a love for outdoors activities and nature. The profile of mountain runners can be sketched as follows: various occupations, strong character, determination, courage, desire and knowledge of their own limits, love for nature, fellowship, field orienteering abilities, physical condition.

The factors that govern the conduct of mountain marathons are: geomorphometric features of the land (energy, slope, orientation, and fragmentation), weather (temperature, precipitation, and wind), the characteristics of vegetation (forest, pasture), the degree of humanization of the land (forest roads, tourist and shepherd footpaths), the profile of participants (age, health status, physical condition).

Among the marathons in Romania we can list the following: Eco Marathon Moeciu, Hercules Marathon, Făget Winter Race, Brașov Half-Marathon, Brașov

Marathon, Apuseni Mountain Marathon, Retezat Trail Race, Cozia Mountain Run, Bucegi Mountain Marathon, Retezat Marathon, Ciucas Mountains Trail Running, Piatra Craiului Marathon, Voineasa Mountain Run, etc.

Organizers of such events are the clubs and tourist associations, clubs and sports associations, county and local authorities, along with numerous sponsors interested in the promotion of mountain leisure.

Methodology

For the present study, there have been completed following steps:

- Consulting the specialized bibliography concerning the areas of the Călimani Mountains (Naum, Butnaru, 1989; Bâca, Șteff, Bude, 2015), the Colibița Depression (Bâca, Șteff, 2010, 2014) and the Bârgău Mountains-Piatra Fântânele sector (Bâca, 2012);

- Completion of specialized works relating to leisure outdoor activities, and in particular the mountain marathons (Epuran, Marolicaru, 2000; Epuran, Holdevici, Tonița, 2001; Epuran, 2005; Ganea, 2006; Hoffman, 2008; Abshire, Metzler, 2010; Ferguson, Shevels, 2011; Allen, Yasso, Burfoot 2012);

- Collecting biogeographical and geomorphological data relevant to sporting and leisure aspects along the route of the Via Maria Theresia Marathon and the Colibița Bike Fest;

- Processing statistical data related to the number, type and origin of participants at the events, as well as the section for which they have opted (marathon, semimarathon, XC marathon, hiking)

(<https://www.facebook.com/colibitabikefest>, <http://via-maria-theresia.ro/>).

Results and discussions

Case study 1: The Via Maria Theresia Marathon from the Călimani Mountains

The Via Maria Theresia Marathon (fig. 1) takes place in the Calimani Mountains (with 80% of its route within the Călimani Mts. National Park) and the Bârgău Mountains, areas which, through their geographical features, can support such a sporting events (fig. 2).

The name of the marathon comes from the border road build in the time of Empress Maria Theresa (1740-1780) and Emperor Joseph II (1741-1790) along the Călimani Mts. peaks. This road started from the valleys of the Șieu and Budac

rivers along the alignment Dealul Negru - Bistricior Massif towards the border area between Transylvania and Bukovina, followed the ridge Strunior – Ciunget – Rusca – Pietrosul - Negoiu Unguresc – Pietricelul – Rețițiș - Bradu Ciont - Iezerul Călimani, from where it descend to the Drăgoiasa Valley, within the Bistrița Aurie catchment area. Part of this road coincides with the route of the marathon, in the Negoiu Unguresc - Bistricior Massif sector.



Fig. 1. The Logo of Via Theresia Mountain Marathon
(source: <http://via-maria-theresia.ro/>)

Technical features of this marathon are the following:

- Sections: marathon, semi-marathon, XC Maraton and hiking;
- Length: 42,195 km (marathon and XC Maraton), 21, 097 km (semi-maraton, hiking);
- Level difference: 1000 m;
- Degree of difficulty: medium;
- Type of route: linear with control points in the order.

