

Module 1. Sport as a Social Good – Sustainable Sport for Development

Unit 4.1

Introduction

Sport is often championed as a great method for bringing people together and making the world a better place. In this module, we will consider this viewpoint and give an understanding as to how sport can be used as a social good for development purposes, bettering the lives and outcomes of its participants. We will then discuss how we can make that sport sustainable so that it can keep producing those outputs over a longer period of time.

To round out the module, we will then look at the limits of sport in this context before debating how commercialised sport can play its role in the creation of social good and development by detailing a case study to bring the module to life and finishing with a summary of the content covered. Let us begin the module by outlining what we mean when we say sport is sustainable and has the potential to be a social good.

Sustainable Sport

The concept of sustainability in sport has many different factors, and the reading could be many more pages as we investigate all of them. To give an idea of sustainable development and the goals that it seeks to address, we need to provide a structure for these goals. Considering that, we propose that we align with the publication by the United Nations of 17 Social Development Goals (United Nations, 2023).



Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals



Source: United Nations, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3V434w7>

The two that we will be looking at in this reading specifically focus on the environment and the programs focused on sport that drive social good. So, what does it mean to be sustainable within these contexts?

Firstly, focusing on the environment, it means that sport should operate in a way that does not impact negatively on the world around it. While doing this, sport, as a whole, should also seek to promote environmentally friendly behaviours while actioning its sport.

Secondly, when considering sport as a social good, we think about the impact on the lives of those participating in it, whether that is playing, officiating, administering or spectating. In this context, we are aiming to provide opportunities that end up improving the lives and opportunities of the participants of sport. We should be aware that this social good of sport could take time to come to fruition and may not happen immediately. It will require long-term investment and care in the targeted area; otherwise, we might find ourselves back at the start, or even worse, further behind than we were previously.

Sport for Social Good

The concept of sport being for social good is one that is recognised the world over and encompasses many different sporting fields and actors. The idea of social good is varied and has many different areas to consider. It has often been thought of that sport is a social good due to the positive impact it can have on physical and mental wellbeing (Seippel,

