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Genius Loci as a "Nameless Value" of Natural and Built Heritage

Introduction and aim

At first sight *genius loci* seems to be a sense that *just overwhelms* you. We fall in love with a city we are visiting for the first time, bustle of its streets, and sound of its cobblestone roads. One does not need to hold a diploma in art criticism, or be an expert of Gothic or classicism... It is a first-hand feeling which we cannot even accurately name or explain. You can only utter – *it is good, cosy and pleasant here,* or– *it is a weird and unpleasant place, I would not want to come back here...* (The spirit of time or *genius temporis*, on the contrary, is not contented with the first impression and demands knowledge or at least a desire to understand the origin of those signs from apparently another time – this hardly definable *once (upon a time)* – in the visible environment as if footprints of the past in the modern landscape). The *spirit of place* is indeed a nearly metaphysical, almost intangible and metaphorical term. Is it in fact possible to touch this so volatile and ephemeral concept without becoming overly lyrical or even mystical about it, without sharing one's personal experiences and feelings? Could it be that the spirit of place and personal experience are really inseparable and as such cannot be conveyed objectively?

Despite a (seeming) ephemeral character of *genius loci*, the duration of its shaping is often counted by hundreds or even thousands of years, and sometimes remains stable and resilient to changes. Definitions of *genius loci* in Wikipedia and similar online sources distinguish two meanings, i.e. secular and sacral. It is a *distinctive atmosphere* or a *guardian spirit* of a certain place. The second anthropomorphised image inevitably takes us back to the archaic times of cult and ritual, a sphere of myth and sacredness. Should we then engage theology and mythology, folkloristics or religious studies as being best acquainted with the world of invisible spirits? On the other hand, nowadays it would be complicated to determine the number of academic disciplines directly or indirectly analysing the natural or inhabited (living) environment as well as the people's relation to the place. Recently, social sciences and humanities began even discussing the *spatial turn* which followed the *quantitative turn* in the history science in the 1960s, and the *linguistic turn* as well as *cultural turn,* familiar to researchers of postmodernism since the 1970s.

Both connotations of the spirit of place are taken into consideration in this essay. Going deep into this phenomenon will require reconstructing both the genesis of the concept, and its field of meanings in different historical-geographical contexts, especially in order to understand the causes for its recurring relevance in certain periods. The enigmatic *genius loci* has been luring believers and poets, romantics and tourists since the Antiquity. Like a *hierophany* – a place characterised by revelations of deities or visited by spirits, or like a creation of a man of genius in architecture, design, art of parks and gardens, the spirit of place has time and again inspired gifted writers or painters to attempt grasping its mysterious aura. The poetic-romantic, even nostalgic sense of the place would become particularly sharp at the times of social reforms and stirrings, especially in the face of radical changes in the visible environment, which already at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries prompted a physical and imaginative escapism of European artists and intellectuals to exotic lands, pastoral idyll of villages, or glorious past of the nation.

The most violent blow to sensing and preservation of the special atmosphere of locations will probably be delivered by the pragmatic and utilitarian process of their remaking and unification (inspired by modernisation and technical progress), which in the countries ruled by the Soviet regime was displayed with an exceptional brutality and even with an open hatred to the spirit of place, e.g., destruction of the old cemeteries practiced in the Soviet Union cannot be explained by any logic or utilitarian calculations. The roots of such hatred could have lain at the core of the Soviet ideology expressed in the line of "*The Internationale*", the former anthem of post-revolutionary Russia and later of the USSR, declaring that "we will destroy the old world".

At present, with a social mobility on the rise (migration, business and consumption trips, mass tourism...), people identify themselves with a specific location less and less, and the pull of home is weakening, which results in a phenomenon of *placelessness* or displacement first discussed probably by geographer Edward Relph. Yet this pessimistic view can be challenged: although due to unification of places (standard new architecture and infrastructure, chains of the same shopping centres and amusement parks...) their certain meanings can be lost, but it may help new meanings to emerge, e.g., identification of Manchester with a certain music style and club culture is a relatively new phenomenon.

Locations with a special aura have always attracted artists, worshipers and tourists (very diverse yet paradoxically similar groups of visitors and contemplators of the local beauty) sensitive to the magic of such places. Still the exceptional effect of appeal of certain places

cannot be explained merely by their aesthetic or other characteristics such as being unusual, rare, exclusive, which could be typical of numerous other (less visited) places. Let us recall the Leaning Tower of Pisa, one of the icons of global tourism, though many parts of the world[1], including Italy itself, have other leaning buildings. However, the famous belfry is just a part of the stunning architectural ensemble, and this part (in tourist consumption) upstages such other equally valuable – in terms of art and history – elements of *Piazza dei Miracoli* as St. Mary's Cathedral, the baptistery and *Campo Santo* now turned into a museum of antique gravestones and sarcophagi and other edifices.

To cross the boundaries of the two major traditions in usage of the modern term *genius loci* – the romantic tradition and the utilitarian one – the present paper will further give a strong focus on the attempt to revive the initial meaning born from the antique culture and worldview. Such meaning may become productive, and can be used in a new and constructive way in various present-day social contexts based on an *interactive relation* to the environment where one lives. At the same time it is clearly understood that the aims to synthesise the cultural insights scattered in fragments along with the suggestions of returning to the sacral origins of the term and phenomenon in the current secularised world are senseless, since the places of hierophany and pilgrimage are increasingly being replaced or substituted by *lieu de mémoire* ("realms of memory" in the sense introduced by Pierre Nora) and consumer-oriented replication of *images* – simulacra of exceptional places.

Genuinely antique meanings

A strong sense of spirituality of certain locations is characteristic to paganism and totem cultures, all three Abrahamic religions, and particularly to the Eastern beliefs and worldview systems (Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Confucianism, and especially Shinto). The locations where deities or spirits manifested themselves, as well as the places or things related to graves or relic of spiritual guardians, saints and religious gurus serving for and acting as intermediaries in the dialogue between the people and spiritual powers – hierophanies – have been treated with a special attention and reverence in all cultures. Such location would often be surrounded by legends and stories explaining its magical or exceptional origin, e.g., the legend of the founding of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, the four local spirits or land wights *landvættir* – the eagle or griffin, the dragon, the bull, and the rock-giant – guarding the isle of

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[1] For example, a residential building in the Town Hall Square of Tartu (Estonia).

