

Here or there, who do you trust? Patterns of social trust following the migration experience of Romanians in Spain and France

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ABSTRACT

This paper links the concept of social trust and that of migration by exploring the interactions and dependencies between Romanian emigrants and returnees and various institutional and social actors. Consequently, the underlying question of the research is: 'What are the ways in which migration experience is associated with social trust?'. This research discusses how experiences with public agencies in Romania or in the host country determine trust or conversely, induce the feeling of distrust. Common specific elements were taken into account, such as determinants and effects of trust, life experience as immigrants, level of integration, and level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with public entities, which linked empirically the two concepts. Drawing on a set of interviews with Romanian emigrants and Romanian returnees¹, this research tackles the peculiarities of emigrants' and returnees' experiences as key factors in identifying the levels of social trust.

Introduction

Trust as a leitmotif of the relationship between individuals and society is an old and frequent topic of debate for many contributors that linked trust to

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what is good and value for individuals, communities, and societies. Seen as an ideal or a blessing in the context of the diversity within a community, trust can determine openness to accept interaction with people who are different from us (Bădescu & Uslaner 2004). Being different from the beginning, migrants can have less trust in the authorities or in other people (Bădescu 2004) because their trust is closely related to their own status changes within the migration experiences (Bădescu & Sum 2014). The first generation of Romanian migrants left the borders before Romania joined the European Union and the reason for leaving that prevailed then was to find better jobs. This phenomenon, known as labor migration, had as consequences different problems, including the illegality of staying and working in a foreign country. The black labor market has increased the vulnerability among them, and if perceived diversity, perceived hostility, severe problems, and illegal status are high, the generalized trust decreases (Bădescu & Sum 2014, 17). Another important aspect to mention is the typical mistrust in former communist states especially in public authorities that appears in different contexts, including the state's concern for family members left at home (Hossu et al. 2023).

On the other hand, migrants' trust is determined by social networks, community, and interaction with the other members through sociability (Ciobanu & Elrick 2009). Citizens of a state with a former communist regime that had harmful effects on trust, Romanians across borders tend to be gathered in trust networks in specific social, geographic, and economic niches (Markley 2011). In Spain and France, migration networks have long been brought into the research debate regarding Romanians across the borders (Anghel et al. 2016). The communities of Romanians in the two states are still strongly extended. The last INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*) data on population by country of birth, shows a number of 539.418 Romanians in

Spain². In France, according to national data of INSEE in 2019 (*L'Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques*), 133.000 Romanian immigrants³ live in the territory.

The migration experience and the life course between homeland and a foreign country has strong effects on the entire package of values, attitudes and habits of individuals. Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) argue that the trajectory of migrants' ideas and practices is a back-and-forth process of strong influences both from the country of origin and towards the host country. They can bring from home resources, motivations to enter the new political system, interactions with institutions, political or public practices, abilities to take advantage of opportunities (Hochschild & Mollenkopf 2009).

Trust can also be felt differently depending on the perceptual transfer between the country of emigration and the country where migrants settle. They decide whether other nations deserve to be trusted or not according to different economic, political, and cultural factors (Kleiner 2016).

Based on these assumptions and on 29 in-depth interviews with Romanians with migration experience in France or Spain, this article associates the concept of trust with the exposure of Romanian emigrants to different contexts that include institutions, public services, or various social actors. During the interviews, I asked the respondents to talk freely about their migration experience, to compare the public services in Romania with the two countries of destination and to evaluate the level of trust directly influenced by these contexts.

² Spanish National Statistics Institute, Población (españoles/extranjeros) por País de Nacimiento, sexo y año, <https://www.ine.es/jaxi/Datos.htm?path=/t20/e245/p08/10/&file=01006.px>

³ French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, Répartition des immigrés par pays de naissance détaillé d'Europe, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6478089?sommaire=6478362>

First, I will review the major analytical aspects of this article's specific focus on social trust. The next section describes the data collected and the methods. In the analysis, I will follow the comparative perspectives of Romanian emigrants and returnees on their interaction with public agencies for work, health, or education and their assessment of the political system and corruption, as determining pillars of trust or distrust feelings.

