

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE DISTRICT ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: RIBÁUÈ 2020- 2022

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**Abstract:** This article under the theme ‘‘The Influence of the District Advisory Council in the decision-making process: Ribáue 2020-2022’’, results from the preparation of a master’s thesis in Project Management and Development, submitted to the Faculty of Education and Communication of Catholic University of Mozambique. Its starting point is the following question: What is the influence of the Ribáue District Advisory Council in the decision-making process? And its central objective is to understand the influence of the Ribáue District Advisory Council in the decision-making process. With this main objective, we specifically sought to: i) Identify the types of Local Consultative Councils and their respective roles in communities; ii) Describe the decision-making process in the District Advisory Council; iii) Evaluate the local economic development process from the perspective of the members of the Advisory Council. The study was developed based on a qualitative methodology with an interpretative paradigm, involving 8 participants of both sexes. Empirical data were collected using semi-structured interview techniques, non-participant observation and document analysis, and were analyzed using the content analysis technique. Fundamentally, the study concludes that the Ribáue District Consultative Council exerts minimal influence, that is, little notable, that is, it is not consolidated, since in practice, they end up performing almost only a merely consultative function or even is characterized as legitimizing previously taken decisions.

**Keywords:** District Advisory Council; decision making.

## INTRODUCTION

In Mozambique, with the approval of the Law on Local State Bodies (Law Number: 8/2003, of 19 May) commonly known as LOLE, administrative decentralization

reforms gave rise to a series of Institutions for community participation and consultation (Local Councils), aiming to integrate local populations in the search for solutions to improve living conditions at local level. The regulation of Law Number: 8/2003, approved by Decree Number: 11/2005, enshrines the principle of community participation in their own development, therefore, ‘‘Local State Bodies must ensure the participation of citizens, local communities, associations and other forms of organizations, whose purpose is to defend their interests, in the formation of decisions that concern them’’ (article 100, Law Number: 8/2003).

These legal provisions emanate principles and norms for the organization, powers and functioning of local State bodies at the levels of province, district, administrative post and locality. Article 3 of LOLE states that Local State Bodies in their functioning must observe the principles of good administration, respect for subjective rights and the legitimate interests of those administered, guarantee the active participation of citizens, encourage local initiative in solving problems community problems, applying, in particular, the resources within their reach.

Respecting what is recommended in the LOLE and its regulations (RELOLE), the districts at the country level began in 2006, the institutionalization of Local Councils, at all levels, starting from the Town, Locality, Administrative Post and District, integrating several representatives of different groups in local society. These bodies have been referred to in set as ‘‘Local Councils (CLs) or, more commonly, as ‘‘Community Participation and Consultation Institutions (IPCCs) (Forquilha, 2009).

In this article, the following starting question is raised: What is the influence of the Ribáue District Consultative Council on the decision-making process?

The main objective is to understand the influence of the Ribáuè District Advisory Council on the decision-making process. In fact, the following research questions were formulated: i) What are the types of Local Advisory Council and their respective roles? ii) How does the decision-making process occur in the District Advisory Council? iii) What assessment do the members of the District Advisory Council make about the process of local economic development in the district of Ribáuè?

The relevance of the study is linked, on the one hand, to its social and scientific relevance, and on the other, to the researchers' personal interest and curiosity in delving deeper into the subject. It is, therefore, a topic of great personal interest for researchers in wanting to understand the influence of the Ribáuè District Consultative Council in the decision-making process, since the functioning of this body raises several questions in terms of efficiency, suspecting it if it is in the wake of government authorities and therefore has little power to influence decision-making. From a social point of view, the relevance of the topic lies in the fact that it changes the mechanisms for society's participation in local governance. From a scientific point of view, the study of this topic is necessary because it constitutes a theoretical contribution to academia and science in general.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **LOCAL COUNCILS**

Local Councils are defined as "consultation bodies of local administration authorities, in the search for solutions to fundamental issues that affect the lives of populations, their well-being and sustainable, integrated and harmonious development of the living conditions of the local community" (MAEFP & MEF, 2015, p. 21). According to

the same source, community authorities also participate in these bodies.

