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Discovery of factors influencing study success for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in an interview study

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INFO	ABSTRACT
XY xy@..... Keywords higher education, drop out, disabilities, success	Abstract: The focus of our research is on students with disabilities by the current Higher Education Act in Hungary. The actuality of the topic is that after the millennium due to the expansion of higher education, the above-mentioned students appeared at universities, but at the law dealing with their presence in Hungary only since 2007. Earlier researches have studied the accessibility and inclusive practices of the institutions internationally and in Hungary, but only little attention has been paid to these students' chances of acquisition and retention to higher education. Equal opportunities in higher education appear to be an important supporting factor in our research, however, the exact social context of the individual has a great influence on successful entry and graduation. As a further research opportunity, a deeper, more extensive quantitative study of the institutional presence of students with disabilities and the factors contributing to their learning success is emerging.
Kulcsszavak felsőoktatás, lemorzsolódás, sajátos nevelési igény, eredményesség	Sajátos nevelési igényű hallgatók tanulmányi eredményességét befolyásoló tényezők feltárása egy interjú vizsgálat során: Kutatásunk középpontjában azok a hallgatók állnak, akiket a hatályos felsőoktatási törvény fogyatékossgal élő hallgatónak nevez. A téma aktualitását adja, hogy a felsőoktatási expanzió következtében az ezredforduló után nagyobb számban jelentek meg az említett hallgatók az egyetemeken, azonban jogszabályi szinten csak 2007 óta foglalkoznak jelenlétükkel. A korábbi kutatások nemzetközi és hazai viszonylatban is vizsgálták az intézmények akadálymentességét és inkluzív gyakorlatait, kevés figyelmet fordítottak azonban a beke-

rülési és bennmaradási esélyekre. Legfontosabb eredményeink alapján lényeges támogató faktorként jelennek meg a felsőoktatásban megvalósuló esélyegyenlőségi támogatások, azonban a sikeres bekerülést és a diplomaszerzést nagy mértékben képes befolyásolni az egyén konkrét társas kontextusa. További kutatási lehetőségként felmerül a fogyatékkal élő hallgatók intézményi jelenlétének és tanulmányi eredményességét támogató tényezőinek mélyebb, szélesebb körű kvantitatív vizsgálata.

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Introduction

Due to the expansion in the nineties in higher education the non-traditional students appeared at universities (Attewell és mtsai, 2007; Harper és Quaye, 2009; Pusztai, 2011, Fenyves és mtsai., 2017). In non-traditional students, the Hungarian literature often examines non-full-time students, but in the international literature most of the students from the unconventional social class are listed here (but in many cases these two categories may be mixed and their interpretation may vary from context to context). (Tőzsér, 2012). According to international researches, the non-traditional student name includes: students from low-status families, first-generation university students (whose parents did not go to university), women, parents, students who are members of an ethnic group, students of different religions, students who are older than the average university students, who are learning and working at the same time, and the students with special needs, and disabilities, learning difficulties (Pusztai és Szabó, 2014; Tőzsér, 2012). Students of the types mentioned above have a greater risk of dropping out of university, so higher education can not effectively carry out its task of reducing inequalities in society (Fenyves és mtsai, 2017).

Hungarian literature knows very little about the situation of students with disabilities at universities (Bánfalvy, 2014), only a few studies have been carried out in this area. However, we know that the number of students with disabilities is increasing in higher education, yet they have lower qualifications than the average population (KSH, 2011). Of the students with disabilities, fewer students appear in higher education, this will further undermine their chances in finding jobs (Fogyatékoságügyi statisztikák 2009).

In recent years, however, it has been observed that people with disabilities have higher levels of education, more and more people are graduate and get university degrees (Laki, 2017). While in 2001, 5.2% of people with disabilities have a degree, in 2011 this ratio increased to 9% (KSH, 2011). With the improvement of qualifications, it can be observed that the situation of people with disabilities in the labour market improved. KSH conducted a microcensus in 2016, and based on the results of the microcensus, 3% more people with disabilities were found in the labour market. This proportion would be further improved if more people with disabilities would successfully complete university. It is therefore necessary to make higher education more accessible to them, as their labour market situation may improve as the qualification increases (Laki, 2017).