Literature review

The concept of trust has been approached most of the time at a micro level, more specifically in studies about individual-level behaviors (Mayer et al. 1995; Rousseau et al. 1998; Offe 1999;). Later, 'trust' was associated with community and society (Farell & Knight 2003; Newton et al. 2018), making its way into other academic fields such as sociology (Zmerli & Newton 2007), politics (Mishler & Rose 2001) and economy (Kotzian 2010), with important effects on individuals, groups or society as a whole.

For Markley (2011), the transnational space is based on interpersonal trust, expanding on solidarity 'between people at the origins and destinations of migration.' During their migratory journey, individuals can feel both particular and generalized trust, a typology proposed by Newton (2001) who classified trust according to groups: 'ingroup trust' which refers to the trust shared with close family members or friends, and 'outgroups-trust' as trust granted as a common value in a society. Generalized trust has two main foundations that have to be mentioned: 'experience-based trust' and 'moralistic trust'. Experience-based- trust is explained through responses to how others have treated you and also, on the interactions between you and others that are part of your network or members of the organizations you get

involved in. Moralistic trust can be developed between you and strangers, people who may not be like you and it cannot depend on your perceptions of people you know as in experience based-trust foundation. From this perspective, individuals' interactions with different actors generate 'moralistic trust', a source of cooperation between people, support for rules of reciprocity, tolerance, and civic morality (Letki 2006).

Determinants of trust

Literature on trust proposes a large list of factors that contribute to increasing its levels. In this article, important sources of trust are considered, such as political and institutional factors, economic factors, and socio-demographic factors.

Political and institutional factors

The culture of political trust in the host country defines how immigrants build their trust in institutions through exposure, sharing the same values of trust and interaction with citizens who trust the government or institutions of that country (Voicu & Tufiş 2015, 13). The political past and the context of the difficult transition from communism to democracy in Romania made the level of trust low. With the adoption of a liberal regime, the new government did not increase the public trust, nor gain the support of the population because of the faulty economy, inequality, and corruption (Bădescu & Uslaner 2004). The Romanians went to the West, where corruption is relatively low, and 'people see their societies as honest and therefore trust each other and their governments' (Bădescu & Uslaner 2004, 2). Moreover, the lack of trust is associated with the general belief that institutions are incapable of being against or fighting corruption in a state (Dragoman 2006) and Romania has

been facing the problem of corruption for many years, civil society reacting even with massive protests like those of 2017-2018.

Citizens' perceptions on government performance can favor or not their trust feelings. According to Davenport et al. (2007), political factors influence trust through the expectations and attitudes of citizens on state-owned institutions. If the government through its institutions and actions positively influences the attitudes of citizens, then the support offered will be a positive one. Institutions that do not perform satisfactorily for individuals' tasks, tend to be untrustworthy (Rothstein 2000; Hardin 2001), and individuals' valuation will be negative for low responsiveness, too (Bruning et al. 2008). Another important approach belongs to Bianco (1994) who showed people that feel represented by institutions tend to have confidence in them because trust 'links ordinary citizens to institutions that are intended to represent them'. Citizens' trust in public institutions also reflects their political integration in a society (Tillie 2004) and migrants' political trust is perceived as a precondition for their integration in the host country (André 2013).

Another important clear correlation between institutions and trust was confirmed by Möllering (2005, 26). He claimed that institutions are a basis for trust between actors and they imply a high degree of taken-for-grantedness which enables shared expectations even between actors who have no mutual experience or history of interaction'.

Economic factors

According to Kotzian (2010), economic performance is one of the most important sources of trust. There are studies that show that economic performance is related to the performance of institutions which is considered

another determinant of trust. Low economic performance can affect the confidence in institutions (Bowler & Karp 2004). Good economic performance of a regime can provide political support and legitimacy for that system (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2000) and also, specific support that later turns into diffuse support (Lu et al. 2016). Institutional performance is considered one of the generalized trust sources, being noticed by strong evidence regarding the effect of 'good government' on its levels (Delhey & Newton 2005).

