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Global Cities in the New Global Landscape

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How has globalization shifted the role of cities in the political and economic spheres?

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What impact has the increasingly multi-level system had on politics, the media, and communities?

Cities always played a significant political role in human history. There were times when cities were actually the dominant layer in politics—in ancient Greece; in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; between 1250 and 1600 in northern Europe (the *Hanse*); and since 2008, when a majority of people was living in cities, and global city regions emerged as a new category of global politics. Despite this record of city resilience, most theories of international politics were firmly state-centered. But in the last twenty-five years, this has changed. Cities are now a manifestation of a new category of players in global politics.

Twenty-five years after the end of the East-West conflict, the international landscape has changed almost beyond recognition. Globalization was and is driven mainly by hundreds of millions of agents, looking for their economic advantages. The aggregate results of their actions have weakened the state's role—and not only of particular states, but of the state as an institution.[1]

To achieve this, they devise new technologies and new tools for capital markets (like securitization and high-frequency trading). Related phenomena are the commodification of ever-more assets, including time and space, accelerated processes and procedures, game-changing financial assessments of private rating agencies, the increasing flexibility of labor markets, shifting demographics, and the shortening of time horizons, leading to ever-more inconsistencies of political actors' moves.

These major shifts of the last twenty-five years will continue to develop in the foreseeable future. Given the relative weakening of national governments and eroding state sovereignty, it may be wise to invest much more effort in exploring non-global and non-national groups of actors and their interests and game plans. One important feature of this new landscape of global politics is the enhanced role of city regions, particularly of those who actively try to connect with major flows of capital and content, of resources and people. This group of cities will be addressed as Globalizing City Regions (GCR).

This Issue Brief addresses the major shifts in global politics and briefly outlines the role GCRs are playing in this new environment.

Less Stability

The Cold War system, as it was known between 1948 and 1989, was often, and rightly so, understood as harboring serious risks in the realm of security. The ongoing arms race and the inherent and unsolvable security dilemma created a latent feeling of uncertainty. Since 1989, the level of (real and perceived) stability has decreased, despite the fact that there are more conflicts (at least when we include non-state-to-state ones). We have less governability and there are fewer certainties. Rather, the range and number of more colorful and complex conflicts has increased, including asymmetrical ones between state and non-state actors.

The core reason for the growing volatility of stability is that with the end of the Cold War, the underlying bipolar structure has disappeared as well. Bipolar systems are notorious for being relatively stable, whereas unipolar systems can be either stable (with a "benign hegemony"), or unstable (with a short-sighted hegemony), while multi-polar structures tend to be unstable. The latter situation has been defining the global structure since 1989, as was predicted by only a few observers, like the Chicago-based political scientist John Mearsheimer.[2]

Today, many global citizens are no longer able to make sense of what is going on beyond their immediate local context. It seems that there are too many actors (state and non-state), too many cleavages, and not enough rules and institutions to effectively manage this kind of post Cold War (dis)order.[3] Also, this new constellation is difficult to describe even for specialists, let alone for the men and women on the streets and at home. There is no simple explanatory narrative strong enough to become dominant and to cover what is happening worldwide. There are plenty of stereotypes and conspiracies, but these tend to have a limited reach.

Traces of these new identity-related challenges can also be found on the ground, particularly in GCRs. Diasporas and migrant communities are often exposed to cultural debates, and, sometimes, clashes. Recent examples from India, China, Russia, African cities, southern and central France, eastern Germany, and southern Italy point in this direction. Challenged identities are increasingly a problem for political stability—both in terms of individuals, and of collective groups.[4]

Whatever will happen to those competing discourses, the reliability, predictability, and relative stability of the second half of the twentieth century is gone for good. The task today is to cope with disorder and fragmentation. One important element emerging from this fragmented picture is the category of global city regions. These cities are both the place for competing interests and narrative and identities, and also the site for testing new solutions and coalitions.[5]

The Westphalian System and Its Gradual Erosion

Many of the dominant approaches still focus on "international politics," not on "global politics." Their advocates view the state as the basic political entity. Since 1648, when the Westphalian Peace made an end to the Thirty Year War, the macro-configuration of the international system was relatively stable. This configuration rested on the existence of nation states bound to their respective territories. Only these entities were entitled to act as international players. The core principles of this system were (internal and external) sovereignty, a monopoly of the power apparatus, and a clear division between domestic and external affairs, indicated by the existence of visibly delineated borders.