Disabilities and learning difficulties in higher education

The concept of special educational needs in Hungary and internationally

In Hungary, the situation of students with special educational needs in public education institutions are regulated by the 2011 CXCV National Public Education Act. The Hungarian law defines a major group called „students with special attention”. Within this we can distinguish two subgroups, „children requ-

iring special treatment” and „socially disadvantaged children”. Within the „children requiring special treatment”, three categories can be distinguished: students with special educational needs, students with learning and behavioral difficulties as well as the highly talented students.

The OECD definition differs in some ways from the grouping in Hungary and there are some differences in the names of the categories. While in Hungary the special educational needs category is a separate group within the framework of special treatment, in the definition developed by the OECD, the Special Educational Needs (SEN) constitute a collective concept of pupils with special attention (Csányi, 2007). According to the OECD, the special educational need is the name of a larger group of people with disabilities, people with learning difficulties (such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc.) and disadvantaged students (which is representing a wider category than the Hungarian definition, including social, cultural and linguistic factors).

The definition of special educational needs in the Hungarian educational system

In the Hungarian Public Education Act, the definition of special educational needs is as follows: who is struggling with mobility impairment, visually impaired, hearing impaired, mentally handicapped or speech-impaired, cumulatively disabled, or with autism spectrum disorder or other psychological development disorders (serious learning disorder like dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, attention or behavioral disorder).

In our research, we use the phrase „students with disabilities and learning difficulties” which is the same as the Hungarian special educational needs group,

and includes two groups from the OECD definition (people with disabilities, and people with learning difficulties).

According to Mesterházi (2006), the current Hungarian Public Education Act describes the concept of special educational needs as a non-diagnostic category, but as a collective term that provides extra rights, so the focus of this concept is on schooling. This attitude and concept has been present in Hungary since 2003 (Gordosné, 2004). Gordosné understands that a student with special educational needs can only meet the school requirements with some extra service and help.

Students with disabilities in higher education in Hungary

The Hungarian Higher Education Act and the Public Education Act differently define students with special educational needs. The Higher Education Act does not use the concept of „children requiring special treatment”, but uses „students with disabilities” as an independent generic term (and using this term instead of a pupil with special educational needs).

Students with disabilities first appeared in higher education in the 2002-2003 academic year (Laki, 2015), and while their proportion is increasing in higher education, they are still a very small part of the students, and only 9% of the total population with disabilities have a degree according to the KSH 2011 census data.

The distribution of students with disabilities on the basis of EUROSTUDENT V's results in Hungary is as follows: there is no correlation between the level of university education and the hours of the courses (day time or evening), but there is a slight variation in the slight variation in which they get a degree in (Kiss, 2014). The number of students with disabilities and

learning difficulties is slightly overrepresented in the fields of social sciences, science and arts, while the number of people in the field of economics, sport sciences, information technology and law is slightly underrepresented (Kiss, 2014). This is somewhat contradicted by Bódi and Garai's research in 2011. The research showed five courses that were the most popular among students with disabilities, including IT and engineering, but in the Bódi and Garai examinations only the responses of disabled students were examined, and the role of students with chronic illnesses only in the EUROSTUDENT study is investigated. (Bódi és Garai, 2011).

Equal opportunities in Hungarian higher education

One of the key components of the realization of equal opportunities is how the institution sees different student groups. As social norms and inclusive attitudes changed over time, higher education institutions began to open up to disadvantaged students (Pusztai és Szabó, 2014). Gabriella Pusztai and Diána Szabó examined the question in 2014, approaching the direction of higher education students. The aim of the study was to find out how students are related to students with disabilities. Among the difficulties it highlights the low level of preparedness of the institutions to educate and accommodate students with disabilities, most evidently in the methodological preparedness of the instructors, and they have found that there is a significant negative attitude towards disabled students. The conclusion is that current teaching practice can be a significant obstacle to the learning process of students with disabilities, throughout their university years (Pusztai és Szabó id.: Tinklin és mtsai. 2004; Fuller és mtsai. 2004).

Holloway (2001) and Fuller (2004) approach the question from the view of disadvantaged students.

