The Meaning of Human Life and Self-satisfaction: Sociological Discourse

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: This paper is focused on the study of the meaning of life, personal well-being and self-satisfaction of a person in the sociological context. Methods/Statistical analysis: The methodological basis of the study is formed by the fundamental ideas of theoretical sociology, comparative analysis, and interdisciplinary approach. The study is based on the conceptual works and the research results of Russian and foreign authors relating to the analysis of well-being and self-satisfaction. As the empirical method, we have used questionnaires. The sampling was formed on the basis of statistical data according to the All-Russia Classifier of Economic Activities. The sample frame for the 95% confidence coefficient and the 5% confidence interval consisted of 1,354 respondents. The article presents the results of the correlation analysis.

Findings: On the basis of the developed methodology of the study, it has been found that women’s group is experiencing anxiety concerning their future. The state of self-satisfaction and self-dissatisfaction is influenced by the management style. The connivance of authorities causes dissatisfaction. The young women also feel themselves dissatisfied when the management is authoritarian. The male manager’s influence is considered by women under 30 as negative. Men under 30, as well as the men and women aged 40 to 49 years were experiencing satisfaction from the male management. This distribution is associated with a high degree of professional maturity that brings satisfaction, as appreciated by the male manager. Personal communication with the manager is important in a greater degree for women and young men. The satisfaction indices are influenced by gender, which determines the novelty of the study. Application/Improvements: The results obtained in the study make it possible to complete the picture of the well-being of individuals and the self-satisfaction in sociology terms. Results of the study can be used in further work on the happiness sociology, as well as on gender-based issues.

Keywords: Gender, Happiness Sociology, Meaning of Life, Self-satisfaction, Well-being

1. Introduction

Modern socio-economic and political processes, the emergence of areas of instability, conflicts and even armed confrontations actualized scientific interest for such issues as the meaning of life, obligations, social responsibility, human happiness and self-satisfaction. This interest is directly caused by a high human development risk and a quite low level of life satisfaction. Even in the countries with high human development index (Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, Croatia, Belarus, the Russian Federation, Bulgaria, Serbia, Armenia, etc.) overall life satisfaction value can be below 50\%. It is known that the aim of development is the self-expression and complete self-actualization of the person\(^1\). In this case, both social development and economic growth become humanized, because they are based on human development. The internal human assets can and should be regarded as the potential for self-actualization. A man becomes a real human being when he ceases being an element of a spontaneous social and natural force and becomes a developed person. At his time, K. Marx through the theory of alienation showed how this process is going on in historical terms. He distinguished three eras in the human development: the first

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one is the era of the productive forces development, when a man obtains his alienated existence (the prehistory of mankind); second one is the era of man's mastery of the labor relations which he “places” in himself (the realm of necessity); third one is the era of the return to the man of the alienated concept of “man” in the form of human culture (the realm of freedom), when the true humanism takes place. It is in this era when a person starts thinking about the meaning of life. In this case, the “meaning” is understood as a purpose, reasonable basis, the content of human activity. The meaning is dynamic, the meanings are objectified, being consolidated in the final and individual forms.

The concept of the meaning of life makes impact on the state of satisfaction. In assessing his own satisfaction, the individual subjectively interprets the quality of his living conditions, conditions of his activities, relationships with people, and himself. In our opinion, this also includes the satisfaction with professional achievements, satisfaction with remuneration for work, the opportunity for professional self-fulfilment, etc. Self-satisfaction is correlated with such an indicator as the quality of life. The “Concise Dictionary of Sociology” defines the “social satisfaction” as “the totality of the individual’s perceptions and assessments of the conditions of his social life and quality of life generalized in his mind”. Self-satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of oneself, environment and quality of life. It is worth noting that the satisfaction and self-realization are influenced by a totality of objective and subjective factors. We should also point out that for the majority of individuals who are in the active phase of their activity the self-satisfaction is influenced by such an objective factor as work.

2. Literature Review

Reasonings about the meaning of life are presented within the framework of philosophical works of sociological works and others. “I may not know the meaning of life, - Berdyaev noted, - but the search for the meaning of life already itself gives the meaning to life, and I will devote my life to the search for this meaning... My mind has always been busy with questions about the meaning of life, freedom, the man's destiny, suffering and evil”. Bulgakov obviously passionately wanted to see the meaning of human creativity in a constant aiming at the human solidarity, the normal constitution of society, the achievement of social progress, the purpose of which “...is perhaps a greater growth of happiness of the greatest possible number of people”. Social progress is inextricably connected with the growth of the personal development and, consequently, with the increase in personal responsibility and self-discipline, which in turn requires the creation of an environment that would ensure the development and use of the capabilities of each person. Hence, social progress with regard to the person is considered as eudemonism, i.e., such a conception of life view, according to which the supreme goal of human life is happiness. It is through the subjective principle of happiness that the social progress can be evaluated. And no matter how great the value of the truth is, “progress criteria - noted Sorokin - have to reckon with the principle of happiness... The neutral formulas of progress are only objective ways to evaluate the subjective principle of happiness”.