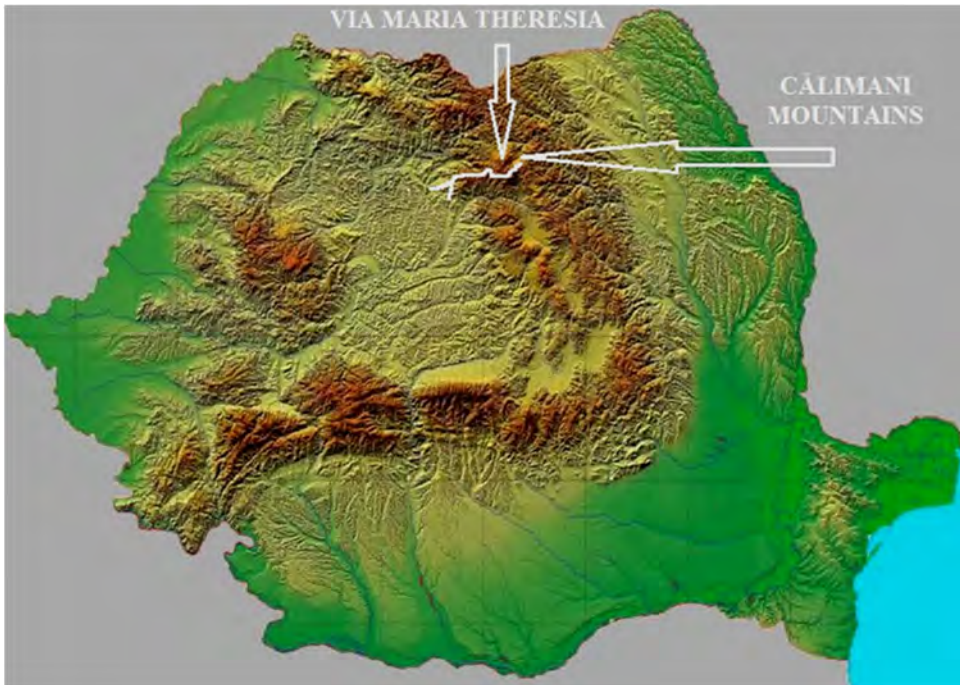


Fig. 2. Geographic localization of the Via Maria Theresia Marathon route in the Călimani Mountains

The route of the Via Maria Theresia Marathon is the following:

Start at the former Sulphur mining Negoiu Românesc (1550 m) - Nicovala Saddle (1934 m) - southern slope of Pietricelul Peak (1993 m) - Negoiu Saddle (1075 m) - Negoii Unguresc (2081 m) - Pietrosul Peak (2100 m) - Poiana Monor - Piciorul Monor - Poiana Izvoare (1723 m) - Grui Monument of the Heroes (1800 m) - Rusca Peak (1913 m) - Ciunget Peak (1923 m) - Poiana Arsuri (1673 m) - Poiana Piciorul Ilei - Străcior Peak (1963 m) - Vișoara Peak (1810 m) - Poiana Dălbidan - Terha River springs - Poiana Terha - Terha - Buba Ridge (1670 m) - Poiana Priporul Roșu - Cornu Peak (1502) - Poiana Vinului - Șendroaia Ridge - Forest Office (1100 m-finish) (fig. 3).

The Semi-Marathon took place on the route:

Start at the former Sulphur mining Negoiu Românesc (1550 m) - Nicovala Saddle (1934 m) - southern slope of Pietricelul Peak (1993 m) - Negoiu Saddle (1075 m) - Negoii Unguresc (2081 m) - Pietrosul Peak (2100 m) - Poiana Monor - Piciorul Monor - Poiana Izvoare (1723 m) - Grui Monument of the Heroes (1800 m) - Ruștii Peak (1913 m) - Ciunget Peak (1923 m) - Poiana Arsuri (1673 m) - Tihu Valley (finish);

The hiking took place on four options, as follows:

- 1) Dornișoara (1050 m) - Grui Monument (1800 m) - Dornișoara (5 km);
- 2) Dornișoara - Grui Monument of the Heroes - Ciunget Peak - Poiana Arsuri - Tihu Creek - Dornișoara (7 km);
- 3) Dornișoara - Tihu Creek - Poiana Arsuri - Poiana Piciorul Ilei - former Strunior Mine - Dornișoara (6 km);
- 4) Dornișoara - former Strunior Mine - Poiana Străcior - Poiana Dălbidan - Poiana Terha - Zâgrciu Creek - Dornișoara (9 km).