Holloway conducted a research in 2001. In this research, 6 students with disabilities participated. Holloway explored what disabled students' experiences were about the institutional infrastructure and the accessibility of institutional services. One of the major results of the study is that institutions have resolved a significant part of the challenging problems in an online environment. However, employees from different units in universities have different attitudes, and universities are facing a long-term challenge of rethinking how to evaluate the performance of disabled students (Pusztai és Szabó, 2014). Holloway (2001) points out that the inclusive environment alone does not eliminate negative discrimination and marginalization, so that several components have to function in order to achieve equal opportunities (Pusztai és Szabó, 2014).

Fuller conducted a research in 2004, which analyzed the obstacles faced by students with disabilities in learning. It highlights that just around 10% of students with disabilities indicate their disability and their needs for extra services. And though more than half of the participating students had encountered a learning or management problem coming from their barriers, students who hid their disability were even less assisted and faced more problems. According to the most important conclusions of Fuller (2004), the results show that disabled students think that their difficulties have an impact on their chances in higher education and they think that higher education is not an open environment, as opposed to the opinion of non-disabled students (Pusztai és Szabó, 2014).

Similarly, EUROSTUDENT V. examines comparable results for Hungarian students as described in Holloway (2001) and Fuller (2004). According to László Kiss (2014), EUROSTUDENT V results showed that the students with disabilities are less satisfied with institutions' services, learning oppor-

tunities and the atmosphere than the average of the total respondent sample, however, there are differences in the satisfaction of people with different types of disabilities (Kiss, 2014).

In Hungary, efforts to ensure equality of opportunity for students can be found at several points in the Higher Education Act, ministerial decrees, and regulations of the institutions. Among others, for example, when applying for admission to higher education, the candidate will receive extra points from 2008 (Dávid, 2015). This type of positive discrimination, which can be observed with other groups like for example disadvantaged students, according to the writings of Zsófia Kálmán and György Könczei (2002), which sometimes can be seen as unfair by other parts of the society. According to Vida (2017), this can be observed in the field of education as well. It draws attention to the situation (especially in the case of learning difficulties) when secondary and higher education institutions themselves are rejecting the students with disabilities. Vida (2017) explains that there is no competency measurement for students with disabilities, and, in the absence of such (especially in the field of public education), the institution can not find out about the individual's level of skill. In the case of higher education, Vida reports that certain faculties, such as education and medical studies, exclude students with disabilities. On the contrary, to this assertion, a result of a second analysis of a 2015 study (IESA) database shows that there are still disabled students in teacher training.

The pursuit of equal opportunities in the light of the Hungarian Higher Education Act

To promote equal opportunities for students with disabilities, the Higher Education Act covers a number of points. Paragraph 20 describes in detail, by

type of disability, the various services and their extent that can be offered to students. However, the law states that they can not be exempted from basic education requirements. Paragraph 20 thus provides as follows for equal opportunities for students with disabilities. The Act describes, for the various types of disabilities, the following: if justified the student can apply partial or total exemption from the practical requirements, the student can take the written exam with an oral exam and vice versa, the student can be excluded from the performance or part of the performance of a language exam. In some cases it suggests providing special tools and fixtures and providing personal assistants during the lessons. In all cases, it emphasizes that a longer preparation time is required for students with disabilities compared to the other students, which is determined by increasing the duration by 30%. In the case of ADHD, behavioral disorder, and autism spectrum disorder, it provides an opportunity to minimize waiting time in an exam, separate from other students or multiple exams for one subject. The act defines the services that can be given for each type of disability, but it also provides the opportunity to apply for services other than those included in it, however, this may vary from university to practice, and may help other students with disabilities, including chronic illness.

The research

The purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to look at factors affecting entry and retention in higher education from the viewpoint of students with disabilities, based on the following criteria:

- The perception of students with disabilities in the higher education institutions they attend and about the effectiveness of creating equal opportunities and services offered to them
- Finding factors affecting students with disabilities that have a negative impact on their academic years, their academic achievement, their graduation, and the search for solutions to them based on the experiences of the students with disabilities
- By examining the academic life of students with disabilities, explore the relationship and interaction between academic effectiveness and equal opportunities at an institutional level
- Also, when examining the academic life of students with disabilities, they explore the attitudes of the families of them, their relation to learning, and their influence on the academic life of students with disabilities
- Examine the extent to which the possibility of equal opportunities in the higher education can be provided to the students and their families prior to applying to higher education and how this affects the entry into higher education and the academic period in higher education

Research questions:

- What are the difficulties faced by students with disabilities in higher education in the practice of equal opportunities?
- Do these difficulties influence the educational effectiveness and the motivation of students with disabilities?
- Does equal opportunity in higher education affect the career choice of students with disabilities?