Although the works regarding the study of the meaning of life and happiness themselves are underrepresented in the sociological literature, but still there are studies on the synonymous conception of happiness, namely the concept of well-being, which already has its own interpretation. We will point out that the notion of happiness is considered in the work of M.E. Seligman. In foreign and national science, the factors of individual well-being were studied by scientists such as Argyle, Bradburn, Bonivell, Dzhidaryan, Kulikov, Kristoffersen, Lindemann, Seligman. Ryff and Keyes proposed their own model. Fesenko and Shevelenkova developed a well-being structure. Fesenko and Shevelenkova discovered its connection with the meaning of life, Leontiev and Shamionov found the connection with the value-conceptual units. Zausenko and Shamionov found a correlation of well-being and happiness with professional activities.

It should be noted that the term ‘well-being’ was introduced in the scientific use by Bradburn, defining it as a subjective sense of happiness and general life satisfaction. Seligman defines the human well-being as a positive affectivity, combined with the activity. Author of the well-being concept Ryff understands it as a base subjective construct, reflecting the perception and assessment of its functioning from the point of view of the top of human potential.

Fesenko and Shevelenkova introduced the concept of the well-being level. The low level of current well-being is determined by the prevalence of negative affect, understood by the authors as a feeling of life dissatisfaction, unhappiness. High and standard level is characterized by
a predominance of positive affect, understood as the life satisfaction, happiness.

According to the Russian researcher Shamionov, the subjective well-being is an integral socio-psychological unit, which is an indicator of the internal ecology of personality which is determined using a system of individual's visions of himself, his life, relationships, condition, etc. The author emphasizes the particular importance of the system of meaning units of the personality and their quality relations for the formation of subjective well-being, and the role of significant events, the dynamics of value-conceptual units in different situations, the existence of meaning and the target hierarchy giving a sense of satisfaction and creating as a result the subjective well-being area.

Close to the meaning of conception of the personality ‘well-being’, there is the concept of ‘life satisfaction’, which in some studies is considered as a component of happiness, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, but there has not yet been a holistic notion of satisfaction formulated in the science terms.

Academic Encyclopedia states that through the concept of satisfaction we can see the closeness of the concepts of happiness, psychological and subjective well-being. Satisfaction is a subjective assessment of the quality of certain objects, living and activities conditions, life in general, relations with the people, the people themselves, including oneself. The high degree of life satisfaction is what we call happiness.

When determining the significance of this concept, Kulikov notes that the life satisfaction or dissatisfaction determines many types of the activities and behavior of the subject, and serves a significant factor influencing the state of public consciousness.

Well-being is also considered in the context of the problem of quality of life. Dzhidaryan says that the quality of life is so much psychologically conditioned that many authors prefer defining it as an inner satisfaction or a feeling of subjective well-being of the individual. It is important to consider the well-being in the context of such concepts as self-satisfaction and opportunity for self-realization.

According to Bestuzhev-Lada, category of ‘quality of life’ appeared due to the lack of quantitative assessments of a person’s life. The assessment of the quality of life covers a wide range of spheres of human activity and includes the evaluation of satisfaction with work and leisure, level of comfort at work and home, satisfaction of needs in communication, knowledge, creativity, the possibility of self-realization, etc.

Well-being is also studied by economists. In this regard, it is interesting to compare the achievements in human development, the state contribution to these achievements and a sense of well-being in some countries with different levels of socio-economic development (Table 1).1

As shown in Table 1, there are problems of perception of well-being even in the countries with high human development index.

Thus, the following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the degree of elaboration of issues. It is important to carry out sociological studies of the meaning of life in the context of the study of well-being of the individual. The latter concept should be interpreted using a number of indicators, which include the self-satisfaction and the possibility of self-realization. In the context of sociological discourse, the satisfaction should be study not in abstract terms, but in relation to specific conditions. They include, for example, activity. A person can measure his satisfaction and the possibility of self-realization as per such indicators of activity as style of management adopted in a particular organization, the type of manager’s connections, etc.