Iceland from all four sides and depicted both in the national coat of arms and the obverse of coins, etc. The spirit or guardian of place is often implied in the toponym itself, and the examples may include totemic place names (Berlin – *ber* – a bear which is a tabooed totemic name and for instance in the Slav culture replaced by a name of the "honey expert" (*medved*)), sacred names (Athens, numerous cities dedicated to Catholic saints – from San Francisco to Santa Monica...), mythological names (Rome, Paris), and finally historical names (Alexandria, Ekaterinburg, Karlstad). Let us recall the myths about Moscow as the "Third Rome" or Vilnius as the "Northern Jerusalem", and Bucharest often named as the "southern Paris" with its eastern counterparty Baku, etc.

Plato identified the origin of genius with conscience as a communication channel between the universal Spirit and human soul (*psyche*). It is interesting to note that the Lithuanian word *są-žinė*, German *ge-wissen*, Slavic *so-vest,* and Latin *con-science* (later inherited by the Romanic and English languages) refer specifically to internal awareness. Conscience seems to be above the individual or social ethics as a set of moral principles implanted on a genetic level (according to the European philosophy), or as an internal memory of former incarnations (according to the Eastern religions). On the other hand, the *genius* is also an ability which responds to this internal calling to discover and fulfil one's vocation by pushing near the limits of cognition allowed to a human being and already bordering insanity.

Although each ancient culture had a sense of sacredness with respect to the world inhabited by people, or some places filled with gods and other invisible spirits, this relation with specific places remained enigmatic and not instantly obvious in the Antiquity. However, it was believed that the presence of those spirits in a specific location transcended its existence enabling an observer to penetrate its visible surface. Thus, already in those times the existence of location was sensed and defined by its quality and content (rather than by topographic limits and characteristics) as a symbolic local reality of sorts, marked by a special aura and spirituality, visibly embodied through traces of human thoughts and activities in the history. Accordingly, the spirit of place is also the *local conscience* admonishing to refrain from ethically impermissible actions rather than referring to what can be done there. Certain locations could also be called "places of conscience", because people would travel there to perform penance (*metanoia)* or with a hope of Divine grace. Thus, they are the places where one could experience *catharsis*, a spiritual and physical cleansing and recovery (that is why they are often near springs considered to be miraculous and healing).

The opposite of places patronised by gods and well-wishing spirits would be daunting, cursed places where any human activity or even visiting is often prohibited by the tradition or unacceptable due to a lethal danger to the body and especially to the soul. They are frequently places of disasters, accidents, or fall and sins in general, as well as deserted towns and buildings which are haunted. Some of the most famous are biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, situated on the southern shores of the Dead Sea, reeking of sulphur and poisonous gases, which in many languages and cultures became a symbol of the moral degeneracy associated with homosexuality. Here we can also mention Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and its neighbouring and abandoned after the catastrophe town of Pripyat where quite a few horror films have been shot by Hollywood industry. Interestingly, such frightening and ominous places as geopathological zones, crossroads, mythical evil-boding stones or marshes, derelict territories or wastelands, haunted houses, etc. are recognisable from their names: the Hanged Men Cemetery, the Devil's Stone, the Witch's Swamp, the Death Valley, Dead Lake, etc. In fact, some of those tabooed places can be situated near holy locations as if their (lesser) antipodes.

Despite the universal nature of this phenomenon, one should keep in mind that in Greek and Roman cultures the primary *geniuses* guarded *only* living beings especially the father and mother as the pillars of the family hierarchy. Meanwhile in the Roman mythology, the duties of protecting places closely related to a specific space (home) had been trusted to *Penates* and *Lares*[2] for a long time. Thus, the *genius* fitted the function subsequently to be taken over by the Christian institution of *guardian angel* which, notably, is most often depicted in popular iconography as guarding and protecting children rather than adults.

During the times of the first emperor Augustus (63 BC – 14 AD) the *genius* of the leader was increasingly perceived as the patron of the entire territory of the empire – *locus*. Thus, only at the times of the empire people started to perceive that each place has its special guardian spirit. There were large numbers of altars dedicated to the spirit of a specific place all over the Roman Empire sprawled across Europe. Still the term was sometimes used in a generic sense, if the person who was praying or offering a sacrifice was not certain which specific deity or spirit is guarding the place he or she is visiting. In antique iconography

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[2] Apparently those home spirits had certain "specialisation", e.g., in *lararia*, a certain home altars, each Roman family worshiped Lares who were protecting the hearth and home as well as the family, whereas Penates were responsible for food storage, i.e., barns and granaries (*penus*). Vesta (the guardian of the hearth) and Genius (who patronised the father of the family or *pater familiae*) were also honoured. We may find certain similarities in Lithuanian mythology; especially in terms of *kaukas* and *aitvaras* who are rather controversial household spirits capable of both bringing wealth and taking it away.

genius loci was often depicted as a young man holding in his hand a cornucopia, a patera (libation bowl) or a snake.

It is interesting that the idea of a "spirit guarding the place" could originate only in the culture which perceived itself as *being born from care (protection)*. Let us recall the legend of the founding of Rome where a wild animal - a she-wolf - fostered and nurtured two human boys. It was the Roman understanding of protection which could fuse such integral components as individuality of nature (including the peculiarity of the place, its unique characteristics) and human tendency to be active (with associated peculiarities of cultural and artistic expression). It is by far the best summing up of this exceptional quality of the Roman culture, so special even in comparison with the Greek culture which (unlike the Roman one) regarded nature as a resource or a "storage of resources", which would seem much closer to the subsequent Judeo-Christian perception. For a Roman, cultivating the nature in general and a separate place specifically was the highest activity which was the purpose in itself, i.e. *cultura*. No wonder that they were inclined to grant a privilege of metaphysical protection to so carefully "cultivated" places by assigning a "spirit of place" to each. The main point is that such notion of culture is synchronic, i.e., is timelessly focused on itself, on honing harmony among its parts, and its internal structural perfection. It is precisely for this reason it was not questioned by applying the criteria of change and historicity, diachronic introspections of culture, which later (especially starting from the Renaissance) would be of so much interest to the European culture. This is one of the core characteristics of the Roman *genius loci*.