Beyond the discussion of economic aspects in an institutional context, the environment of the destination country has a significant impact on migrants' trust because, according to the experiential perspective, it changes depending on what we face in different contexts (Dinesen 2012). If the social environment is characterized by high national trust, this has positive effects on well-being and life satisfaction (Helliwell 2003). Moreover, the level of social equality and living standards are key points of reference in the analysis of trust. If in a state income create great inequality, this can cause conflicts and decrease the level of trust between people (Kwon 2019). Conflicts can also arise in the context of economic fears, and worries that when in some communities there are minority groups such as those of migrants, the economy can suffer (Ciobanu & Escandell 2010).

As previously mentioned, socioeconomic status has important effects on trust. For Romanians, the pressures of living conditions, the unemployment rate, or the loss of jobs were important reasons to leave the country (Anghel et al. 2016), their social and economic position is strongly affected, an issue that predicts a lack of trust.

Socio-demographic factors

A lot of socio-demographic factors such as education, profession, religion, nationality, or language influence trust. In the study of the determinants of interpersonal trust, there is the theory focused on individual characteristics that include both personality traits and demographic and social aspects (Kwon 2019).

Contributors showed that trust is highest among good educated individuals (Glanville & Paxton 2007) or those that are employed, with high income (Alesina & Ferrera 2002). Also, trust is lowest among divorced individuals (Pettersen 1999), those who don't have a job, ethnic minorities groups with a history of discrimination (Alesina & Ferrera 2000), or those with weaker health. According to Uslaner (2004), young people trust people of the same age, rather than strangers of different ages.

Data and methods

This article is based on a set of 29 interviews conducted during two field research trips in Paris, France (2021) and the Valencian region, Spain (2023). The data was collected as part of my PhD research on political behavior dynamics following a migration experience in the two states. The most important point of reference in the selection criteria of the interviewees was a stay of at least 6 months in France or Spain. Therefore, I have also included a series of face-to-face and online interviews with returnees in Romania.

I selected Spain and France as countries of current or former residence because migratory flows are abundant in both countries, but differ according to various contextual, economic, and social particularities. If, for example, in Spain, the labour migration started in the 90s and only in 2004 the Spanish

National Institute of Statistics includes Romanians as the country's main emigrants (Sandu 2009), in France, through the brain drain, the flow began to expand with Romania's entry into the EU in 2007 (Séchet & Vasilcu 2015; Stanciu & Toma 2020). The two countries also differ depending on the welfare policies granted to immigrants, societal attitudes, culture and demographic diversity.

Official data from Romania indicate a considerable increase in Romanian migrants from Spain and France. According to INSSE (National Institute of Statistics) statistics, from 2008 to 2021, the average number of Romanians leaving for Spain was almost 32,600 people per year, with the largest number of temporary emigrants registering in 2008. In France, in the same reference period, the average number of Romanian emigrants per year was approximately 4100, in 2009 the highest share of 7576 people.

With the increase in the number of Romanians in the two countries of reference, the social networks, but also the organizations were strengthened. The Embassy of Romania in the Kingdom of Spain centralizes the list of associations from the territory of the country, and according to the last update, there are over 130 associations, of which 21 are in the Valencia area where the empirical data was collected.

As for France, more than 50 Romanian associations and organizations are active in the country, according to the data of the Romanian Embassy in the French Republic. Among them, the Romanian School in Paris stands out, initiated in 2015 for the purpose of the participation of Romanian children from the capital and its surroundings to acquire linguistic knowledge or about the culture and traditions of Romania. Activism through associations influences the level of trust because, as we have seen in the literature, the tendency to trust people with the same objectives, values, principles, and

common goals is greater than trust in minority groups, for example. Moreover, association members are much more likely to express their social trust or actively participate in politics (Putnam 2000).

The institutional capacities in the two states prevail in the context of the integration of Romanians through policies and services. In the case of Spain, local self-government strongly influences integration, and the authorities having a series of sectoral competences in the field of health, education, social employment policies, social services, etc. (Mera 2015). Moreover, living in Spain, and being exposed to integration into society, Romanians state that the welfare state is generous, offering higher unemployment allowances or aid for those with low incomes (Bertelli et al. 2021, 21).

In France, before 2007, the monitoring and limitation of emigration prevailed, then, between 2007-2014, the authorities reduced the restrictions due to the lack of employment on the labor market (Vasile, Bunduchi & Ciuhu 2019, 1147). If in Spain local authorities, social groups/networks, the church or associations predominate in the integration process, in France the integration is rather individual by withdrawing from the group of Romanians and trying to belong to the indigenous group (Matichescu 2010, 630). However, the 'comfort' of the stay and the integration are mentioned in the empirical data by the Romanians as impact factors on the trust in the institutional context.