Survival was the core national interest, superseding all other issues. Domestic configurations, structures, and interests were irrelevant—and cities not much more than lower-level administrative agents. Federal governments as city administrations were perceived and portrayed as executing interests of black boxes, whose internal organization was irrelevant.

This way of thinking was challenged after the Second World War by institutionalists and by liberals. The first group argues that cooperation between governments can, and actually does, happen (see the European Union), and that domestic structures do matter a lot. Liberals and pluralists analyze domestic interests and structures to figure out how they influence, shape, or even capture governments.

The advent of constructivist thinking (the spectrum is too broad and diverse to be called a "school") introduced non-positivist assumptions, according to which reality is not exogenously given, but is influenced by actors trying to make sense of it. This means that observers, including researchers, are not neutral bystanders, but that they actively shape what they try to understand. This happens, mostly, by communication via oral and written texts. To understand the (often) hidden or "real" meaning of these texts, they have to be de-constructed.

Communication is crucial.

Most of these macro-approaches are in trouble when their main object of research, the state and its behavior, is weakened or becoming less relevant. This is precisely what we are facing right now.[6]

In this regard, a disturbing development is the emergence of flows. Flows, by their very nature, are floating. They neither know, nor care, about borders. There are more traditional flows, like those of goods and services. But even here, both types are today handled in a completely different way, compared to 100, 50, or 20 years ago—one may think about revolutions in logistics and transport, the emergence of 3D printing, the virtual-

ization of homes, and the increasing flexibility of labor markets. Cities, particularly gateway, border, and port cities, play (again) a major role here.

The same goes for flows of people, i.e., migration. Here we are observing the merger of old and new types of flows, domestic and transnational. They are today less induced by push and pull factors, but by the existence of networks, and by strategic decisions of families and clans (new economics of migration).

Worldwide, there are more refugees than ever. Southern Europe is the target area for hundreds of thousands of people coming from Africa. The Mediterranean, as well as the South China Seas, are sites for mass human tragedies organized by human traffickers. And there is labor migration, from permanent to temporary and unskilled to skilled, and also a new type of circular permanent migration. All different categories of migrants are very much moving from and, even more so, toward cities, rather than nations. More often than not, their destination is not a concrete country, but an imagined city.

The flows that are probably most crucial today are those of capital and of content. There are very different categories of capital flows—credits (state to state, international organizations to state, banks to state and reverse), portfolio investment, foreign direct investment (FDI), remittances, and others.

Important actors in this regard are GCRs, whose relative standing is very much co-determined by their influence on capital markets. The competition between major exchanges (like in New York, London, Frankfurt, Bombay, Shanghai, etc.) drives part of the flows, and they also drive their host locations, GCRs, toward global roles. In Europe, the re-thinking of the value of the United Kingdom in the EU is much driven by the City of London's interests.

The other form of flows is content-related. Here, we have basically two groups. The first pertains to the provision of information, with the Internet, intranets, and databanks as the prime forms of delivery and storage. The size of these flows today is immense.[7] The second group of content flows is related to entertainment—including movies, music, and TV productions. These content flows are ever-more relevant for transnational politics. They offer images, visions, patterns of life, and consumption of brands and "cool behavior." They have a major impact on people. They do not make peoples' appearance and behavior uniform, but induce them to digest images against the background of their respective cultural legacies. This process of adaptation, called indigenization, may produce major ruptures of identities.

Cities are core sites for originating such flows.[8] Bollywood is a metaphor for generating movies. The Silicon Valley area, stretching from San Francisco to San Jose, is a haven for IT innovation, most of that materializing as flows. Old and new financial centers, being transformed in nodes and hubs for capital flows, are located in cities as their material base.

So different types of flows are partly space-related. They need to be processed and re-processed. They are attracted by hubs and nodes. Among the most crucial points of attraction are cities—particularly GCRs. Together with trans-national companies' (TNCs) headquarters and representative offices, GCRs are the points where flows reemerge and touch ground, even if only for a short period of time. Cities also provide the background of stories, pictures, and visions. Cities are the fabric of postmodern local and global narratives. They are the sites of links and ruptures, of communities and disjunctures.