Sample

- 6 students with disabilities, details:
 - 3 persons obtained a degree
 - 1 person graduated but did not get his degree in the absence of a language exam
 - 2 persons dropped out from higher education

Methods

The research involves a semi-structured interviews scan. The interviewees were selected by using snowball method.

Results

In the semi-structured interview study, 6 persons participated, including 4 women and 2 men. Four of them were diagnosed with dyslexia, one of them with dyscalculia, while one of them was hearing impaired. However, when applying for higher education, not all of them applied for extra points (they were among those who used the opportunity to earn extra points on a higher-level graduation certificate).

Although the distribution of disabilities is disproportionate, each interview can provide us with important lessons that can bring us closer to understanding the issue of students with disabilities and with disabilities.

The questions of the interview can be divided into different dimensions. Questions about the relationship of the family to learning and their attitudes to the studies of the individual are included in the first round. After that, we asked about the study life of the interviewees, encompassing their experiences in elementary, high school and higher education, and their experiences, depending on the school, the teachers and the students, as well as their dif-

difficulties in school life. We also asked them about finish their studies, about their experiences, how they manage after, and future plans.

When analyzing the answers received, a number of critical points were drawn up that greatly influenced the respondents' academic lives and attitudes. Therefore, when analyzing the results, we do not analyze the interviews in accordance with the dimension of interview questions, but on the resulting nodes, which are as follows.

The first node is the realization of the problem and its circumstances, especially when and how it has been noticed (which is especially interesting for people with learning difficulties who have no apparent external sign of the problem and are most likely to appear in school years). And as a result of the discovery, how did the family's relationship to learning develop and whether the pupil had the right development in time. An important factor is who are those who know the student's problem (typically educators and fellow students), and what is the attitude towards the student. We received important information about the impact of the surrounding environment on motivation. The environment also includes the influence of family, friends and educators. The influence of career orientation, the attitude towards the success of the student with disabilities, and the role of motivation for further education have played a significant role, even if the student does not feel able to enter higher education. As an important factor, the student's confidence in their ability and the impact on their career choice has emerged. It was important to see if the students had asked for help and if so, who they asked when problems that arose during their education. Students tend to turn to fellow students, instructors and assisting organizations. In this matter, it was important for the student to have information on the various forms of help request and whether the requested assistance was provided in the particular case. In addition to the

request for help, their own strategies aimed at facilitating school / university life, learning methods and their effectiveness in the studies have played a prominent role. The nodes of the post-study period include whether the learner is willing / able to find the job according to their profession, and whether they are satisfied or looking for another job.

Identifying the problem and the subsequent period

For students with disabilities, when it comes to learning outcomes and careers, it is of the utmost importance when they identify their disability, learning difficulties, and when the problem is the first serious obstacle for the individual. It is important to ask who noticed the problem and when and whether the individual has received appropriate and targeted development after the discovery, and how the expectations of the parents and the environment have changed about the learning outcomes. For six of our interviewees, the following can be observed: The problem of the hearing impaired interviewee soon became apparent, mentioning hearing loss due to medical malpractice. She then received speech therapy for half a year at the end of kindergarten. Four of our interviewees - including two of them with dyslexia - were diagnosed in the early years of the primary school and one were associated with severe dysgraphia. Each of them reported that a teacher recognized the problem. Our respondent with dyscalculia only found out about his problem in secondary school. During his school career, his results in mathematics gradually deteriorated. As he approached graduation, he had already had significant difficulties. After the series of failures, teachers asked the family to contact an expert. Therefore, it is clear that the teachers play an important role in the recognizing the need for special education during the school period as they see the children in different learning situations. In addition to the role of the teachers, the role of the parents is important. In the case of our interviewees, where the

problem was discovered in time, parents also tried to give them the right development that helped them to continue their studies smoothly. Besides the development, the parents' expectations towards the children's achievements changed. According to our interviewees, the parents, even though they have lowered their expectations for short-term goals such as the year-end certificates, but their long-term goals still included for their child to enrol in higher education and graduate in line with the child's interest and abilities.