The main object of this article is to link the individualized experience of migration with the feeling of trust, an association that requires careful attention to the depth of individuals' beliefs emerged from the exposure in different social contexts. Consequently, the underlying question of the research is: 'What are the ways in which migration experience is associated

with social trust?'. Research studies on the concept of trust have been to a large extent quantitatively approached especially due to the social indicators collected by the World Values Survey. Literature that addresses qualitative research methods provides many advantages about using in-depth interviews as good practice. It is considered one of the most efficient methods of collecting data because the answers of respondents can be fully explored by factors such as: opinions, beliefs, feelings, reason, etc. (Keegan et al. 2003).

Most of the interviews lasted an hour, but there were some shorter ones (no less than 40 minutes) and others that exceeded two hours. The interviews were transcribed in Romanian and translated in English. I followed a semi-structured guide composed of three major thematic sections: migration experience, political behavior (views on the public system, political parties, corruption, contact with institutions), and the experience of voting abroad. For this article, the focus will be on the first two sections by identifying the common elements between migration and trust.

During the interviews conducted, there were collected other important data such as level of integration at the time of the interview (language learning, finding a job, relationship with public authorities, acquisition of citizenship, etc.), participation or absence in voting for the elections in the home country, socio-demographic aspects (age, educational level, working experience in Romania and abroad, living conditions, incomes, family composition, etc.). Table 1 presents the demographic background of the interviewees including data on education, age, gender, and migration trajectory quantified in years of French or Spanish residence.

I reached the respondents through my own network of acquaintances from the two countries, and then through snowball sampling the group of respondents expanded. The interviewees gave their consent for the

discussions to be recorded and I made every effort to protect their rights, ensuring their anonymity by coding their names.

Table 1. *Overview of interviewees*

Nr.crt.	Code name	Gender	Age	Education	Migration experience
Emigrants					
1	Alex	M	42	higher education	18 years - France
2	Alin	M	57	medium education	21 years- Spain
3	Anastasia	F	54	medium education	20 years- Spain
4	Andreea	F	59	higher education	23 years- Spain
5	Camelia	F	33	higher education	8 years - France
6	Carmen	F	26	higher education	5 years- Frane
7	Corina	F	26	higher education	7 years- France
8	Daria	F	46	higher education	20 years- Spain
9	Gabriela	F	25	higher education	7 years- France
10	Ioan	M	25	higher education	2 years - England 3 years- France 1 year- Germany
11	Ioan	M	46	higher education	20 years- Spain
12	Lorena	F	54	medium education	16 years- Spain
13	Marius	M	20	medium education	15 years- Spain 2 years- France
14	Mia	F	24	higher education	1 year and a half France
15	Mirela	F	25	higher education	6 years in France 1 year Netherlands 1 year Belgium
16	Radu	M	45	higher education	17 years- France
17	Raluca	F	21	higher education	3 years- France
18	Sebastian	M	44	medium education	14 years - Spain 2 years - France
19	Silvia	F	66	medium education	23 years- Spain
20	Simona	F	25	higher education	6 years- France
21	Sorina	F	30	higher education	1 year- France
Returnees					
22	Alexandra	F	25	higher education	2 years- France
23	Ana	F	39	higher education	8 months- France
24	Cristina	F	40	medium education	17 years- Spain
25	Denisa	F	30	higher education	9 years- France
26	George	M	46	higher education	16 years- Spain
27	Ioana	F	39	higher education	12 years- Spain
28	Larisa	F	34	higher education	6 years- France
29	Maria	F	38	higher education	18 years- Spain

Findings

In this article, I analyzed patterns of trust of Romanian emigrants and returnees depending on their migration story in Spain or France. The analysis focuses on particular factors of social relations between individuals and the state, comparative perceptions on the systems in Romania and the two countries of destination. Closely linked to important attributes of migration, both trust and distrust have some typical factors of growing or decreasing levels.