Ever More Actors

The preceding reflections already hint at the fact that many more actors than just states and governments shape global politics today. In an attempt to structure this widened actor spectrum, four groups of actors can be singled out: state-related, market-related, society-related, and international actors. According to another classification, one also can identify supranational, national, and sub-national groups of actors. Cities and GCRs belong to the latter grouping.

Governments, sub-national administrative entities (states, provinces, regions, districts), cities (both megacities and globalizing city regions), and sovereign wealth funds, to name just the most important entities, belong to the category of state-related actors. Be aware these are not unitary actors, either.

International organizations (UN, EU, Shanghai Organization, CIS, WTO, World Bank IMF, G7, G20, Iran 6, Korea 6, etc.) constitute their own group, with different degrees of effectiveness and legitimacy.

In the market-related group, we can locate transnational companies, rating agencies, law firms, media, legal and illegal entrepreneurs, lobby organizations, etc., who are all participating in and co-shaping global politics. They tend to locate themselves in globalizing city regions. GCRs are, by definition, places attracting these other organizations to generate the critical mass for a place functioning as a node or hub for global flows.

Then, there are societal actors like NGOs, virtual social networks (like Facebook), terror organizations, churches and religious communities, individuals, the media, and others, who are actively involved in transnational and global games.

To some extent, cities in general and GCRs in particular can be considered as political and social units per se—without presenting themselves as unitary actors. They provide both spaces as places and spaces as scapes, thereby connecting not only flows with actors, but also various types of territoriality.

The concept of scapes tries to offer a conceptual solution to the fact that multiple places and identities are required for identifying where some individual, group, or event is "located."

GCRs are indicative here, in particular, in connection with headquarters and representative offices of transnational companies. GCRs offer a mixture of "real" and virtual places, of ruptures and disjunctures, of attraction and rejection, of "Imagineering" and shifting identities.

Multilevel Games and Rules

The term "multilevel game" was coined for describing and understanding the political workings in the EU. Here we can see that governments and other actors pursue their interests simultaneously on at least three different levels: (1) The national level, where the rules of government are set and/or coalitions between parties are formed; (2) the EU level, where the Council of Ministers, the Commission, and the European Parliament convene and make decisions; and (3) the sub-national/domestic level, where consensus has to be built and maintained among domestic actors and (potential) veto players.[9]

No energy policy initiative, nor move on subsidies for agriculture, nor changes of oversight over banks, nor new sets of rules how to address refugees, nor new approaches to euro zone problems can be imagined and engineered without having some support on the domestic front(s), including, and not in the last instance, the media, and GCRs.

All these actors are permanently trying to influence each other, to build coalitions, to shape rules, and to enlarge and protect their constituencies. Governments remain powerful actors, but they are now far from effectively dominating the crowded playgrounds of global politics.

Politicians have to carefully fine-tune and target their policies to the audiences on each level. They have to calibrate and re-calibrate their messages accordingly. It goes without saying that this produces linkages, side-payments, contradictions, and opposition. However, it is unrealistic to assume that voters cast their votes with these policies, layers, and dimensions in mind. Rather, voters tend to withdraw from the increasing degrees of complexity. They do not reward candidates with complex agendas, but those who express can-do mentalities, and who frame issues in a black-white way.

Accordingly, city-based elites also have to learn how to act on different levels of action simultaneously. By reaching out beyond the borders of their communities and municipalities, they have to take regional, national, and even global interests into account and connect them to their own agendas. That turns out to be difficult in concrete terms: Is an application for hosting a huge sports event useful or detrimental for a city, or, to be more precise: Which groups and stakeholders in a city will profit, or suffer from such a move?

Ad-Hocism: A New Political Style

Allegedly, there were times when politicians enjoyed the luxury of being able to address just one or two problems at a moment. Time horizons were relatively long, the number of TV stations to take care of was limited, and the number of political parties and other actors was manageable.