In this regard, another important factor is who knows about the difficulty in the environment of the individual. For all respondents, it can be observed that a large proportion of the environment in primary and secondary schools (other students and school staff) know about their disabilities and can provide help. From this period they were accepted by the school community, and they didn't feel let out. However, entering into higher education changed the situation. The respondents reported that they were only talking about their difficulties with very close friends, and they tried to avoid telling their instructors unless it was absolutely necessary which resulted in many difficulties and misunderstandings. Except for the hearing impaired person - who talked to a single instructor of her problem - none of them spoke about their case with their instructors, so they did not get help with lessons or exams. However, the teacher that knew about the problem actively helped and provided the necessary help.

Motivation

Looking at the issue of motivation, the motivational role of the environment became obvious during the interviews alongside with the internal motivation of the individuals. During the interviews it became clear that the motivation of the environment includes the support of the family and teachers and if they

suggest a suitable carrier that affects the career choice of individuals. In the case of our interviewees, the role of friends on this issue did not emerge prominently.

All of the interviewees reported that the families still had expectations on their learning outcomes, but motivating them got less attention. In contrast with this, the incentive effect of the instructors has been particularly prominent in all of them. The role of teachers in the field of career choice was also decisive. In the case of one of our interviewees, the teachers recommended her a carrier and corresponding higher education which resulted in her applying for the advised faculty. For our other interviewee, the picture is more complex, the instructors encouraged her enrol to higher education but have suggested an area that did not fit her long-term goals, so she chose another course. After making a decision, the teachers continued to support and agreed with her choice. In her case, it was also remarkable to what extent her teachers and family trusted in her success. We should also mention our next interviewee who did not want to enrol to higher education, but applied nevertheless for his teachers.

Self-evaluation is part of the internal motivation and so it also influences career choice. For one of our interviewees, this was the following:

"In primary school, I decided to go to college after graduation, because I wanted to prove that my learning difficulty did not affect me, and I did not want to get the "silly title". In secondary school, this decision was further strengthened by my community, I wanted to be intellectual, I did not want to get stuck at the level of others." (25-year-old woman, dyslexia)

Similarly, the case of our other interviewee:

"After school, I went to work as a labourer and I was doing the worst job. There I decided that I did not want to do this until the end of my life and because I successfully graduated, I thought I would try to enrol to higher education." (28-year-old man, dyslexia)

Before choosing their course, each of them considered their own skills and interests and tried to choose accordingly. Several of our subjects have reported that their perception of their own abilities has influenced their career choices. One of them wanted to be a doctor, but because of her hearing, she decided to find another but still similar career. Then she chose biology. She was disappointed with the training, but she still did the course. After getting her degree, she completed a massage training and started her own business. According to her, she found the profession closest to her original ideas, and she can enjoy it and do it successfully.

Our next interviewee wanted to apply for special education, but she did not think that she could be successful in getting into the course, so she chose social pedagogy. But regretted it later, and had always considered it as a missed opportunity.

Managing in the educational system

The following factors played a part in the interviewees' school life. Did the students ask for help from students / trainers / help organizations, if so, in what cases? Were they aware of the different forms of assistance and the opportunities available? Did they develop any strategies themselves to facilitate institutional life?

While for all of our interviewees, the different forms of help in primary and secondary school were a lot more easily accessible than in higher education.

Thus, it shows that there are differences in not only the use of concepts in the Higher Education and Public Education Act, and that the pupils concerned themselves find a lot of differences in their studies. Typically, interviewees most frequently asked for assistance from other students, with notes, book sharing or learning together for easier understanding or helping with the administration. In contrast, the students did not ask for help from the teachers, one of them reported to a single teacher of their own difficulties. Only two interviewees asked for assistance from a university-run organization, both for the purpose of acquiring a language exam, and one of them asked for permission to substitute a course. According to the respondents' comments, they had no information about who they could turn to and the opportunities they had for facilitating them. The information on how to substitute a subject was only found when the student had already been in a year behind, so the lack of information strongly held her back in her studies.