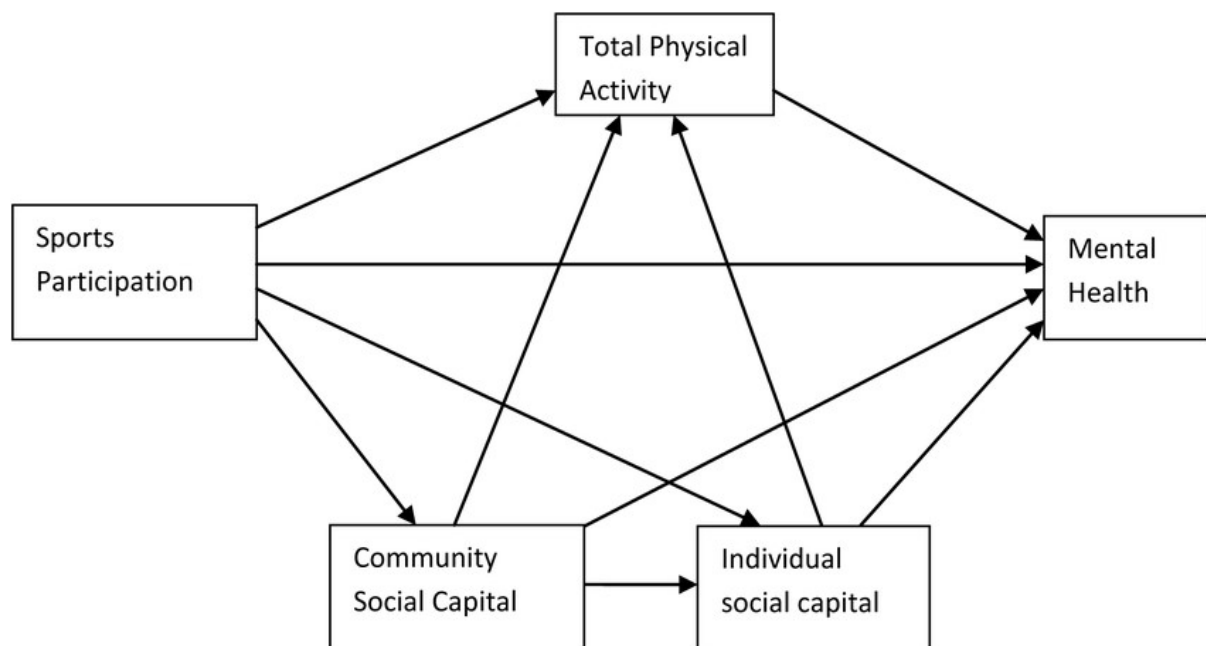


2006). Various studies around the globe have shown that participating in sport can extend life and lead to healthier outcomes for all participants.

While correct, this is not the only motivation or benefit that people have for participating in sport. Sport can be a very useful way to make connections for the people involved, they can make connections with individuals or groups they might not interact with daily. This can help with breaking down barriers among different demographic groups and provide new opportunities for those individuals.

We can understand this through the theory of social capital. Social capital is the connections between individuals that allow those individuals to perhaps benefit from being part of that group. Social capital has “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). This can be applied within sport. Imagine if you move to a new area and do not know anyone. Perhaps, you play football, and you join the local team, which consists of other football players and people who like football. By becoming part of that group, you can build social capital, of course, this leads to playing and making connections with the individuals who are members of that team. In the figure below, we can see the link between social capital, sport, physical activity and wellbeing.

Figure 2: Hypothesized model of relationships between sport participation, total physical activity, community social capital, individual social capital, and mental health



Source: Marlier et al., 2015, <https://bit.ly/3L3Psws>

By participating in sport, an individual can make a connection that they would not have previously been able to make. These connections can help them, and they can make groups of other individuals who are tightly bonded to each other. This can be beneficial to making lifelong links with like-minded people. We can also benefit from the bridging



of social capital, these links are between individuals that do not inhabit the same areas in life, for example, the same socioeconomic group. It can be useful to gain access to benefits in life, for example, job offers, that might not be available had these connections not been made. Bridging social capital is arguably the most useful as it does not close individuals and groups off from wider society, which is a risk of bonding social capital.

And remember, it is not just in a sporting context in which these new relationships can be of benefit. For example, one of the members of the team is a car mechanic and can help you when your car breaks down or someone offers you a job that you would not have got had it not been for that connection.

For others, it might provide the opportunity to escape from the situation they find themselves in or connect with a part of society they would not be able to do so otherwise. This is why sport is held in such a high regard, you can no doubt find reference to the social good of sport in your government documents wherever you are from in the world. Sport is used to break down barriers and to offer hope to millions of people that might not have many options left. Sport does not only have the potential to be for the social good, but can also be linked to the development of various populations and locations.

Sport for Development

Much like the way sport is championed for its social impact, the same can be said for its role in development. It can bring different areas of society together and be used as a way of driving positive initiatives in many different areas of life.

Sport for development has been defined as “the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialisation of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution” (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011, p. 311). It has been used by various agencies to achieve developmental goals around the globe. For example, it has been used to assist refugees in integrating into new societies and for helping to develop opportunities for those who are less fortunate in society. As the quote suggests, sport can also be used to foster better relationships between warring factions or in areas that have experienced natural disaster.

The example of this is shown below, which focuses on Haiti, a country that has experienced a natural disaster, an earthquake, in 2010. While Peace and Sport were already operating within the area, the earthquake further solidified their approach to the country.



Figure 3: Sport for Peace and Development



Source: Peace and Sport, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3LnQjtb>

There were and continue to be plenty of different aspects that Peace and Sport will focus on, one such example is regarding the following quote: “Capacity building for directors and instructors at the International Olympic Committee’s Hope Centre, focusing on the management, implementation and execution of their peace through sport program for bringing about lasting change” (Peace and Sport, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3LnQjtb>).

The program is hoping to bring about lasting change and development of infrastructure which can help the nation recover from the natural disasters, but also the violence-based issues that have plagued it recently. How successful this action is remains unclear, and the true success measures are perhaps not going to be known until many years in the future. Of course, achievements can be found by giving children something to do and keeping them away from issues such as gang-based violence or by creating jobs so that people can have, or even rebuild, lives. There is also a chance that, should a talented athlete be uncovered by these schemes, they themselves could lift the whole area out of poverty, though we must remember that the chances of this happening are remote.