This definition was reinforced with the approval of Ministerial Certificate, Number: 67/2009, of April 17th, just as RELOLE defines Local Councils as a "consultation body for the authorities of the local administration, in the search for solutions to fundamental issues that affect the lives of populations, their well-being and sustainable, integrated and harmonious development". They consist of the creation of a public space for institutional mediation through which representatives of communities, organizations and interest groups would be encouraged to participate in the debate and choice, especially regarding the major intervention priorities of public authorities at the local level.

In turn, MASC (2014) explains that these consultation institutions allow dialogue between the state and communities, at different levels: Village, Locality, Administrative Post and District. For the same source, communities in the district are organized into Local Councils, Local Forums, Community Committees and Community Funds.

Local Forums (FLs) are civil society institutions that aim to organize representatives of communities and local interest groups to allow them to define their priorities.

Community Committees (CCs) are forms of organizing populations to allow communities to mobilize in identifying and seeking solutions to their problems, and can forward other concerns to the relevant public sector structures. These Committees can be set up to manage land, water and other natural resources, schools, health centers and other non-profit institutions at a local level. It is regulated that all existing committees must appoint a representative to participate in local advisory council sessions (MASC, 2014, p. 11).

Thus, it can be seen that the Local Council is an institution that aims to contribute

to the institutionalization of participation mechanisms and community consultations, which expands the possibilities for discussing ideas from different social segments in the same space and with common objectives. That said, the decision-making process within the Advisory Councils is largely involving as it results from the participation of the different social segments that make up these bodies.

## **CREATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

Local Councils are entities whose legislation (LOLE) grants the power of the district administrator to create them, that is, the administrator is responsible for the institutionalization of local councils. In fact, the LOLE regulations formulated this idea as follows: „„the district administrator is responsible for the institutionalization of local councils at district and lower levels““ (Decree Number: 11/2005).

Article 118 of Decree Number: 11/2005 recommends that members of local councils are selected through a process that involves different levels: the lower levels choose their representatives for the levels above, ranging from community development committees (CDCs), passing through by local councils from Village, Place, Administrative Post to the District.

Therefore, the institutionalization of local councils sought to ensure, through the guidelines that underlie the process of citizen participation in Mozambique, fundamentally, two important aspects of the democratization of the State: the exercise of citizenship and social construction. In this sense, it can be stated that these institutional spheres are based on the creation of public spaces whose purpose is to give voice to local actors or social organizations, enabling the implementation of a democratic management model in which the inclusion of people who are involved is privileged. by the consequences of government

decision-making processes on public policies at the district level.

This definition is reinforced in MAEFP and MEF (2015), which define the criteria for the formation of interest groups: condition, activity and common concern. Therefore, a given person may belong to different interest groups. As you can see, in the places where we live we may have a certain association of carpenters, religious, or other types of associations created at the community level.

## **TYPES OF LOCAL COUNCILS AND PRINCIPLES OF THEIR CONSTITUTION**

Community participation and consultation is carried out through local councils at the following levels:

- a) District – District Advisory Council (CCD);
- b) Administrative Post – Administrative Post Advisory Council (CCPA);
- c) Locality – Locality Advisory Council (CCL);
- d) Povoação – Povoação Consultative Council (CCP).

Under the terms of MAEFP and MEF (2015), the constitution of Local Councils must comply with the principles of integration and representativeness. Thus, “Local Councils, community leaders, representatives of economic, social and cultural interest groups chosen by Local Councils or Forums at lower levels in proportion to the population of each territorial level” (p. 21) must be part of the Local Councils). Therefore, the Director of each Local State Body has the prerogative to invite influential personalities from civil society to join the Local Council in order to ensure representation of the different actors and sectors.

This way, women’s representation of never less than 30% must be guaranteed. Whenever

possible, 40% of the members of the different Local Councils must be community leaders. A representation of at least 20% of young people must be guaranteed.

## DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

First of all, it is important to know the concept of decision in order to understand the decision-making process. Thus, etymologically, the word decision comes from Latin deriving from the prefixes "de" meaning to stop or interrupt, followed by the etym "caedere" which means to split or cut. Therefore, deciding means stopping cutting or letting it flow (Online Portuguese Dictionary).