3. Materials and methods

The methodological basis of the study consists of the fundamental ideas and principles of theoretical sociology, comparative analysis, interdisciplinary approach. The study of self-satisfaction has been carried out in Novosibirsk. The sample has been formed on the basis of statistical data existing in accordance with the All-Russia Classifier of Economic Activities (ARCEA). The sample frame for the 95% confidence coefficient and the 5% confidence interval consisted of 1354 respondents. For the study, we have used a two-stage sampling. Survey method: questioning.

Due to the impossibility of the analysis of all units and all questions in the article, we present only the results of the correlation analysis conducted using the Spearman correlation coefficient. To carry out the correlation analysis, the entire sample set was divided into groups by sex and age. Age intervals included three groups of respondents: under 30, 30-39, 40-49 years old. Groups of respondents aged 50 to 59 years and 60 years and older have not been subjected to correlation analysis due to a small quantity.
Table 1. Human Development Index (HDI), government expenditures for basic social services (education, health) and the perception of personal well-being in 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>HDI</th>
<th>Adjusted HDI with account of inequality</th>
<th>Gini coefficient</th>
<th>Government expenditures (GDP %)</th>
<th>Perception of personal well-being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Life satisfaction index (max. value: 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>for education</td>
<td>for health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>0.944</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td>0.755</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0.911</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td>0.804</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.762</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>0.818</td>
<td>0.757</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>0.786</td>
<td>0.726</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td>0.685</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>0.745</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>0.667</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The self-satisfaction and the possibility of self-realization have served indicators, in regard to which there has been a correlation with variables such as the estimation of the future, sex of the manager, type of the manager’s contacts and his management style.

4. Results

Variable: estimation of the future. It has been considered in two variants: a) “I’m worried about my future”; b) “My future is not clear, because I constantly have to compete with others”.

In women aged 30 to 39 years there is a weak negative correlation between satisfaction and estimation of the future (r = -0.165, N = 184, ρ = 0.05). This shows that in women in this age interval the satisfaction is reduced due to the estimation of the future, which is associated with the anxiety related to it.

These data for women aged 30 to 39 years are confirmed by another correlation between satisfaction and “estimation of the uncertain future due to constant competition with others”: r = -0.186, N = 184, ρ = 0.05. As we can see, it is also a weak negative correlation. Thus, in women aged 30 to 39 years the estimation of the future reduces the self-satisfaction. Men have no such correlations. In the given case, we can say that there is a manifestation of gender due to the fact that it is the women's group that is experiencing anxiety about its future. The study of gender is represented in the works of Ilinykh27,28 and Udaltsova29. Anxiety can be caused by both the competition, and the general feeling of instability of one's situation.

Variable: management style. It has been considered in two variants: a) providing people with a possibility to do as they think proper (connivance style); b) determination of the priority areas of work and development of the basic principles and methods of its implementation (authoritarian style).

For men aged 30 years, a weak negative correlation has been determined between the variables: “possibility of self-realization”, “self-satisfaction” and “providing people with a possibility to do as they think proper”: r = -0.132, N = 262, ρ = 0.05 in the former case and r = -0.346, N = 262, ρ = 0.01 in the latter case.

In women under 30 years, there is a strong negative correlation between the variables “the possibility of self-realization” and “providing people with a possibility to do as they think proper”: r = -0.92, N = 510, ρ = 0.05. The “providing people with a possibility to do as they think proper” variable symbolizes the connivance style. As we can see, the use of this style by managers has a negative impact on the development of potential and satisfaction. Probably, in order to realize their potential and to obtain
the feeling of satisfaction, the staff members at this age need more determined and focused management. This finding is confirmed by correlation with an authoritarian style of management, which is expressed in “the determination of the priority areas of work and development of the basic principles and methods of its implementation”.

In men under 30 years, there is a weak correlation between the “self-satisfaction” and “the determination of the priority areas of work and development of the basic principles and methods of its implementation” variables: $r = 0.157, N = 262, \rho = 0.05$. In other words, their satisfaction increases when the management uses the authoritarian style methods. Women under 30 show exactly opposite results: a weak negative correlation between satisfaction and authoritarian style: $r = -0.100, N = 508, \rho = 0.05$. That is, the satisfaction of women increases with decreasing management authoritarianism.

For men and women aged 30 to 39 years, there is a weak negative correlation between “the possibility of self-realization” and the authoritarian style: $r = -0.210, N = 89, \rho = 0.05$ for men and $r = -0.182, N = 185, \rho = 0.05$ for women. Based on these data, we can say that in this age range the authoritarian style only prevents the development of potential. At the same time, women aged 40-49 years show a weak correlation between these variables: $r = 0.252, N = 113, \rho = 0.01$.