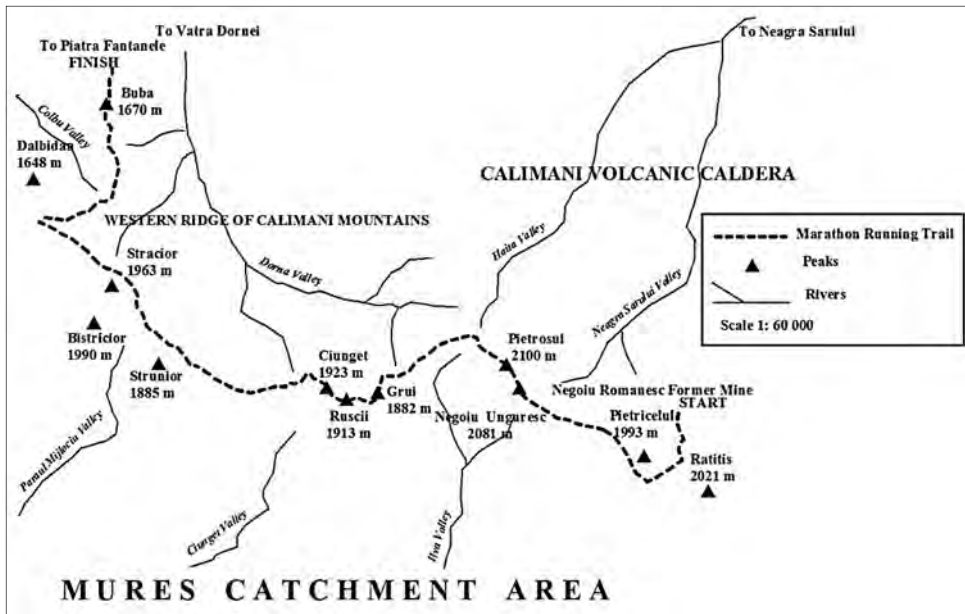


Fig. 3. The route of Via Maria Theresia Marathon

Via Maria Theresia Marathon is a marathon along a mountain ridge, its geographical features being shaped by several factors, such as: hardness of igneous rocks, landforms marked by peaks, saddles, slope or flat segments, residual slopes, boulder fields, forest vegetation (*Picea abies*, *Abies alba*, *Fagus sylvatica*), and alpine vegetation (*Pinus mugo*, *Juniperus communis*, *Vaccinium myrtillus*, *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*), the presence of sheep farms and sheep herds and characteristic high mountain weather phenomena (low temperatures, rain, fog, wind) (fig. 4).

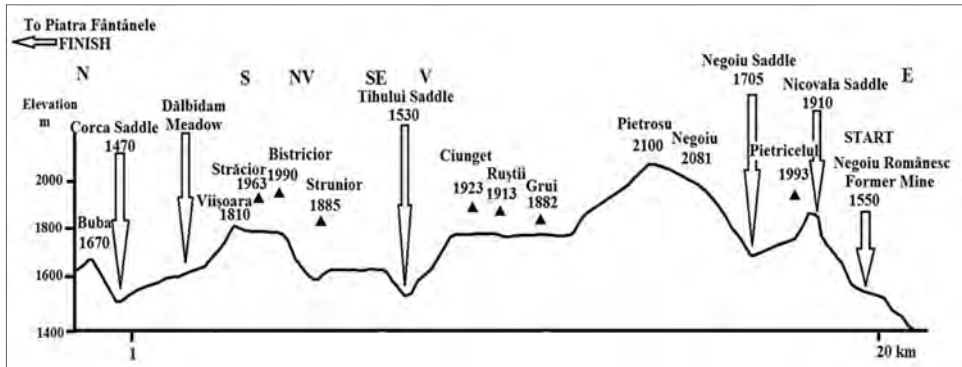


Fig. 4. Geomorphometric profile of the Via Maria Theresa Marathon (sequence)

The marathon Via Maria Theresa gathered 300 people (fig. 5), from 23 counties (fig. 6), which have opted for one of the disciplines listed above (fig. 7), which show the public's interest for such activities, but also the historical resonance of the route.

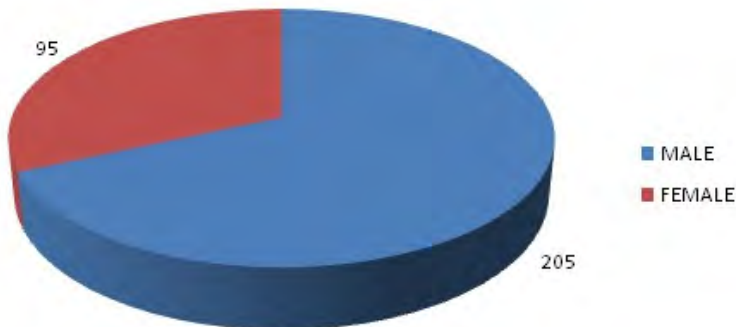


Fig. 5. The genre of participants to the Via Maria Theresa Marathon 2014 edition (source: <http://via-maria-theresia.ro/>)