Typically, the interviewees did not have their own strategies to facilitate studies. Based on their statement, they were not prepared for the challenges of higher education, they found the amount and complexity of the curriculum a lot more difficult than what they were expecting. Three of the subjects increased the time spent on learning, while one of them tried to sit in front of every lesson to see and hear the lecture, and often relied on help from friends with their notes. There is also some connection between the development of the learning strategy and the love of learning, since students who, according to their own admission, did not like to learn did not attempt to change their learning methods, while those who sought to facilitate learning said that they have learned to like learning and would like to continue studying.

Period after completion of studies

As mentioned at the beginning of the analysis of the interviews, 3 of our respondents got their degree, one of them passed the final exam, but in the absence of a language exam, she did not get her degree, and two of them dropped out.

We also received relevant information from the interviewees about the period following the completion of their studies. During the interviews, they also talked about how motivated they are in getting a degree and if they already got it whether they got a job in that field or chose a different career or if they are planning to go back to study later in life.

Three of our respondents said that they were in line with their studies, but one of them wanted to change the course later, and they would like to learn a profession that is not related to their knowledge so far. One of them, after getting their bachelors, learned a new profession in the following academic year and started working in that field. In the case of our two dropped-out interviewees, they said that if they found a course that matches their interest and skills, they would be enrol to it.

Conclusion

Analyzing the interviews, we can see what are the important nodes in the family and career path factors that can affect the effectiveness and equal opportunities of students with disabilities. Summarizing the nodes, we can outline the following which can be used in the rest of the study.

In the question of the problem and the subsequent period, the most important nodes are the underlying circumstances of the problem and the circumstances under which the attitude of the environment to the studies and the success of the child has changed and whether the child has received the appropriate

development after recognition. Subsequently, it is important for students to be informed about their situation and what attitudes they experience.

In the dimension of motivation, it is worth examining how the family, friends and teachers affect the individual. In the case of career guidance, the student's environment may try to influence the student's decision with suggestions and, in such cases how much the individual's interest and abilities are taken into account. It is important, whether they motivate them even if they are not sure or if they would not apply in higher education. All this is linked to the path of the individual's inner motivations and how they value their abilities, how much they consider them to be a successful or limiting factor.

How the students are doing in different educational institutions can depend on requesting help from other students, educators, and helping organizations. In this case, an important factor is whether the individuals are aware of the available and requestable help. It is particularly prominent that the forms of assistance that have worked on previous educational spaces are less effective in higher education. As a result, pupils perceive being left with learning difficulties that have an impact on their learning outcomes and motivation. In addition to the forms of external assistance, the students also have a strategy for facilitating their own lives and their effectiveness, as well as their relationship to learning.

The most important of the nodes of the post-completion period are the extent of determination to complete their studies, if they have already completed their studies or have not been able to utilize their qualifications in the labour market. It is also important to see how their learning plans appear in their future plans.

So we got the following answers to our research questions:

We received the following answer to our first question. There are a number of elements in the practice of promoting equal opportunities for higher education that can help the pupils concerned with available services. However, their availability and efficiency is less effective than in public education, so there are significant obstacles to how students get access to information about helping services, who they can talk about their current difficulties, and who they can ask for help, but there are also significant differences in the professionals and teachers attitude about students with disabilities and their difficulties.

The answer to our second question is, therefore, that these difficulties have a particular impact on study success and motivation.

The answer to our third question is that the aspirations for equal opportunities in higher education have no effect on the career choices of the students concerned, because the interviews showed that the students had no prior information about what services they could use at the university and how these services could help their studies.

Further possibilities of research:

The topic can be studied from the point of view of disabled students, as well as from the perspective of co-ordinators and equal opportunities workers working in higher education, which can make the results of questioning students with disabilities more subtle:

- To examine the methods of the employees of higher education organizations that assist disabled students, their views on the effectiveness

of their work in the field of equal opportunities, and which types of disabilities are the cases, degrees and circumstances in which students can be granted the requested service, in which case the students most typically require assistance.

- For non-specific students, the purpose of the research is to investigate how information is accessed to equal opportunities for students with disabilities and how receptive they are for disabled students and how they think they can help disabled people

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