In the meantime, for women aged 30 to 39 years there is a weak negative correlation between the “satisfaction” and “providing people with a possibility to do as they think proper” variables: $r = -0.162, N = 185, \rho = 0.05$.

Thus, when using the connivance style of management, men and women under 30 experience discomfort in personal self-fulfillment and fill no satisfaction. Interestingly, the opportunity for self-fulfillment in men under 30, as well as in men and women aged 30-39 is negatively affected by the rigid framework of the authoritarian style, but the same cannot be said regarding women aged 40-49 years. Satisfaction of young women under 30 years is reduced in case of the authoritarian style, and in young men, on the contrary, it is increased. So, it is obvious that connivance style and authoritarian style negatively influence the self-realization and satisfaction in all groups of respondents. The exception is women aged 40 to 49 years who have shown a positive correlation between the possibility of self-realization and the authoritarian style, and men under 30 years who are satisfied with the same style.

Variable: sex of the manager. This variable includes two aspects: “the basic managerial positions are occupied by men”, “women constitute a large part of the management”.

Men under 30 years show a weak positive correlation between satisfaction and the fact that the main management positions are held by men: $r = 0.162, N = 258, \rho = 0.01$. In men aged 30 to 39 years there is a weak negative correlation between satisfaction and the fact that women constitute a large part of the management: $r = -0.229, N = 85, \rho = 0.05$. The situation is directly opposite in men aged 40-49 years. There is a weak correlation between satisfaction and the opportunity for self-fulfillment and the fact that managers are female: $r = 0.250, N = 88, \rho = 0.05$ and $r = 0.378, N = 88, \rho = 0.01$. The same group has shown a weak correlation between satisfaction and male management: $r = 0.260, N = 90, \rho = 0.05$.

Women under 30 years of age show the negative relation between the fact that the manager is male and the opportunity for self-fulfillment and satisfaction: $r = -0.90, N = 502, \rho = 0.05$ in the former case, $r = -0.110, N = 501, \rho = 0.05$ in the latter case. As we can see, the strongest negative correlation is observed between male management and the opportunity for self-fulfillment. And at the same time, there is positive correlation, when the manager is a female: $r = 0.166, N = 498, \rho = 0.01$ and $r = 0.117, N = 497, \rho = 0.01$.

Women older than 30 years show positive correlations associated with male management. The self-fulfillment is better in women aged 30 to 39 years when the manager is male: $r = 0.196, N = 177, \rho = 0.01$. And in women aged 40-49 years the satisfaction is increased in the case of male management: $r = 0.306, N = 107, \rho = 0.01$. Interestingly, this same group of women demonstrates the presence of a weak negative correlation between the possibility of self-realization and male management: $r = -0.197, N = 111, \rho = 0.05$.

Thus, the effect of the male management on satisfaction is considered as negative by women under 30 years. This is probably due to the fact that they have not yet achieved professional success, which would be appreciated by the male managers and that would influence the satisfaction of women. At the same time, men under 30 years, as well as men and women of the age interval of 40 to 49 years are satisfied with the male management. Perhaps this distribution is due to the fact of a high degree of professional maturity appreciated by the male manager that brings satisfaction.

Study of relations between variables such as “the possibility of self-fulfillment” and “the basic managerial
positions are occupied by men”, shows that the two groups of women show opposite results. In our opinion, in this case we are dealing with a disguised manifestation of gender. The fact is that the women under 30 years do not have a proper opportunity for self-fulfillment. The reason for this lies in the severity of male managers towards young women and their consideration of them as unreliable workers. But the woman of the next age group (30-39 years old) have better opportunities for self-realization in the case of male management because they have already been able to prove to some extent their professional worth.

The same manifestations of gender, namely the aggravation of competitive relationships, we find in a group of men aged 30-39 years, where there is a negative correlation between female management and their satisfaction. It is significant that the men from the next age group assess positively both the male and female management. In this case, we can say that for the male group aged 40-49 years, the intense competitive relationship has been already over, but the women of this age, on the contrary, are entering into them, having accumulated professional knowledge and skills.

Variables: types of the manager’s contacts and management techniques. As the type of the manager’s contacts we have considered the personal communication of the manager with subordinates: “the manager is personally communication with employees”, and among management techniques we have chosen “criticism” and “dismissal” and methods of management.

In men under 30 years, there is a weak correlation between the possibility of self-realization and personal communication of the manager with employees \(r = 0.138, N = 263, \rho = 0.05\), criticism \(r = 0.138, N = 263, \rho = 0.05\), dismissal \(r = 0.155, N = 263, \rho = 0.05\). The satisfaction is positively influenced by criticism: \(r = 0.126, N = 263, \rho = 0.05\). The latter correlation may indicate that young men prefer the authoritarian management style.