Naturally the places spiritualised by either hierophany or human activity as well as degraded ones do not dominate in the landscape, so the reasonable question is whether any place would have its "spirit", or such would be quite rare cases and exceptions to the landscape? The above-mentioned examples tend to narrow this concept to the places of direct existence and intervention of deities or other supernatural beings in the course of history. However, one may note that the later meaning of the special atmosphere of the place would become a qualitative characteristic enabling to expand the field of usage of this term.

Aporias of *genius loci* in modern cultures

As we know, in the epoch of the Renaissance the discovery of laws of the linear perspective, a growing number of travels overseas and the rise of more precise cartography lead to the qualitative change in a relation to a place. The terms of an objective geometrical space introduced by René Descartes were applied in an attempt to define logically and

impartially the phenomena which used to be perceived more implicitly, without separating the observer from the object being observed, the man from his place in the world[3]. Eventually, in the 18th-19th centuries in Europe, where the prevailing form of cultural expression became Romanticism, *genius loci* was again pulled out from the passive into active use, but lost its former specific notional character in the process. An exceptional versatility of this concept (notionally integral in the classic world) downgraded *genius loci* – in the modern world – to the *table talk* level, a status close to the pre-romantic *picturesque* characteristic at best. The question is where we should look for the notional centre of gravity of this particularly broad concept in the conditions of modernity? It can be assumed that the essential divide between the universalism and cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, and the new romantic ideas lies in the relation to a place: where worshipping of the art of "timeless beauty" of the ancient Greece and Rome is being gradually replaced by discovery of the indigenous folk cultures. That is why it is important to remember and reconsider the causes and key stimuli for rebirth of *genius loci* in the epoch of Romanticism, or rather just one common specific characteristic of the period, i.e. *reactionary views*.

Reactionary views in this context are, of course, a painful response of the romantics to those sudden and – vaguely and dauntingly apprehended as – irreversible changes in culture, society and living environment which started with the dawn of the industrial revolution. Thus, a "fixed idea" of many a romantic to rehabilitate and restore the defunct and vanishing forms and practices of culture manifested in the Gothic Revival movement, painting of pre-Raphaelites or an emerging heritage protection thought of British "anti-restorers" should not come as a surprise. Here lies the origin of the famous romantic yearning for "organic culture" contrasting it with the new mechanistic and technical image of the world.

Nevertheless, manifestation of romantic impulses and idealistic stimuli in the milieu of Western intellectuals should not mislead us and obscure the fact that there were already substantial differences between the then new aesthetic vocabulary and archaic perception of *genius loci*. The German *Volksgeist*, which gained popularity at the time, reflected the spirit (*Geist*) of a territorially and ethnically defined *community* which expresses itself through specific articulated pieces of art rather than the spirit of place. The "spirit of nation"

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[3] The landscape theory developing in geography and anthropology initially also collided with the contrast between local peculiarities visible by a specific view of an individual and the objective analysis of a space in order to disassociate from the vantage point of a movable subject as much as possible. A typical example of this approach is "The Morphology of Landscape" (1925), the famous paper written by American geographer Carl O. Sauer.

understood in this way was internal and immanent rather than externally defined as a quality of a certain entirety of people distinguishing it from the others. Intellectuals of the Enlightenment perceived the "spirit of nation" as a quite rational, complex and generalising quality, e.g., Charles de Montesquieu associated nature as the principle of the standard with the "genius of people" as an ability of self-control/self-government, the standard of ruling, (hence *The Spirit of the Laws* (French: *De l'esprit des lois*)), whereas the "spirit of people" to Voltaire already meant a certain cultural dimension, the whole of popular customs and traditions. The subsequent discourse of German idealism and Romanticism will associate this term even more closely with the teleological or simply theological vocabulary, for instance, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel will identify the "people's spirit" with "the God's people". It will coherently generate an explanation of the permanent characteristics assigned by later idealists and romantics to individual nations, and their historical path based on a peculiar logic of the Divine. Thus, the concept of *Volkgeist* was increasingly approximating *Volkdsbildung* – creation of the nation, which became relevant for the developing nationalisms of the Central and Eastern Europe.

Although the academic historical tradition – developing simultaneously with the modern political nationalism – focused on the objective needs to learn the "national history", it did not prevent the rise of the commemorative cult of the nation itself. The latter manifested itself both through the movements of preservation of artistic and architectural heritage created by the "national genius" in various European states and through "nationalisation of the space" of the state – the search of typical "national landscapes"[4]. When nations replaced descriptions of lives and military campaigns of their rulers, and became a political subject and an object of history studies in the same time, they began to be viewed through the prism of the actual physical and also poetical as well as symbolical landscape of the *homeland*. Such newly created collective images of "national landscapes" in fiction, poetry, painting, state propaganda, etc. helped to foster a collective identity supported by the belief that a specific nation is not only entitled to a relevant territory where it has allegedly lived from the ancient times,[5] but such nation is united and homogenous in terms of ethnolinguistics and culture. Perhaps the first work of this genre was *Histoire de France* (1833) by Jules Michelet where

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[4] It is interesting to note that these "national landscapes" are sometimes symbolically recorded even in national flags, e.g., flags of Argentina or Ukraine.
[5] For instance, the German anthem *Das Lied der Deutschen* (The Song of the Germans) contains the lines which are no longer performed: "*From the Maas to the Memel / From the Etsch to the Belt / Germany, Germany [...] above all in the world...*"

descriptions of the national character are associated with peculiarities of the provinces of the French state.

However, the rapid processes of modernisation which started in the 18th-19th centuries along with expansion of European colonies overseas gave birth to another broad phenomenon, namely alienation to the place which was now perceived merely as a source of productivity, profiting and material gain, and that gradually led to depletion of resources, impoverishment of land, degradation of the environment and subsequent ecological problems. Ironically, this feeling of alienation enabled to transform the nature of reclaimed lands to a positive *picturesque* image as well. For instance, this is how the overseas colonial possessions of the British Empire were symbolically merged into one integral image of the state by invoking aesthetically appealing and idyllic sceneries of exotic landscapes in painting, graphic arts or fiction.