From the Latin the decision concerns a determination or resolution that is made about a certain thing. The Online Portuguese Dictionary also explains that decision is a feminine noun that designates the action or effect of deciding; determination. As a general rule, the decision involves starting or ending a situation; that is, it imposes a change of state.

The decision implies a resolution that is taken after deliberation; sentence or judgment. It concerns everything that was resolved about something through deliberation. Thus, the opposite of decision is indecision, perplexity or hesitation. Therefore, decision-making is generally defined as the choice of a course of action, among several possible alternatives, with the aim of achieving a specific end (Mintzberg, 1980). In fact, according to Harrison and Pelletier (2000), decision-making is a process of selecting and choosing an option and excluding other possible alternatives. For example, within a company, the decision-making process is related to the evaluation and selection of a strategic path to be taken, within a sector, market or process.

Historically, decision making is associated with Herbert Simon, who, intending to explain human behavior in organizations, released a book entitled Administrative Behavior in

1947. It was with this book that Simon began Decision Theory, where, explains Chiavenato (2003), each individual participates rationally and consciously, choosing and making personal decisions regarding rational behavioral alternatives. In this sense, it is worth remembering that everyone must make decisions, both individual and administrative, bearing in mind that this is strictly related to taking advantage of opportunities and also with the ability to solve problems.

## STAGES OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Starting from the fact that Herbert Simon was one of the first researchers to propose a formalization of the decision-making process, it is necessary to present his model, consisting of three phases, namely:

- i) Information (Intelligence), which involves observing the organization's surrounding environment, with the aim of identifying situations that require decision-making;
- ii). Project (Design), in which we seek to better understand and structure the decision problem, and identify, develop and analyze possible courses of action or alternative solutions;
- iii). Choice, which implies choosing the most appropriate course of action from among the various alternatives generated in the previous phase. This is a dynamic decision-making process because, despite establishing a sequence between each of its phases, it is possible, whenever necessary, to return to a previous phase to adjust, or introduce new information, as shown in the following figure.

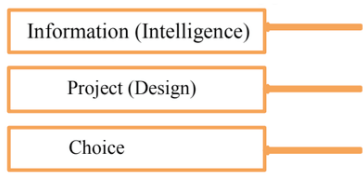


Figure 1: Simon's (1977) decision-making process model

Source: Bernardo (2006).

Simon's model has an apparently simple structure, but it illustrates well the decision-making process and the relationships that are established between each of its phases, which makes it easy to understand and use, being a reference model in most cases. part of the studies related to decision making, regardless of the scientific area in which they fall. Thus, Simon (1980) also proposed a hierarchical decomposition of his model, in which each of the phases of the process can include the sub-phases of Information, Project and Choice. This new design was called "wheels within wheels". Other conceptual models of the decision-making process have been developed. Fundamentally, such models are just extensions of the Simon Model (Sabherwal & King, 1995).

Starting from Simon's model, other models were developed comprising different stages of the decision-making process. For example, Certo (2005) argues that the decision-making process involves the following steps: i) List possible alternatives to solve the problem; ii) Select the most beneficial of the alternatives; iii) Implement the chosen alternative; iv) Gather feedback to find out whether the implemented alternative is solving the identified problem.

Maximiano (2009) points out 7 stages of the decision-making process and explains that the same (process) requires the person to: i) Identify the decision; ii) Gather relevant information; iii) Identify the alternatives; iv) Evaluate the evidence; v) Choose between

alternatives; vi) Put it into practice; vii) Analyze your decision.

## PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING IN LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

The concept of participation refers to the idea of sharing, collaboration, involving human groups or popular masses. This way, participation is understood as an action in which the majority of people influence decisions of a political, social and economic nature, hence Paro (1996) states that the word participation can be understood from different approaches, as this word It is marked by factors such as the inclusion of sectors of the population excluded from social benefits, the processes of modernity, democratization and the transformation of states. Thus, participation is seen as a basic element for democratization as it seeks to create a set of social actions that produce the effect of "expanding the capacity to influence the decision-making process at all levels of current social affairs and institutions" (p.17).