Interesting correlations have been found with respect to the “dismissal” variable. Satisfaction in men aged 30 to 39 years is positively associated with dismissal: \(r = 0.258, N = 90, \rho = 0.05\). Men aged 40 to 49 years show that their possibility of self-fulfillment and satisfaction are negatively affected by dismissal: \(r = -0.258, N = 90, \rho = 0.05\) and \(r = -0.236, N = 90, \rho = 0.05\).

In relation to women up to 30 years, there has been observed in women aged 30 to 39 years. Their satisfaction is affected by personal communication with manager: \(r = 0.212, N = 185, \rho = 0.01\). Thus, the personal communication is more important for the women and young men. Here, in our opinion, we can see the manifestation of gender. As we have already pointed out, women and young men are concerned about professional recognition, which is realized also in the process of communication with management. Criticism produces the stimulating effect on young men and discouraging effect on older men, which, in our opinion, in some way reflects the gender manifestations. Criticism for the older men signifies a doubt about their competence and their professional status. This involves gender roles and status system, in which the professional status is playing a key role. Criticism is painfully perceived and is related to the career progression while performing gender roles. All this affects the implementation of the individual and social subjectness.

5. Discussion

The findings of the theoretical and empirical study allow us interpreting the results as follows:

1. The true progress and happiness of every person are related to the harmonious development of the individual, with a broadside approach to the human and society. Fromm\(^\text{a}\) warned that “in the information society, the problem of human freedom and his responsibility may completely disappear, as the world being cut up to the standards of man-made thinking, will cease being human... I believe in freedom of man, in man’s right to be himself, to assert himself and to fight all those who try to prevent him from being this. But freedom is more than the absence of violent oppression... It is more than “freedom from”; it is “freedom to”. The meaning of life should be returned to the today’s generation.

2. The sociological study of the meaning of life should be carried out in the context of the study of well-being of the individual. It is determined using a number of indicators, which include the satisfaction and the possibility of self-realization. In turn, the satisfaction and the possibility of self-realization in terms of sociology
achieving internal and socially-oriented objectives, and serves as a condition for the realization of his potential and abilities. In other words, the self-satisfaction is generated in the course of activities. It is significant that the experience enriched with gender practices, in certain cases serves the basis for increasing of the person's satisfaction through a deeper understanding of life, awareness of his own life goals, and the establishment of a harmonious relationship with others. In other words, in certain situations, a gender effect on satisfaction and even more - the meaning of life - does not have a negative connotation, but has a positive meaning.

Self-satisfaction allows a person feeling more comfortable in relationships with others, trusting other people and himself, having an optimistic view of life, faith in his abilities and meaningful life. From our point of view, we would like to complete the conversation about the meaning of life and self-satisfaction in the sociological discourse by pointing out the need for the development of such sociology-based discipline as the sociology of happiness.

6. Conclusion

At a time when the socio-political and economic situation of the society is quite flexible and changeable, and the flow of information timely provides information about all of its positive and often negative trends, the sociological science begins focusing on the meaning of a person's life, well-being of every individual and satisfaction with his own life. The notion of human well-being is associated with other concepts, such as “happiness”, “self-satisfaction”, “life quality”. In the framework of the present article, the meaning of life, well-being is considered in the context of satisfaction and the possibility of self-realization. Self-satisfaction is interpreted as a systemic quality of the person acquired by him during his life. It is manifested in the person through the perception of the meaningful completion and the value of life in general as a means of achieving internal and socially-oriented objectives, and should be studied within the framework of the specific conditions of human activity. A person can evaluate the self-satisfaction and the possibility of self-realization as per such indicators as the management style adopted in a particular organization, the type of the manager's contacts, etc.

3. Empirical study reflects the fact that women's group is experiencing anxiety about its future. Anxiety can be caused by both the competition, and the general feeling of instability of one's situation. Use of the connivance style of management causes dissatisfaction. Perhaps, in order to feel satisfaction and to have the possibility for self-fulfillment, the staff members need the management to be more determined and focused. With regard to the authoritarian style, the satisfaction decreased in women. Influence of male management on satisfaction is considered by women under 30 years as negative. This is probably due to the fact that they have not yet achieved professional success, which would be appreciated by the male managers and would influence the satisfaction of women. Men under 30, as well as the men and women of the age range of 40 to 49 years are satisfied with the male management. Perhaps this distribution depends of a high degree of professional maturity appreciated by male manager which brings satisfaction. Personal communication with manager in a greater degree is important for women and young men. In general, we can say that the self-satisfaction is influenced by gender.

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