We should not forget that landscape painting gained popularity in Europe starting with Italian Renaissance in the 15th-16th centuries, and in the 17th century the landscapes of England were already perceived as a symbolic representation of mythological, literary and aesthetic aspects of the local nature and culture. Thus, thanks to European colonial expansion this "*picturesque*" characteristic became that quality of newly discovered and conquered overseas territories for which those strange exotic cultures could be perceived, soaked up and conveyed by the imagination of Europeans. Romantic European writers, poets and painters most often portrayed the indigenous people of distant lands as remaining in the natural state untouched by civilisation, and such state was associated with *Arcadia*, *Eden*, primitivism and "savageness".

The "picturesque" theory developing in the art criticism of the 18th-19th centuries echoed this tendency by conveniently creating an image of the colonised people as observed and controlled subjects, and by attributing to the colonists the opposite active role of observers and controllers. Such aesthetic debates continued the former European discussions regarding principles and purpose of representing landscapes in art, especially intense in the romanticism epoch and making a huge impact both on the growth of tourism (from the already usual *Grand Tour* trips of the nobility to such countries of antique heritage as Greece and Italy to more remote, mysterious and exotic lands) and formation of the national identity in the parent states, i.e. England, France and others.

On the other hand, the concept *picturesque* had an unquestionable influence at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries with a start of network of *skansens* (ethnographic open-air

museums), and ecomuseums later, in the 1960s-1980s. Thus, the efforts of preserving the tangible folk culture or the industrial past no longer threatened to rip those objects from their inherent cultural surroundings and landscapes by placing them in a decontextualised and artificial environment of museums, or it was at least attempted to recreate their features in specially selected territories where such objects were relocated (for instance such solution was applied in 1965 when Rumšiškės Open-Air Museum was founded: Lithuanian ethnographic regions were "settled" in the landscapes which were morphologically closest to those regions).

Nonetheless, the "elemental" and elitist (favouring most prominent heritage monuments created by the nation) perception prevailing in the heritage-related thought of that period meant that taking over, transferring and preservation of cultural heritage ideally was possible only in museums or by "freezing" their status *in situ*. Thus, the museum (which in itself was a great invention of European civilisation) with its new mission could not go further from the "spirit of place" as it did when heritage specialists concentrated on collection, accumulation, classification and evaluation of unparalleled valuables of the national past.[6] Such isolated exceptions as an uprising of cultural workers of Danzig in 1848 against intentions of the town museumification only confirm tendencies of the epoch to conduct a scientific analysis of the local peculiarities, to institutionalise them or place in a hierarchy (which later will be harshly criticised by the specialists) instead of cherishing the local spirit.

Thus, the idea of *genius loci* in the intellectual milieu of the 19th century was not consistent with the idealistic-theological explanations and the developing rationalist tradition of historical thinking, or with the practices of early nationalism for that matter. Consequently, even the *patina* cult, which peaked at the time and was often associated with an image of the "spirit of place" as well as other phenomena of romantic culture, should be understood adequately, avoiding anachronisms. To such true romantic as John Ruskin, who wrote about patina in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, patina was not an irrational measure by means of which a sensual comeback of the desired historical epoch was to occur, or as romantics called it a "revival". This tradition in perception of patina in the 19th century was quite reasonably generalised by heritage theoretician Michael Petzet in early 21st century claiming that the time covering those objects with a certain layer enabled romantics to sense the historical

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[6] It should be noted that at present this method does not necessarily ignore or destroy the spirit of place. Sometimes quite the opposite happens, and the attempts of its revival are successful. That was the case with *One Street Museum* established in the old Podol district in Kiev (*Andrejevskij spusk* or *Andriyivskyy Descent* street) in 1991, and highly acknowledged internationally.

perspective, evoking reverence to the heritage monuments as to documents of the past. As a result, the aesthetic function of natural aging processes of heritage objects then remained subjugated to their historicity.

The fashion of the real or even artificially created ruins (the "genius of ruins") of the 18th-19th centuries by itself appealed to the scars left in the heritage monuments by time or history and their silent story rather than to a complex reflection and contemplation of the site. J. Ruskin and W. Morris, the romantic pioneers of the British heritage conservation, were generally interpreting those "atmospheric places" in the ancient epistemology prevailing at the time which Alois Riegl, an Austrian art historian, would define as *Alterswert* (the age value) in the very beginning of the 20th century. In a similar manner, Jacob Burckhardt and the remaining speculative culture history advocates would talk about "spirits" of "the Renaissance" or "Renaissances" rather than spirits of "Italy", "the Apennines", and "the Mediterranean Sea". Even Johan Huizinga was more interested in that strange transitional epoch which he called "The Autumn of the Middle Ages", and not in the exceptional spirit of Burgundy he cherished so much.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the crisis of historicism which suffered the history science accompanied by disciplinary fragmentation of humanitarian cognition and the deepening relativism of cultural values being affected by their mass destruction during the greatest calamities of the 20th century – two world wars and other socio-political crises – as well as the subsequent neoliberal turning of nearly everything into merchandise, instinctively prompted to turn attention to the antique ideals of harmony, beauty, and completeness. However, we see rather opposing views to the phenomenon of the "spirit of place" emerging in the intellectual and socio-political milieu of postmodernity, and such views were largely influenced by a particularly rapid advancement and expansion of technologies permeating all spheres of life, including architecture's creation and spatial planning. On the one hand, the spirit of place was further ignored and destroyed for the sake of "research and development"; on the other hand, we may discuss a true revival of the idea of *genius loci* or even a certain hunt for it in order to reproduce artificially and replicate the "atmospheric" nature of exceptional places.