But in the last three or so decades, we see significant shifts and problematic moves affecting politics, and not only on the state level. There are five interrelated reasons for why the traditional, rather sequenced order of doing politics has changed fundamentally: growing complexities; information overload; growing media involvement; more frequent election cycles; and uneven acceleration. Taken together, this produces shorter time horizons and fragmented policy styles. This can be observed at the level of national politics, as well as on the supra- or subnational levels.

Growing Complexities: The number of domestic and international issues to be taken care of in a country like Germany or the U.S. used to be limited. There were one or two "big" issues in a decade to be taken care of, and about one per month of a

lesser magnitude. Decision-makers could address those and, otherwise, try to keep the boat floating.

Today, in a globalizing and, in many regards, already globalized world, there are not just one or two items on the "domestic" and "international" agenda. To start with, these formerly rather separate spheres are increasingly merged.

In a country like Germany, all kinds of European issues are quite dominant. In addition, regional questions figure prominently— proliferation issues, especially regarding Iran and the Broader Middle East in general; the apparently eternal and irresolvable Near East conflict; the emergence of caliphates in the MENA region; a growing number of failing or failed states (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya); the issue of a stuck modernization domestically, and its external repercussions in the Russian Federation; the management of the gradual decline of the United States in geopolitical terms; the future role of China; nervous moves in the East and South China Seas; waves of refugees and labor migrants coming to Europe, while others seek refuge in the Bay of Bengal; an unbalanced

euro zone; pandemics; pirates; hostage-takers; climate change; to name only some.

And there is, of course, a plethora of domestic issues: a demographic trend that causes concern for labor markets and the stability of social security systems; educational institutions in urgent need of reform; an unclear new balance of federal and regional roles in the national constitutional and pan-European configuration; a cumbersome tax system; an awkward health sector; security concerns; and much more.

Much of this also can be found on the level of GCRs administrations, either as fall-out, or as something happening there directly. Depending on location, the effects of climate change have to be addressed. Terrorists could (and do) hit and attack. The global financial turbulence could endanger a local "systemic" bank, or mute ATMs. The mortgage crisis could produce ruptures in the local fabric of the GCR's society. Sorrow may arrive with body bags from distant places. Structural economic changes may close down local productions and turn workers into the unemployed. A high school may be attacked by a lunatic and become the stage of a national catastrophe.

Information Overload: There was never a time when most people in any given society had such a degree of exposure to a permanent influx of information. Mouth-to-mouth transmissions and printed media, then phones, radios, and TV, are now embedded into global flows of cell phone networks, e-mails, text messages, breaking news, blogs, advertisements in and on all of the mentioned devices, and all of this in general and customized versions.

Generally speaking, we are living in an ever more complex world. At the same time, media coverage is under-complex. Most media are under political or market pressures, and often go for the lowest common denominator and high quotas. These cannot be reached by sophisticated, quality reporting. Also, there are no easily accessible narratives available. In addition, social networks are quicker, but also less reliable than traditional media. There is an increasing gap between a rather concrete and hands-on reporting on the level of cities, and the much more abstract and difficult coverage of highly complex issues like global financial crises, the Islamic State, artificial islands in the South China Sea, or the intricacies in eastern Ukraine or nuclear proliferation.

Growing Media Involvement: Media are playing an ever-more important role in domestic and global politics. Events that fail to fulfill the criteria for relevant news value or entertainment value are simply not reported. This is particularly relevant for local spaces. Accordingly, it is as if they are not taking place, not appearing on the horizon of thousands or millions of viewers and readers, ordinary people and elites alike, nationally and locally. Vice versa, the so-called "CNN effect" can bloat the importance and the global presence of minor events, or lead to complete ignorance of major events, if they stay unreported.[10]

Journalists produce images and put them into frames. Framing, supported by pictures and images, is crucial for producing imaginations, perceptions, and stereotypes. The power of the media is hard to overestimate. This is not to say that the media have the power to tell politicians what to do and how to decide. The avenue for influence is more subtle but not less powerful: the media set decision-makers' agendas. This role of agenda-setter puts the media—traditional print, electronic, and new virtual ones—in a decisive role for prioritizing and marginalizing issues and for creating corridors for action by framing techniques.