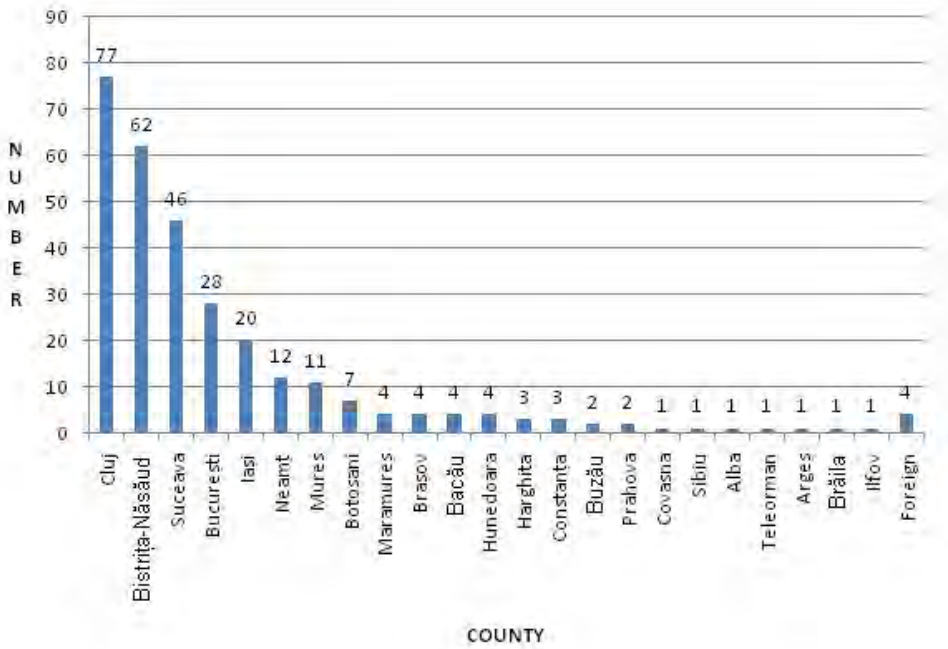


Fig. 6. The origin of participants to the Via Maria Theresia Marathon 2014 edition
(source: <http://via-maria-theresia.ro/>)



Fig. 7. The number of participants to the Via Maria Theresia Marathon 2014 edition
by disciplines
(source: <http://via-maria-theresia.ro/>)

Case study 2: Colibița Bike Fest

Colibița Bike Fest is a sporting and leisure event which takes place in Poiana Stegea in the Bistrița Ardeleană Gorges (fig. 8). Each year, bikers from several counties of the country meet here (fig. 9, 10), competing in the following categories: BMX Dirt, Dirt MTB, Dual, Marathon Running, Trial, Trial Elite Masters, XC Amateurs, XC Pro (fig. 11).



Fig. 8. The geographic location of the Bistrița Ardeleană Gorge in Bistrița-Năsăud County

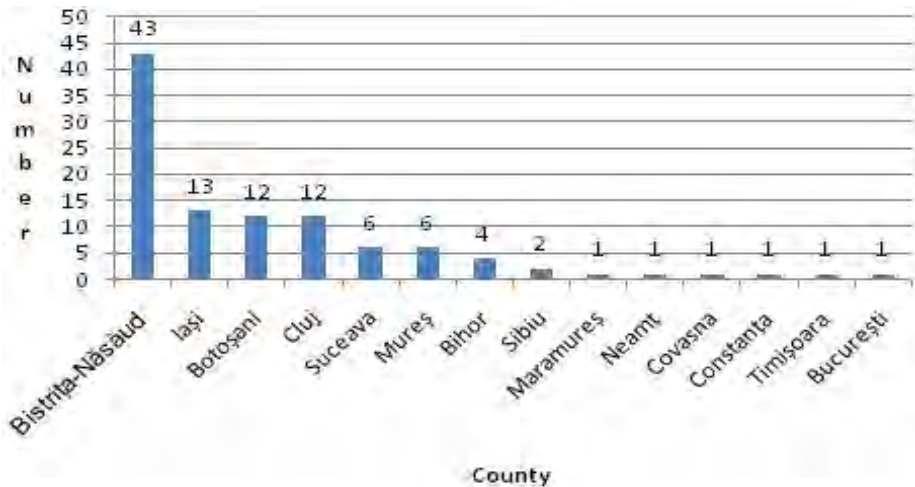


Fig. 9. The provenience of participants to the Colibița Bike Fest 2014 edition (source: <https://www.facebook.com/colibitabikefest>)