In fact, the typical, standard construction solutions and massive mechanisation of agriculture apparently allowed sacrificing both aesthetic and ecological quality of the environment for the sake of pragmatism and utilitarianism. Radical goals to reconstruct, manage and have the maximum control of the space were manifested not only on the

economic level, but also in essentially utopian projects of social reforms which were tried by the greatest ideologies of the 20th century by adjusting ideas of the "progressive" urban specialists to the plans of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes in practice. Nevertheless, when a residential environment was being created with a typical infrastructure – the same chains of supermarkets, standard motels, offices, airports and apartment blocks – even the developed industrial democratic states adopted the decisions which were economically most feasible but paid almost no regard to peculiarities of the location. Ironically, such standardisation of place infected even the area where one would think it cannot be found, i.e. urban heritage protection... Gregory Ashworth noted a paradox where due to national schools and traditions of restoration formed in different European countries, and as a result of encouragement to take over examples of "good practice" on the international level, instead of highlighting the unique character of historical towns, they are becoming similar and quite standard, although easily recognisable as historical. Thus, if heritage protection solutions highly valued by experts are mechanically shifted to other locations, it generates a paradoxical effect of assimilation of such places.

A similar effect of the notorious dullness of monotonous and standard Soviet cities (brilliantly reflected in the witty comedy "Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!" directed by Eldar Ryazanov (1975)) was achieved in the Soviet Union for slightly other reasons. As we know, it was a must for every larger town of the Soviet Union to have a square for ideological meetings containing a monument of the leader and a building of the Executive Committee, an industrial area, "sleeping" residential districts, a military garrison, etc. In fact, the spirit of place in such towns and cities was ruled by a persistent demonic foreboding of the Cold war, and such environment reminded a mellowed version of GULAG where a systemic disarray was thriving, hardly veiled by an ideological facade. Moreover, toponymy of such towns was also standard and repetitive, discarding authentic historical place-names. Let us recall the neighbouring Russia's Federation Kaliningrad Region (Oblast), former East Prussia, where after the war the bank of German and Lithuanian place-names was radically eradicated by replacing them with numerous typical repetitive Soviet toponyms. Even hydronyms were sovietised, though the latter usually remain untouched by invaders who just adapt such names to their pronunciation).

When Bolshevik visions to evoke a worldwide "proletarian revolution" crashed into the wall of reality, the idea of creating a perfect society on a global scale was forced to be narrowed to an attempt of its implementation in a specific isolated political space, often

watchfully guarded against "pollution" from the remaining world. A historically developed urban space and traditional landscapes remaining in this utopian and largely futuristic Soviet vision were mostly understood as obstacles to changes and a drag on progress, and as such were doomed to remaking or radical destruction. If fragments of the past were left in the fabric of the city, they served based on the principle of contrast, illustrating the "superiority" of new architectural solutions over those created in the past. This is how the spirit of place had to be adjusted or drastically transformed and subjugated to the political pragmatisms as well as visual indoctrination of the masses.

The idea of social engineering adepts that transformation of the public space in a desired direction would change the worldview and self-image of those living there was attempted to put into practice from Berlin to Pyongyang, and currently this idea is further developed in Dubai, Astana or Ashkhabad. The strive for perfection of the present-day authoritarian regimes and their inclination to control everything sometimes acquires paranoid characteristics, e.g., the new avenues of Ashkhabad under reconstruction are spotlessly clean, though continuous maintaining of such cleanliness requires huge efforts, but the streets and avenues of the rapidly expanding city remain empty as if the city is created as a piece of art for art's sake and not a living space meant for people.

However, in the second half of the 20th century the unique character of places was increasingly challenged by mass consumption and assembly-line tourism. Paradoxically, it did not contribute to a keener sense of exclusivity of places, but brought a contrary result since it generated mass copying and replicating: these processes are accelerating on a smaller or larger scale by repeating a model of Las Vegas, and are gaining a percolating form of *McDisneyization*. No wonder that representatives of the developing trend of phenomenological architecture responded to the growing standardisation and dehumanisation of the environment, and soon C. Norberg-Schulz, D. Canter, K. Lynch, F. Steele and others started playing a leading part.

C. Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000) stands out among the above-mentioned names as the one who scrutinised the phenomenon of *genius loci* most comprehensively. He referred to philosophical ideas of Edmund Husserl, Gaston Bachelard and Martin Heidegger, and elaborated the category of "existential space" or "live experiential space". In his view, the existential task of the new architecture should be to encourage the territory to become the place, i.e., to reveal all its meanings potentially lying in this medium. The theoretician of

architecture distinguished two planes of architectural phenomenology – "poetical" and "analytical". The former was more associated with the emotion experienced during a contact with environment as if a deep contemplation of the place, intimate "rooting" in the medium, which is evidenced by the *Fallingwater* designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, architectural creations of Tadao Ando, and other modern buildings. Meanwhile the analytical phenomenology of architecture (apparently closer to Norberg-Schulz himself) is characterised by a desire to discover those permanent spatial forms and deep structures, *a priori* schemes and types which could be capable of stepping across the threshold of mundane existence and temporality for the sake of eternal and unfading truths, perfection and divinity (that is why he was so impressed by Louis Khan's buildings).

Meditating on the phenomenon of the spirit of place, Norberg-Schulz opened up a dual relation of a person with his/her living environment, which manifests itself by *orientation* in the space and psychological *identification* with it. However, the modern society mostly focuses on "practical" functions of orientation, whereas one's identification with the place and its immediate experience are left unchecked. As a result, the real life in places is being substituted by alienation. Bitter doubts about the trend, speed and quality of development of post-industrial societies, levelling of living environment, degradation of the so-called neighbourhoods, turning of the cultural heritage into a resource, and the ensuing ecological issues have raised numerous down-to-earth problems on the survival level. They are discussed not only by architects and landscape specialists who examine a widespread phenomenon of despiritualisation of the living environment, but also by the heritage experts concerned over the influence of the above-mentioned changes on the relics of the past in the present. This is how a growing scepticism towards maintaining of the spirit of place (theoreticians refer to *deterritorisation*, *non-places*, *third space*, *marginalised spaces* and so on), where a collective identity is declining or alternative identities are being created, prompted a reciprocal reaction. It can be noticed that famous designs created by the "stars of architecture" are more often replaced by an architectural approach which is more oriented towards a sensitive and respectful relation to a specific landscape and cultural characteristics of the future building, urban complex or an entire city, especially taking into consideration the local construction traditions and materials, and an equally important lifestyle of the location. In this context, as one of the successful cases of respect for a special spirit of place, we might mention the Franciscan Monastery chapel near to Šiauliai, Lithuania, the altar of which is designed so as

to open a view to the nearby Hill of Crosses; thus, synchronising the aura of the new sacral architecture and historical landscape.