Election Cycles and Veto Players: All this has to be addressed against the background of a notorious over-exposure to elections, accompanied by increasing election fatigue on the side of the electorate. Especially in Europe, political elites are caught in an almost permanent election treadmill—people are called to give their votes on European, federal/parliament, federal/presidential, and regional and municipal levels and issues. Running almost twenty elections (excluding the local level) over the course of four years is not only democratic luxury, but also a curse for a country like Germany.

In addition, formal and informal veto players have to be included in policy changes, or neutralized. This also drags on political processes.

This has significant effects on the time horizons of politicians and other decision-makers: While the problems enumerated above require a rather medium to long-term perspective, politicians, bowing to elections, are following ever shorter time horizons. This correlates to the dramatic shortening of time spans in the commercial sector, where CEOs and managers have to produce "positive" reports to their strategic investors every three months.

Acceleration: In addition, we are experiencing a situation in which different sub-systems of societies transform themselves increasingly quickly. This concerns first and foremost capital markets and financial flows, but also content flows (of information and entertainment) and other culture-related spheres, life patterns and life cycles, and, to some extent, politics.[11] There is a significant "but": Organizing political decisions and outcomes takes a lot of time, at least in representative democracies. Processes have to be organized, actors need to be integrated into processes, compromises negotiated, potential veto players neutralized or overcome, and procedures need to be observed. Furthermore, one may need to overcome legal options and obstacles. In other words: democracies are seemingly too slow to catch up with the problems they face. There is no general difference in local politics; though, sometimes, things may be achieved more smoothly there, even if not necessarily more transparently.

Summing up, the political sphere is under pressure from different sides. While electorates and constituencies harbor expectations vis-à-vis politicians and endow them with some legitimacy, the political personnel seemingly in charge hunts after ever-more complex problems, bargains for solutions, losing out in terms of pace against the media. Politics in general and global politics in particular are in the process of losing agency. Politics cannot be masterminded, engineered, implemented, executed, organized, and controlled. Politics in the twenty-first century is the result of thousands of more or less ad hoc moves by a multitude of actors on different levels of action. It looks ever more "ad-hocistic."

Now, a plausible question is: how do cities fare in this constellation, where national politics is running out of steam?

Growing complexities and information overload can be found as well on the level of cities, or GSRs. They are probably less serious than on a national level. Growing media involvement may be slightly less relevant, as well as election cycles: The number of media in a city context is limited, and elections take place once every four or five years. Finally, uneven acceleration. Here, again, in cities' spaces there are certainly differences in subsystems speeding up. But only up to a point: In a relative perspective, things were changing more slowly on a local level.

New Trends in GCRs

On their way from moving from purely administrative units of more or less unitary states to more autonomous entities with global connectedness, cities had to face previously uncommon challenges. But they also acquired formerly unknown qualities.

Sites of Violence

Arguably, we are living in a time of violence returning to Western societies. Diverse groups with different agendas are using the high visibility of dense city populations for attacking infrastructure, symbolic places, or soft targets like groups of people who represent easy targets for high-effect attacks. In 2015 alone, fourteen years after the al Qaeda attacks on the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, Islamist fanatics attacked the editorial meeting of the journal Charlie Hebdo in Paris. In February 2015, a Muslim gunman attacked a cultural center and a synagogue in Copenhagen. In May, two Muslim attackers shot at attendees of a caricature exhibition in Garland, Texas.

Radicalized fan groups of popular soccer clubs often turn support for their team into a violet clash with rivaling groups. Clandestine groups or movements use cities as soft targets for highly visible and damaging attacks. Terrorists use cities and their places as stages for their symbolic high-intensity carnage. States are rather abstract entities and difficult to attack directly. Urban centers, however, can be disrupted and paralyzed with a relatively low effort of violence.

Media are quite helpful in multiplying or even globalizing the coverage of a physically local attack. Attacks by fanatics are often looking for the broadest possible media response to their deeds, more than to concrete political results. Urban sceneries provide the perfect background for these ambitions.

Sites of Mega-Events

Huge events related to sports, festivals, musical performances, or political rallies usually take place in cities. Cities can provide the required infrastructure, including some degree of protec-

tion. Cities also can use these events to market their attractiveness, and to attract investment.