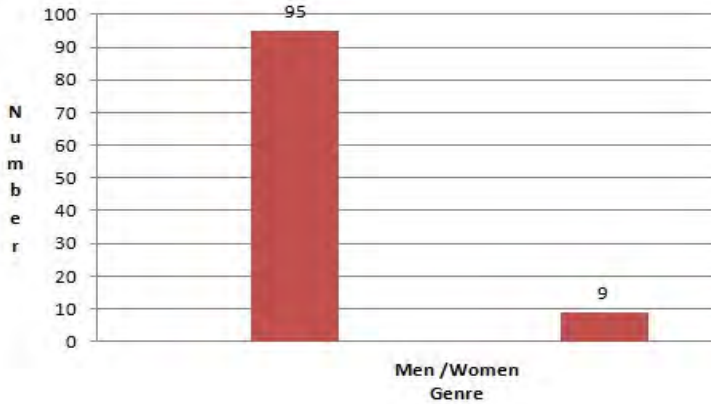


Fig. 10. The Genre of participants to the Colibița Bike Fest 2014 edition
(source: <https://www.facebook.com/colibitabikefest>)

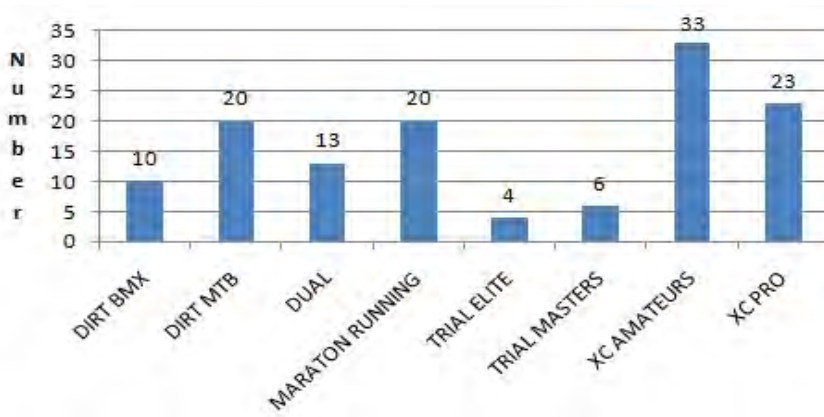


Fig. 11. The disciplines of the Colibița Bike Fest 2014 edition
and the number of participants
(source: <https://www.facebook.com/colibitabikefest>)

The competitions of Dirt BMX, Dirt MTB Elite, Trial, Trial and Dual Masters are held in Poiana Stegea, where there exists a proper equipment (fig. 12), while the competitions of Marathon Running, XC Amateurs and XC Pro are carried out in the Colibița Depression and the Călimani Mountains Plateau (Dealul Negru Ridge). The XC Marathon was 50 km long, with a 890 meters level difference and took place on the route Poiana Stegea - Stegea Valley - Dealul Negru ("At The Cross") -

Poiana Cofii - Pănuleț Valley - Tirimii Valley – Țiganca - Colbu Valley - Pănuleț Valley - Poiana Slatinii - Sub Dealuri - Colibița Dam - Poiana Stegea, including areas with a variety of geomorphological parameters (forest road, shepherd routes, slopes, rocky ground terrain, valley sectors, ridge sectors, downhill sections, wooded areas) (fig. 13).



Fig. 12. Trial contest at the Colibița Bike Fest 2014 in Poiana Stegea



Fig. 13. The route of XC Marathon (Colibița Bike Fest 2014)

Conclusions

Via Maria Theresia Marathon and Colibița Bike Fest are two major sporting events held in the contact area between the Bârgău and Călimani mountains, because the natural environment of this area is favorable for active recreational activities. The sections of the competitions are diverse, and the number of participants is relatively high, which proves the public's interest in such events.

The impact of these two events is confirmed by the following:

- The growing number of bikers who are preparing for future mountain biking competitions;
- The growing number of hikers undergoing the route of the Via Maria Theresia Marathon for recreation;
- The concern of local authorities for planning of tourism locations where the two competitions are taking place;
- Increasing interest in the protection and preservation of the mountain environment in general, and in the two areas hosting the two events in particular.

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