"Spatial turn" in heritage discourse: from preservation of spirits guardians of places to conservation of the "spirit of places".

Nowadays various practices, sites, objects and even people are referred to as "heritage". Yet that was not always the case. What is the position of "place" in heritage studies and international legislation? Examples from the history provide contradicting information. The classical concept of heritage was dominated by practices of protecting individual, most prominent and significant immovable (buildings) and movable (artefacts) objects, but – as noted previously – under the influence of Romanticism, in the 18th – 19th centuries the focus shifted on the local cultures and traditions. Perhaps the earliest term to get established in the international heritage law (*The Hague Convention 1954*) was "a group of buildings". In the international heritage protection doctrine, shaping in the second half of the 20th century, the places were mostly associated with archaeological territories, historical gardens or old towns. The character of "picturesque" landscapes and old heritage monuments as an element to be preserved was later emphasized in legal enactments of various countries. Nevertheless, until the second half of the 20th century, the *monumental* concept of heritage as a prominent building, piece of art or sculpture, which was prevailing in the heritage protection doctrine, seemed to leave little space for a wider perception of the environment and context of such valuable objects, for which it was criticized numerous times. The reflection and quintessence of this concept is the *Venice Charter* (1964). It is interesting to note that difficulties in application of this *Charter* in other cultural and geographical contexts generated a need to consider those aspects to a greater extent and the outcome was the *Australian ICOMOS Burra Charter* (1979) which replaced the term of "monument" with a "place".[7] In 1993, it was supplemented by the *ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of*

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[7] *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (The Burra Charter)* was revised in 1981, 1988, and 1999. Its wording of 1999 m (Article 1.1.) reads as follows: *Place means site, area, land, landscape, building or other work, group of buildings or other works, and may include components, contents, spaces and views.* It is also stipulated that *[t]he concept of place should be broadly interpreted. The elements described in Article 1.1 may include memorials, trees, gardens, parks, places of historical events, urban areas, towns, industrial places, archaeological sites and spiritual and religious places.* It is very important to note that The Burra Charter introduced the term of "cultural significance" which *means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects. Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups.*

Cultural Heritage Value introducing the term of *indigenous heritage* which was initially applied to the Maori people, but later spread more broadly.

The first legal steps in protection of urban territories on the international level were taken in the second half of the 20th century: in 1976, UNESCO *Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas* substantiated the term of "historic areas" which includes not only archaeological sites, but also urban quarters and villages. It was promptly followed by the categories of "historic centres" and "historic towns" (established in the *Washington Charter* (1987)). At the turn of the 20th and 21st century, as a reaction to the further expansion of the concept *heritage*, the term "historic urban landscape" becomes popular as defined in the *Vienna Memorandum* (2005). The expanding concept of *heritage* kept including more and more elements and areas of knowledge such as folklore (*UNESCO Recommendation* (1989)) and intangible heritage (UNESCO *Convention* (2003)), enabled to rethink the authenticity category (*The Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994)) and to address the phenomenon of cultural diversity (*UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001)*)* as well as to emphasise the society's role in protecting heritage (the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society *(the Faro Convention* (2005)) opening the gate for greater inclusion of communities into the sphere of heritage protection, thus eradicating the traditional artificial and mostly inefficient segregation of experts and the society.

Awareness of the new role of heritage in post-modern societies as affected by globalisation also inspired the *Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place* which was adopted by international experts in heritage at the 16th ICOMOS General Assembly in 2008. The *Declaration* identified the threats to the spirit of place and provided recommendations as to its preservation, mainly focusing on the issues of intergenerational transmission of intangible heritage.

In terms of the concept of the spirit of place in the context of architectural heritage, it is worth mentioning (at least very briefly) the key problems in this area. The majority of them arise in trying to match the "old" and the "new" architecture. Nowadays, the relation to the place and its identity is gaining rather weird shapes ranging from the modernist challenge to the historically shaped environment or post-modern pastiche attempting an ironic game with such environment, to the "placelessness" described by E. Relph and decontextualization which are considered nearly the main characteristic of present-day architecture by F. Jameson.

For instance, pseudo-historical buildings, manifestations of *new ruralism* in cities, or a particularly interesting "reflection principle" would indicate attempts to establish a new – though not always successful – dialogue with the "spirit of place". Yet the situation is not so hopeless. There are examples where even modern forms did not prevent maintaining a respectful relation to the place (one of such examples could be the already mentioned Franciscan Monastery designed by Italian architects Angelo Polesello and Nunzio Rimmaudo in 2000. The building gives a view to the nearby Hill of Crosses – which is an archaeological and historical site sacred to the Lithuanian Catholics – as if letting it in, inviting it into the space of the chapel of the monastery).

Then maybe the practical and cognitive intensity of the heritage idea, its constant presence in the centre of most heated discussions (both in a social and professional sense), and the inevitable political and ideological agenda behind it imply that the idea and tradition of *genius loci* are not in such a despairing situation after all? Among successful cases of combining interests of the local community and specialists in heritage protection is the campaign of preserving the sacred rocks of the Algonquian people in Canada[8] in the 1970s in which Romas Vaštokas, an anthropologist of Lithuanian descent, took an active part as intermediary. Initially, the design including a covering glass structure meant to protect the Peterborough rocks which were deteriorating from erosion prompted strong objections from the indigenous people who consider the site as being holy. They thought the spirits would not be able to visit it any longer. The anthropologists undertook a role of "cultural interpreters" in that conflict situation and helped to find a solution acceptable to both sides, i.e., the structure was equipped with opening windows so that spirits could freely access the rocks, thus preserving the sacral nature of that exclusive place.