Migration experience

For Alesina & La Ferrara (2000) three factors that reduce trust are: (1) a recent history of traumatic experiences; (2) being economically unsuccessful in terms of income and education; (3) living in a community with a high degree of income disparity.

Among the interviewees there were people who strongly stated that they had traumatic experiences in Romania which made them feel disappointed, insecure either they or members of their family. Disappointment feelings with the system in home country can also vary for returnees depending on the experiences they had as immigrants. If they were satisfied in the host country, when returning to the system problems back home, it can trigger a return to disappointment or its amplification and this can lead to distrust feelings.

To my shame, I would never return to Romania to live (...) honestly I can't and I wouldn't. I experienced some very traumatic experiences with the hospital and with the medical side, people die in Romania. What I saw from these two points, I said that I would never return to live there. (male, worker, France)

Maria, who returned from Spain to Romania for a while before returning definitely, because of her child's desire to be close to his family in the country, tells about the disappointment in the education system that her son went through:

In 2016, he was in 5th grade and his integration at school in Romania was not what he expected. To be honest, I was also disappointed by the system and the parents' education towards children of his age. He suffered a kind of bullying. And the teaching staff did not get involved in this matter (...).(female, returned migrant worker, France)

Denisa returned to Romania after 9 years in France, where she gave birth to her two children. She interacted directly with the French medical system, and although she has no plans to return to his former host country, she regrets that she does not have the same benefits in the medical system in Romania compared to France:

I think the biggest regret I have for returning from France is the medical system. Since I came back to Romania, I am really sick of the medical system here. Every time I had tangents it was a nightmare. From this point of view, I have all the respect for France. I regret that I no longer have the same pediatrician for my children. (female, returned migrant worker, France)

Taking a retrospective look at the reasons why the Romanian diaspora has expanded considerably in the last 20 years, we can say without any doubt that the main incentives for leaving were the results of the economic shortcomings and dysfunctions of the Romanian system (Bygnes & Flipo 2017).

Romanians left in order to find a job that would offer them sufficient economic remuneration for a better life which brings a higher level of trust as previously mentioned.. For example, Sebastian went to Spain before Romania

joined the European Union and initially he worked illegally but he had to in order to support himself:

I left for Spain in 2005. I left because I had no job in Romania. I was earning, but there was little money and I couldn't support myself or my family. (male, worker, Spain & France)

After a 17-year stay in Spain, Cristina decided together with her husband to return to Romania because they had managed to get a house:

Immediately after the marriage I went to Spain. I gave birth to two girls there. We returned, we enrolled the girls in school in Romania. They integrated very well. It is fine. When you've worked and you made it, you have a house to live in and you don't have to fight to build your house, you can live in Romania, too. (female, returned migrant worker, Spain)

Contact with public institutions

An important aspect of institutional trust is institutional performance or system improving. There were contributors who claimed that institutional trust is a consequence, not a cause of institutional performance (Rothstein & Stolle 2002). Institutional performance is rational based, as a cause for institutional trust and untrustworthy institutions as a cause for skepticism and distrust, but cultural influences are important in institutional trust (Mishler & Rose 2001).

A decision factor for leaving Romania was the dissatisfaction with the public services and political system. Experiences with poor performance of institutions could be a factor of distrust and a desire to find a better institutional performance and a system improving abroad (Baudassé et al. 2016). Among the interviewees, a good part are people who went to study in the two states, considering that the educational system is different in a

positive sense. For example, the context of migration for both Sorina and Corina was going to study in France. Besides frustration with the educational system in Romania, comparing the interaction with institutions between the two countries, both girls have a negative opinion about institutional contact:

God forbid that I have contact with the institutions in Romania. I get angry every time. (female, worker, France)

It seems to me that the system is not so corrupt in France. (...) I am sometimes disgusted by what is happening in Romania. (...) It often happens to me that I don't feel free in Romania. It seems to me that this is how the system is made, as if someone wants to prove everything. (...) As if the roots of the system are rotten. (female, worker, France)

Gabriela also migrated to study law in France because she wanted to study in a less corrupt system than in Romania.