This can also be physical developments, including infrastructure. Large sporting events can play a role in revitalising an area and improving sports facilities, but also, they provide the impetus to facilities for those living there, roads, housing, or other infrastructure projects. One such example was the London 2012 Olympics, which took over and

redeveloped a run-down and deprived area of East London. The redevelopment was vast, the figure below demonstrating the scale of the project.

Figure 4: How the Olympics completely turned around a bad London neighbourhood



Source: Manfred, 2012, <https://bit.ly/3oEQEyx>

The development made use of previously old or unsuitable land and turned it into the Olympic park. Contained within the park was the Olympic stadium, velodrome, aquatics centre, hockey pitches and athlete's village, among many other venues. Furthermore, infrastructure was developed, including new roads and rail links to make the site more accessible and, when twinned with a large shopping centre, a destination worth visiting that side of the capital. This, of course, gave many benefits to sport, but also to the local community.

This started even before the games opened on a summer night in July. The building work on the site, as you can see from the figure, was quite extensive, and therefore created numerous jobs in the area and investment that would not have been there otherwise. In addition, schemes based on Olympic sports in an effort to drive up interest and begin some form of legacy for the games also created development opportunities and work for those that lived in the area.

During the games, sport was front and centre, the London Olympics were seen as a watershed moment in the United Kingdom as the event was front and centre in nation's minds. The buzz around the Olympic Park, and indeed the entire country, was notable

with Olympic-based public sector funding, largely for sport initiatives, and private funding, which again drove upskilling and employment opportunities for many different sections of society.

After the games, the impact has not stopped. While the London Olympics was won under the tag line of being sustainable, meaning that some of the locations used in the games were dismantled or returned to their previous use, this did not mean that the development caused by sport lessened. The sporting facilities on the site were scaled down, but venues such as the main stadium, the velodrome, the aquatics centre, and the hockey centre continue to be used by the local community. As a result, some of the roles that were created during the Olympics have been retained.

Due to the facilities remaining open, the participants themselves have benefited, with many different local groups and social groups now using facilities that were once used for the Olympics. This allows for the creation of social capital, as we have discussed earlier in the piece, and the benefits that participants can have from this. Furthermore, activities that might not have been available to those living in the East London area could now be an option for the population. This could open doors for training, competing, or getting paid roles in sport that were previously not obtainable for that population.

While some jobs need time to be fashioned, others have even been created almost immediately, for example, at the stadium, English Premier League football club West Ham United have moved in, playing at least 19 weekends of the year at the stadium. This has, of course, brought further work, an influx of visiting fans from all over the country (and occasionally Europe) to the park, but has also brought football in the community schemes, run by the club, to the locality for those now living on the site.

Finally, the athlete's village that was used for the games has subsequently been converted into flats for the local population. While this is not directly sport related, had the games not been held in this area, this development would not have occurred. It has improved the lives of residents who previously lived on the site before the development and elevated to some extent the housing squeeze in the area. But sport is not always the most sustainable medium, how can we improve sport that it is, in fact, more sustainable and delivers long-lasting benefits to a population?

How Can We Make Sport Sustainable?

One of the main challenges is to make sport sustainable. In this regard, what we mean is making sport environmentally sustainable and making sure that it enjoys financial sustainability. Without these two things, the life span of the sport and its role in development will be limited.

Environmental Sustainability

There has been a concerted effort in the last decade or so to make sport more sustainable and more in line with the world around it. Major sporting events, while spectacular, are

often noted for their impact on the environment. The development of facilities and associated infrastructure has an enormous carbon footprint and, while efforts have been made to try to offset some of this damage, arguably this has not been enough.

Furthermore, if a sport, or sports development program, is not considered to be environmentally sustainable, then it is unlikely to be championed as a vehicle for development. For example, if a sport requires the development of specialist facilities or the transportation of mounds of equipment so that it can be played, then it will not be environmentally sustainable to play. It will not be able to be played, and reach development goals, in the locations that it might be needed without substantially changing the environment. So, how do we fix it?