World Expositions (Expos: Shanghai in 2010, Milan in 2015, Astana in 2017); car races of the Formula 1 series (Barcelona, Budapest, Monaco, Osaka, Shanghai, Singapore, Sochi, Toronto, among others); World Soccer Championships (the last four were staged in a selection of cities in Brazil, South Africa, Germany, and Japan, with the finals being played in Sao Paolo, Johannesburg, Berlin, and Yokohama); Olympic Games (the last four in Sochi, Vancouver, London, and Beijing); huge art exhibitions like the Venice Biennale, Art Basel (also organized in Miami Beach and Hong Kong); movie festivals (in Berlin, Cannes, Hong Kong, Locarno, Moscow, Toronto, Venice, among others); and other markers are the premium prizes of advancing globalizing cities, promising a huge media hype and flows of tourists.

Sites of Artifacts of Global Relevance

There is a competition going on in architecture between cities, investors, and architects for high-risers and skyscrapers (currently Burj Khalifa in Dubai, Shanghai Towers, Abraj Al-Bait Clock Tower in Mecca, One World Trade Center in New York City, CTF Finance Center in Guangzhou), huge movie Cineplexes, event hotels, or famous museums targeting different audiences (sometimes mushrooming like the Guggenheim, now represented in New York, Venice, Berlin, Las Vegas, Bilbao, and under construction in Abu Dhabi). These are the signifiers of city branding, and of the competition between popular place-based destinations.

The layer of globalizing, and also the non-globalizing, city regions could offer interesting examples of potentially powerful discourses and narratives. Different GCRs are developing different strategies for identity-building and branding. Their development of special combinations of selling points is particularly visible in places like Dubai, Shanghai, Mumbai, Berlin, Beijing, or Moscow, to name just a few. The shared challenge for all of these places is to combine internal consensus and

identity-building with external marketing. Those two tasks often appear as mutually exclusive; they require special attention to be made compatible.

While more local politics, like in cities and GCRs, are no less interwoven in global complexities, they still may be more open for controlling narratives, organizing and monitoring politics, and sequencing time spans than politics on the national or global levels.

Living in Cities in Global Times: Use the Options, Reduce Expectations

Cities are no better or worse than nation-states. They are no black boxes either. But they are gaining relevance beyond their traditional function as nodes in the established framework of their respective states. Increasingly, they establish and develop horizontal networks, and also vertical ranking according to all kinds of indicators.

Cities are now the dominant site and form of living for human beings. Since 2008, over 50 percent of the world's population is living in urban agglomerations. Cities have to handle and digest all the bigger trends in concrete terms—demographics (like shrinking or expanding populations), migration, education, social violence, investment, huge events, large or weird buildings, congestion, and pollution, as well as innovation and creativity. The creative classes tend to settle in certain urban areas.[12] But the poor are also moving to urban cites—vertical mobility, they assume (often rightly), is higher in cities than in

the countryside; and higher in bigger cities than in smaller ones. When people think about their future, they engage in Imagineering, or media or story-inspired fantasies. They want to be "Breathless in Bombay," the "Maximum City," looking for "Love and Longing."[13]

It is here that the demand for politics to "be done" is not as abstract, or utterly absurd, as on the level of nation-states. There, we have to re-orient our expectations away from hoping that things can be engineered by knowledgeable and powerful specialized elites as used to be the case since the Enlightenment and modernity. Life in cities is still less abstract. But here, too, decision-makers should start to function as moderators or navigators. Toning down expectations could in fact strengthen the role of politicians, also on the local level. And this may work on the level of cities and GCRs even better and more quickly.

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What is the nature of power in the post-Cold War era? Can national governments retain their strength and authority in a globalized world? Or will cities and other local actors deal with these problems more effectively? This Issue Brief by Klaus Segbers explores emerging centers of political, social, cultural, and technological power. He argues that Globalizing City Regions (GCRs) are harnessing the power of democracy and connecting flows of resources, people, and capital in the face of weakening national governments. This power shift from nation-states to cities is a critical theme for the twenty-first century as the majority of the world's population now lives in urban areas. Will these increasingly global cities fundamentally change the nature of international relations?

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Global Cities in the New Global Landscape

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