We have all heard of cases of corruption, we all know that you get somewhere if you know someone, if you have a relationship or a connection, if you know the right person at the right time. (female, worker, France)

For George, who worked as an Orthodox priest for a community in Spain and at the same time in agriculture, the relationship with the institutions in the country of destination was very good, a factor that can determine trust. He also stated that access to services in Spain is granted equally to everyone. Nannestad (2008) claims that universal welfare states are high-trust countries and people contribute because they trust that others, without abusing the system, will do the same.

The relationship with the Spanish authorities was very good, sincere and it never happened that I asked for something and was refused. On the contrary. When I used to go to the town hall, I never found a line of people there. There was a lady at the entrance, she had a perpetual table full of documents and if you made a request,

she listened to you nicely, and until you submitted the request you had a room like a bar, for waiting. A coffee, water, juice, a cake, whatever you want. (male, returned migrant worker, Spain)

Direct trust assessments

I asked the interviewees to compare their own level of trust between the system in Romania, as the country of origin, and the systems in the two destination countries, France and Spain. Most of the statements confirm a considerably low level of authorities, social services or governance in Romania. Surprisingly, this does not determine an absolute level of trust in the same entities in France or Spain, but a relatively better one.

Ana met her husband, a French citizen, during her stay in Paris and later they moved together in Romania. She did not leave Romania because she was dissatisfied with the institutions, arguing that the French are also dissatisfied with their institutions, but she wanted a new experience.

I don't have much trust either in some or in others, but it is true that I tend to have more trust in the French state because somehow society is looking for them much more. It seems to me that in Romania the institutions can do what they want because there is no real civic spirit, but in France there is and then the institutions do not become better because they want to but because they are very much "held accountable" by civil society . (..) I am clearly leaning towards France a little more. (female, returned student, France)

Mirela studied in France and had various contacts with state institutions, being involved in internships. She claims that it is also difficult in France to get a job in a public institution because it is offered if you have someone in your family who works in public service or in your own networks.

I think that in Romania, in general, people do not necessarily trust public institutions. In France it seems to me that it is a little different. People somehow still trust the institutions, but the difference is quite small (...) because even here people are dissatisfied with what is happening. (female, worker, France)

Carmen went to France for her master's studies, but she also worked for a while in Romania. She believes that France offers better career opportunities, and the studies completed in Romania would not have fit her in a specific job.

Unfortunately, I can say that I have more confidence in France. The people who work in the public system in France are more capable. (...) You must have some education. (...) I mean, at least that's what I feel when I go and talk to someone in France versus Romania where they actually yell at me for no reason. (female, worker, France)

Discussion

"Trust is essentially a matter of expectations and experience" (Mitruț, Șerban & Vasilache 2013, 11). The trust patterns of Romanians with migration experience in Spain or France are closely related to three major specific features: reasons for leaving Romania, contact with the Romanian, French or Spanish institutional environment, and individual characteristics in their migration story. The prominence of mistrust is the empirical result of comparative perspectives on the various social contexts to which migrants have been exposed. Evaluating satisfaction with institutions and systems is another pillar for determining trust models. Distrust in the "public" of Romania does not determine absolute trust in the country of destination, but a finer attention to the connection between civil society and state institutions.

This article sought to associate social trust with migration. I have selected important determinants of trust and, contrarily, of distrust, but there are some considerations on the limits of this research that must be mentioned. First of all, social trust has two main constitutive components, namely interpersonal trust and institutional trust. The interview guide did not include specific questions on trust in others or in the community (interpersonal trust), but was focused on institutional trust. However, interpersonal trust includes the society-based theory that explains trust through various national factors or social circumstances (Kwon 2019). Thus, in this study, there is a fine line of differentiation between interpersonal trust based on society theory and institutional trust that would require the collection of more empirical data for a better understanding.

Secondly, the interviewees, although diverse in terms of profession, age, and gender, most have higher education and this gives them great discernment regarding the quality of trust evaluation, especially in public authorities. It is acutely necessary to take into account the expansion of the sample on migrant people with secondary education or no education given the fact that the Romanian diaspora is strongly characterized by these two aspects.

I conclude by saying that migration experience is a strong associate of trust. In the light of empirical evidence presented, migrants preserve their trust depending on the satisfaction of the services received or vice versa, they materialize their mistrust through disappointment in institutional performance or worse, through exposure to various critical situations of dissatisfaction.

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