There have been many different attempts at reducing the environmental impact of sport, some on the small scale, some much larger. A notable example in sport is Forest Green Rovers, based near Bristol in the United Kingdom and playing in the third level of league football. They have adopted renewable energy technologies to power their stadium, a vegan menu, and even spread animal waste on the pitch as fertiliser.

Other sports, such as field hockey, have developed their pitch surfaces so that, where once gallons of water would be sprayed on the pitch before matches, this is no longer required due to changes in pitch technology. A relaxation of rules has also helped in this sport to make it more environmentally sustainable and, therefore, played more widely. Previously, an international standard pitch was required to play an international match, regardless of age, group, or development of the game in that country. The international body, FIH, has removed this requirement, allowing nations to play on surfaces, even including grass, in recognised international fixtures.

This may seem like a small compromise, but it illustrates perfectly how environmental changes in the interests of reducing unnecessary impact on the world can help with playing opportunities that sports development might bring. It is unlikely that field hockey, or other sports with a need for specialist pitches and equipment, could be used in development opportunities. But by changing the regulations, set-up costs reduced and participants can be encouraged to and even access opportunities that international representation can offer them.

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability is equally, if not even more, important for the success of sports development. Many well-intentioned sports development programs have fallen short on their aims due to a loss or mismanagement of financial input. What this can lead to is that the original goals of the development program have to be scaled back to balance the books or to make sure the program can finish, therefore, reducing their impact.

Sport, especially at the professional level, depends on financial sustainability; however, all too often, this is the issue that causes sport to falter. Sport and the actors within it have



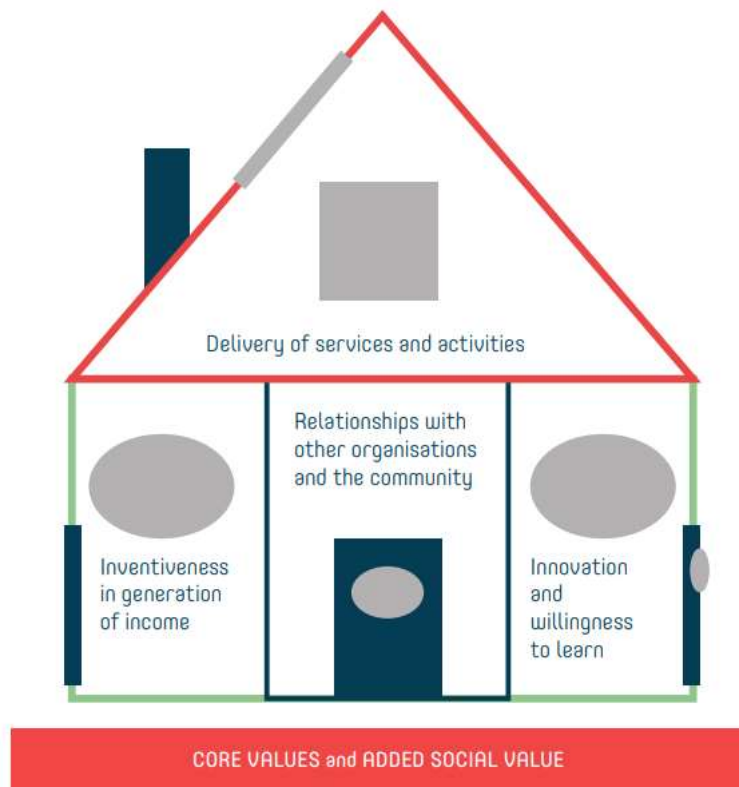
the tendency to overstretch themselves 'chasing the dream' and, as a result, when this is not reached, it can all come crashing to a halt. The obvious way to make sport more sustainable is to only spend what an organization can afford to. However, with pressures from fans, governments and other actors, this is perhaps easier said than done.

To counteract this, sport organizations can set out detailed plans of how spending will be managed. This plan must be done with objectives to understand exactly what is required and how they can achieve these without the issues we commonly see. In work conducted by Dortants & van Eekeren (2015), they looked at how sport for development could become more sustainable through numerous case studies. Their findings and recommendations for organizations in this area are below:

1. They know their own strength and stick to their core values.
2. They are innovative and willing to learn.
3. They actively relate to their community and to other organizations.
4. They are inventive in generating income.