Nevertheless, such compromises are not always achieved. For instance, the Uluru (or Ayers Rock) was at first inscribed on the UNESCO *World Heritage List* as a natural site, and only later was reclassified as an "associative cultural landscape". People of the aboriginal Anangu culture believe that their ancestors' spirits walk along the paths of the holy mountain, and the Anangu never climb it so as not to disturb them. However, the continually growing numbers of tourists could not care less, and most of them scale the mountain slopes. The only way to solve this cultural conflict is to educate visitors appealing to their respect for the sacral character of the place and those who inhabit it - both the living and the dead.

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[8] Known by the Indigenous peoples of the area as *Kinoomaagewaabkong* or "The Teaching Rocks".

Thus, although landscapes received some attention much earlier (*The Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding of Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites 1962*), currently, as a reaction to the ecological challenges, the significance of landscapes to the society tends to be understood more integrally. In 1992, it was finally decided to recognise the term of "cultural landscapes" (known to the UNESCO specialists since the 19th century) as a separate and special category of heritage, and to provide its typology. In 2000, the Council of Europe adopted the *European Landscape Convention* expressly discussing the impact of people on landscapes and their mutual relation. Out of the three groups of cultural landscapes the above-mentioned type of associative landscapes, which in practice is often associated with holy mountains, would be closest to the category of the "spirit of place". As we have seen previously, such exclusive mountains are a particularly significant sign of collective identity. In China, for instance, five most important holy mountains (including Mount Taishan), currently inscribed on the UNESCO *World Heritage List*, used to be the places of ritual visits of the emperors. Mount Fuji in Japan has still retained its symbolic significance to the entire country, and Mount Ararat is further depicted in the coat of arms of Armenia despite being located in the territory of Turkey. In fact, even the underlying idea of the reconstruction of Erevan led by Soviet architect A. Tamanian was an attempt to turn the Armenian capital into a certain pedestal for the holy mountain.

Since the majority of the supporters of new approaches to heritage protection agree that their aim is not just to preserve the fabric of the past, but rather to manage the ongoing changes, the concept of sustainable development is being introduced in heritage management more actively and harmonised with a category of "cultural landscape", combining heritage elements of different origin and forms, which also requires a deep rethinking of the "character of place". Recognition of the category of cultural landscape enabled to transcend the nature/culture dualism so familiar to the Western cultures. However, the "immaterial" or "intangible" component of spiritual heritage advocated by UNESCO in the early 21st century was accompanied by another established dichotomy, i.e., *material/immaterial*, based on the Cartesian division and contraposition of *matter* and *mind*. Yet the aboriginal people of Australia challenge this established perception of heritage (which is inclined to classify and categorise) by believing that the quality of the living environment is an integral part of the health condition of the society, and the person is linked to the environment by multiple invisible ties of "kinship". This is how ecological and symbolic *binding* with the living environment and the perception of responsibility arising from such binding, which is typical

of representatives of many non-Western cultures previously considered primitive, may become the source of a new holistic and integral attitude towards multifaceted interfaces between the people and the environment they inhabit. According to Rodney Harrison, such an "ontological perspectivism" of the indigenous people is becoming the basis for a heritage concept as a dialogue, combining the protected elements of the natural and cultural environment as well as the material and intangible heritage which used to be analysed by specialists in isolation, and is approaching further expansion of the archaic idea of *genius loci* in a new and creative way.

Genius loci **and axiology of heritage**

How can we translate the term *genius loci* into the language of present-day axiology of heritage? Though at first glance *genius loci* seems to contain a number of values as if permitting to substitute it with usual axiological categories of heritage, but the effect of the special appeal of certain places cannot be simply decomposed and explained merely by their aesthetic or other characteristics (such as being unusual, rare, exclusive), which may be typical of many other locations visited less.

Architect Christopher Alexander was very determined to reveal this secret of the special attractiveness of certain places by analysing such architectural elements as the scale of structures, use of the local construction materials, spatial forms, colour, picturesque character, order and harmony. However, he arrived at a conclusion that although all of them are highly significant, none of them are vital. In an attempt to derive one common characteristic of the places which seem to us very appealing and exceptional (for no apparent reason) he even needed to introduce an enigmatic term of "nameless quality". He also regretted that rationalised modernisation processes depriving the world of places pushed aside the ability to create an extraordinary and intangible character of architecture.

In terms of axiology of heritage, *genius loci* may be associated with A. Riegl's *age value*, W. D. Lipe's *associative symbolic value* or S. Muňos Viňas' *sentimental meaning*, but is not limited to such concepts. If in heritage value systems (however different) we obviously deal with a desire to decompose such values, attribute them to types and place them in hierarchies, then *genius loci* would first and foremost be an integrating term, requiring to view a specific object or place holistically, to include both physical sense of the place and the related emotions, as well as the information about the place.

On the other hand, we have seen that merely professional protection of historical sites and exclusive natural locations (both of them incorporated more often by an integral perception of the heritage) would have little effect and meaning without disclosing their significance to the society by evoking knowledge and the emotional relation to the place. Although in some countries the function of a tour guide is not to report on the local history, but just to lead a visitor to a certain place and allow him or her to admire the special atmosphere, in most cases it is the heritage interpreter who helps revealing the special qualities of the place and its changes in time by showing the remaining signs of such changes and pointing out the characteristics of the place which could not be felt and perceived without such information, especially where we learn of such locations on TV or big screen, instead of visiting ourselves physically.

David Uzzell, an authority figure in heritage interpretation, distinguishes five factors serving as emotional engagement with the heritage, and those are: time, distance, experience of places, level of abstraction, and management. Thus, visiting of historically significant places enables us to fill certain abstract ideas (such as the "Cold War") with a specific content, e.g., such is the main objective of the Museum of the Cold War established in Žemaitija National Park in the Western part of Lithuania where foreign visitors learn that their countries were targeted by Soviet missiles from that specific place. Then a physical stay in the place helps to develop a clearer view of its relation to other places, the state or even continent. However, it has been noticed that a distance can prompt a misleading impression about the problems which at close quarters may seem smaller (or bigger) than they really are. Eventually, management decisions and certain selected methods for conveying the heritage will have a tremendous impact on interpretation of the place as well. It is particularly relevant to archaeological reconstructions, inevitably escalating the issue of their "reality" and authenticity, and especially to the sites of atrocity which present their interpreters with an imminent dilemma whether to tell their story "as it happened" without embellishments and censorship, or to provide a milder version of it by adjusting to expectations of the visitors who would not want to be overly frightened or intimidated, but just wish to have a great and interesting time while travelling.