Dortants & van Eekeren highlight stories that they used in their research in this document. To summarise, they state that to be sustainable, a sport for development initiative must have a combination of all four aspects. An initiative might be successful in the short term, but without a clear plan, the ability to be innovative, relatable and able to generate its own income, then it will not be sustainable and ultimately cease to exist, perhaps with the goals it was set up to achieve being left unfinished. They have named this approach the House of Sport for Development, a diagram of which can be seen below.

Figure 5: Towards financially sustainable sport for development organizations



Source: Dortants & van Eekeren, 2015, p. 35

Dortants & van Eekeren (2015) suggest that the house is where people will want to be if it is attractive and improvement can be observed through the sport for development program. These aspects are important to get right as we might imagine that, due to some sports being awash with a seemingly endless supply of money, this is not often the case for sport for development programs. Their finances come from tightly regulated government or national governing body sources and these can be difficult to get in the first place, but even more so to increase them. While we have shown that sport can be sustainable, both financially and environmentally and be of benefit in those areas, we must consider that there is a limit to what sport can achieve, and we should not expect it to do everything.

Limits of Sport for Social Good and Development

We cannot assume that sport in all its forms can be a social good forever and develop in the way that is most beneficial for society as a whole. As such, we devote this section to the limitations of sport for social good and development.

Competition

Sport is by its definition concerned with competition, with being the best and achieving the best outcome possible. Competition will unfortunately lead to stresses with social

good outcomes (Seippel, 2006). The pressure on performers to achieve their goals, often tied to financial reward, which we will come to in the next subsection, puts extreme strain on the 'goodness' of sport. Athletes will play hurt, causing themselves long-term health issues long after their career has finished. They will also cheat in an effort to come in first place, this could be through doping or financial means, but the result is the same.

The many benefits that sport and physical activity can bring, friendship, physical, and mental health to name only a few, are often lost when cheating occurs. Participants interact less, they begin to trust each other less and, instead of becoming a community, they become individuals. This, of course, is not to say all sport behaves in this way, but we need to consider that in some sporting spheres it does, and some would say too often.

It might not be a concern for sport for development programs that offer non-competitive activities, but cheating can impact those further down the line. Participants in a sport for development program who continue to play or have developed beyond the program's reach could become disillusioned with the sport following an act of cheating. This could lead to disengagement from the sport and a return to the starting point before the sport came in.

Money

One of the overriding factors that can limit the potential for sport to achieve its true potential regarding sustainability and development is the need to make money. Sport, at whatever level, cannot survive if it does not make money to hire of players, coaches, pitches would not be possible and sport would be over before it started. This is the same for sport for development schemes, the money to run these projects needs to come from somewhere.

This need to make money can lead to the unfortunate issue of pushing the development goals back. Budgets, from wherever they are formed, might be cut back if other areas fail and through no fault of its own, the sport for development work might get pushed back and become an afterthought. It could also fall victim to a change in business and political will. For example, if the money to run sport for development programs is reduced at a government level, then schemes will be impacted negatively.

The Nature of Sport

The very nature of sport, including the competition and money, are not overly conducive to development and relationships in some areas. For example, the elements of tightly bonded social capital and leading to the exclusion of outsiders can persist and not allow for sport to play a role in changing these attitudes or mindsets.

Sport has been used as a vehicle by many different elements of society to push aims that could be considered divisive and attach them to sport. As a result, sport, and particularly football, is more than just a game for some, especially when rivals meet. Take the picture



below, which was the abandonment of the fixture between Serbia and Albania after a drone with a banner was flown over the pitch.

Figure 6: Serbia v Albania abandoned after players and fans brawl on the pitch



Source: Ames & Ibrulj, 2014, <https://bit.ly/3L0txGh>

Football has so often been used as a mechanism in which to foster peace and understanding, so it is disappointing when issues such as this overshadow the game being played. But is this not the nature of modern sport? Individuals, sporting organizations and even countries will seek to use sport as a method of accomplishment and identity, and they will stop at relatively little to make sure they are successful in their pursuit. So, in our next subsection, we will consider whether sport can operate in the professional model and still provide these social good and development opportunities.