As we know, such "sites of memory" as museums, memorials, heritage centres, etc. also inspire the *memory of the place*, which sometimes can be unpredictable and cause unintended consequences to the sense of the place. According to P. Connerton, we may talk about "memory work" of several phases: *embodiment* (gestures, movements, body position, which

becomes particularly important during a ritual), *language* (the narrated story, its tone, emotional register, value statement) and *visualisation* through specific objects and places. But is the relation between the material character of the place and individual/collective memory always immediate? Otherwise museums and public monuments intended to commemorate specific historical events and persons, but constructed in the locations which are more remote geographically and culturally, would be inefficient (e.g. the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington), but it is not the case. On the other hand, the question is what memory will be generated by the authentic place which was destroyed as in the example of fragments of the Berlin Wall demolished in 1989, the the statues of Bamiyan Buddhas dynamited and blasted by the Taliban in 2001, or the Twin Towers in New York destroyed the same year, i.e., the places which R. Harrison called the sites of *absent heritage*?

Tourists establish multifaceted relations with the places they visit ranging from very personal and existential, if it is the place of their birth or their ancestors, to seemingly superficial. In this context it is worthwhile to remember another insufficiently analysed phenomenon. When visiting famous sites, tourists tend to leave there a trace of their visit (e.g., to carve their initials on the bark of a tree or a wall of a building, etc., which often balances on the verge of vandalism), or try to "take the place with them" – usually in the form of photographs or souvenirs. Such souvenirs, especially the nowadays popular fridge magnets with images of visited places, are as if a *madeleine* of Marcel Proust, and may refresh the "sense of the place". All this allows us drawing a logical chain attempting to grasp an "algorithm of the place":

> *guide – place/event – legend — aura/atmosphere - memory/souvenir.*

Final notes

The spirit of place is a distinctive basis for shaping of cultural or architectural uniqueness of a location or a town/city. We may claim that a unique character of places or their special aura is created by non-standard, unorthodox solutions of spatial planning and architecture, especially by the love for the environment of the designed structure, and such unique character is destroyed by standardisation and monotony of the environment, which is typical of the modern construction, "manufacturing" huge numbers of similar cities, towns and building complexes almost as if by means of a production line. Ironically, the spirit of

place is being eliminated by a commercial replication of *images of places* in the form of McDisneyisation.

"Belonging to a place" is closely associated with a certain actual or "imaginary" community. Here we can distinguish places as an experienced physical and emotional reality, and places as a symbolic space, e.g., "native land" or "homeland". Summarising we can distinguish some essential structural layers of *genius loci:*

- *spatial experience* (physical presence in a place, movement in space);
- *impressions, emotions and feelings (esthesis* and *catharsis);*
- *knowledge* (event / (hi)story / legend);
- *place identity and dialogue* (exceptional personalities / community / way of life);
- *collective memory vs. individual reminiscences;*
- *place consumption* ("take the place with me" - souvenir);
- *place nurturance and respect.*

Due to their multiple meanings and aspects, the sense of place and the identity of place are widely analysed by representatives of fiction, humanistic geography, historical ecology, architecture, landscape design, territorial and urban planning, heritage protection, tourism and travelling-related areas. Thus, the spirit of place is emerging both from the qualities of its physical or cultural elements and from its observer's cultural sensitivity, sense of identity, psychological state and mood. Since these elements continuously fluctuate, the spirit of place may also change imperceptibly or radically over time, and that should be taken into account by the architects, planners and landscape architects working in specific locations. This relation between the place and group identity – so colourful, multifaceted and displayed on so many levels – was and still is creating an intricate geography of boundaries and walls, symbolic spaces and places. Places are intertextual, and on the level of representation they generate meanings according to a certain semiotic system and order. That is why they can be considered *nodes in a network of meanings*. The following dichotomies produced by the concept of *genius loci* may be observed:

- individual *vs.* collective experience;
- intellect and reflexion *vs.* experiences, emotions and empathy, feelings and intuition;
- material, tangible, visible *vs.* unsubstantial, intangible, ephemeral;
- past *vs.* present;

- sacral *vs.* profane, secular;

- professionalism *vs.* amateurs ("people from the street");

- expert's elitism *vs.* democracy, openness.

But the concept of *genius loci* as an analytical tool may help to overcome these contradictions in perception of heritage which are still restraining efficiency of heritage preservation. Thus, in order to incorporate "the spirit of place" into methodologies of heritage assessment, first of all it is necessary to figure out how it is perceived and appreciated by members of local community, also incoming tourists and heritage professionals – its custodians, interpreters and managers. Therefore it is very helpful to include into sociological surveys questions about the residents'/visitors'/experts' feelings, personal memories and sensations connected with being in certain places, their relation with the distance of the historical time (close *or* distant past), their affection, aesthetic experiences etc. It is essential in this case to achieve and constantly maintain reversible feedback both in normal communication and interpretation of the heritage as well as solving everyday "domestic" problems in cooperation with the local residents and *heritage community* members. In cases when the continuity of the local community is broken/damaged (as for instance in the case of Jewish heritage in European cities after the Holocaust) or the local heritage had been destroyed, for the highlighting of the "spirit of the place" a museum or virtual means can be applied. In general, these issues should be solved in a very complex way including all concerned agents and holistically combining and estimating certain characteristics/peculiarities and history of the locality.

In the course of history the term *genius loci* has underwent several radical transformations, closely related to the changes in cultural and historical categories of the Western civilisation. Preserved by traditional societies, the holistic and integrated approach to the living environment that connects people and animals, land and culture could be the essential source of revival of the *sense of place* and the *identity of location* in the conditions of the displacement brought about by globalization. The new, dialogic, approach to the heritage makes it possible to transcend the dichotomies of nature/culture, material/immaterial values and experts/society that have been established in postmodern heritage preservation, thus qualitatively updating the category of *genius loci* and turning it into one of the essential components of heritage axiology and architectural and landscape management.

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