Commercialised Sport for Social Good and Development

On the face of it, it would appear that commercialised sport is at odds with the ideas of social good and development. We have already talked about how competition can impact negatively on these ideal developments (Seippel, 2006). So, can sport, at the professional level, ever truly be good for society?

Just because sporting organizations, especially at the top of their respective leagues and competitions, earn vast amounts of money does not mean that none of this is redistributed. Often there will be some form of charitable initiatives that are run directly by these wealthy sporting organizations within their local area. Take for example, Chelsea FC, in the English Premier League and based in London, who run a separate organization,

Chelsea FC Foundation, that focuses solely on the use of sport for development within the local area.

Figure 7: Chelsea FC Foundation



Source: European Football for Development Network, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3n3i68T>

The range of different opportunities that the foundation runs and offers to the local community and further afield is comprehensive and can be viewed by following the link in the references. Chelsea is not the only organization to offer such programs, and even individuals from the world of sport are known to help in this area. NBA star LeBron James is well-known for his charity work, gifting some of his income to projects that include sporting pursuits (Schneider, 2021).

Why do Chelsea and LeBron do these things? There is no one size fits all answer to this, and each organization or individual will have their own motivation. It is perhaps easy to be cynical about these approaches, and in some cases, rightly so. We might suggest that they are set up in a way that will benefit the giver of the charity, whether that is tax breaks or looking good in the media or local area in the hope of using this positive coverage for something that will benefit them in the future. Though in the end it does not really matter what the motivation of the giver is, only that the gift gets to where it is the most useful.

Again, we might be concerned that the sustainability of the finance might not be forever. James has gone to lengths to make sure that the foundation he founded can be financially sustainable and continue to help those who need help long after he is gone. And large sports organizations such as Chelsea have continued to run their foundations through the course of numerous owners. In this regard, at the top level of sport, these things are likely to continue.

It does show that even though we might think that individuals and sporting organizations are above this type of action, they can actually be a key part of the program. Of course, there are issues that remain as with all sport for development programs that we should be aware of, but this is not a reason to completely stop welcoming input from these sources.

In addition, players or other high-profile figures within sport can also play a role in sport for development by highlighting issues. This might not require to invest of their own personal finance, but can be a good way of causing a call to action that results in an issue being solved through the medium of sport. This can be an extremely effective way to almost guilt governments or sporting governance organizations into acting, as it requires little financial input on behalf of the athlete. Even when the athlete or organization offers their own money to back a scheme, then it can have a positive impact on that athletes' brand, maybe much more than if it had not been noted through social media. Although conflict with marketing and sponsorship agreements can cause the athlete issues if these brands do not agree with their viewpoints or support them, it is something to be mindful of, if not a reason to stop these actions completely.

To give further understanding of this area, we will now look at some case studies that highlight this need and how sport has been used as a sustainable social good.

Case Study

The case study that we will focus on is Sparky Football. There are many programs that use sport, and particularly football, as a development tool, and this is only one example. Sparky Football uses the method of football to reach underprivileged children in India. They estimate that through their scheme they have reached nearly 100,000 children around the city of Bengaluru.



Figure 8: Sparky Football



Source: [Untitled image of Sparky Football], (2019), <https://bit.ly/3KUCnoU>

They aim through their work to give the participants in the scheme good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, and decent work and economic growth, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The scheme has been running successfully for a number of years, with many children being provided opportunities that they would not have received had the program not existed. They have since worked with Rohingya refugees in a collaboration with other agencies.

Summary

In this reading we have discussed what it means for sport to be for social good and how it can aid in the development of a population. We have provided examples that show sport must be sustainable to succeed in the modern world. When we say sustainable, we are thinking about sport being able to both interact with the world in a manner that does not diminish the world's resources, but also in terms of its survival. Sport, and particularly sport for development, needs to be financially sustainable. It is no use having a sporting element to a development goal, but not planning well enough for it to last its intended course. We have also outlined why, on some occasions, this might not be possible due to mismanagement or pressures brought on by the professionalised environment some sport exists in.

Sport is competitive and pits individuals and groups against each other; therefore we must be mindful that even if we feel that sport could be useful in a particular development role, it might not always be the right choice.

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