Participation occurs when there is effective access for those involved in the planning of actions, the execution of activities and their monitoring and evaluation. It is on this basis that Basílio (2014) explains that in the social context, participation constitutes a fundamental instrument with a view to promoting coordination between actors at different levels, strengthening the cohesion of the State, Government and Civil Society relationship, which enables improvement of the quality of decisions about society, making it easier to achieve objectives of common interest. This idea is shared by Ibraimo (2014) stating that participation forms a consensual and conflictual process that, in a certain way, allows us to understand the difficulties of participation.

Community participation is a process

by which individuals take part in decision-making in institutions, programs and the environments that affect them.

In the context of Local Consultative Councils, participation finds an officially established space with the approval of the Law on Local State Bodies (LOLE), Law Number: 8/2003, of 19 May, resulting from the administrative decentralization reforms that gave rise to a series of institutions for community participation and consultation (Local Councils), aiming at the integration of local populations in the search for solutions to improve living conditions at local level.

It is important to remember that the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, in its Article 116, establishes that “at different territorial levels, the OLE’s<sup>1</sup>, ensure the participation and decision of citizens in matters of self-interest of the respective community” (Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, 2004).

It was from here that the Government took dialogue as a fundamental method for listening and searching for better ways to satisfy the needs of the population, getting them involved in the decision-making process. Before that, the Ministries of Planning and Finance and State Administration published in 1998 a document with the purpose of guiding the activity of drafting and implementing District Development Plans (PDD), containing specific guidelines to support their formulation. According to Valá (2009), both LOLE and its regulations also resulted from the exploration and incorporation into them of relevant experiences on community participation processes that took place in the districts of Nampula Province.

## **METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

To materialize the study, we opted for a qualitative approach methodology in the form of a case study and interpretative paradigm, and semi-structured interview techniques, non-participant observation and document analysis were used for data collection. 8 study participants were involved, all of them members of the Advisory Council of the District of Ribáuè, the place where the research was carried out, that is, the case of the present study. Gil (2007) defines case study as a modality characterized by the study exhaustive study of one or a few objects, in order to allow broad and detailed knowledge. In Minayo’s view (2004), the qualitative approach makes the researcher delve into the universe of meanings of human and cultural actions and relationships.

The work was developed using a qualitative approach, which means that the study sought to assess the perceptions of the subjects involved in the research on the influence of the District Advisory Council in the decision-making process.

For ethical reasons in scientific research and information reliability, we sought to maintain confidentiality and integrity for the 8 study participants, and codes were assigned so that their personal data would not be exposed (Bardin, 2014). That said, participants were coded using a combination of letters and numbers in order to omit their identification, starting from E1...E8.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The analysis and discussion of the results was carried out within categories and subcategories. The data analysis process was triggered in a triangular strategy based on three empirical sources, namely, semi-

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1. Local State Bodies.

structured interviews, document analysis and non-participant observation.

## TYPES AND ROLES OF LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

Regarding the types of Local Councils, the interviewees' statements (E1, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7 and E8) were unanimous in stating that the Local Consultative Councils are of four, classified in a hierarchy that starts from the village level and ends at the district level. For example, one of the participants mentioned that "the types of councils that I know are: village council; local advisory council; administrative post advisory council and district advisory council" (E2).

As can be seen, the four types of Local Consultative Councils presented by the interviewees exactly coincide with those described by the Mozambican State as the Ministry of State Administration and Public Function (MAEFP & MEF, 2015) speaks of the i) Consultative Council of Village (CCP); ii) Locality Advisory Council (CCL); iii) Administrative Post Advisory Council (CCPA) and; iv) District Consultative Council (CCD).

Thus, it can be said that the interviewees and the literature consulted move in the same direction in terms of understanding what types of Local Advisory Councils are. This understanding converges with the legal dictates set out in Law Number: 8/2003, of May 19th (Law on Local State Bodies) and in Decree Number: 11/2005, of June 10th (Regulation of the Law on Local State Bodies), which create and regulate the Local State Bodies, respectively.

## ROLE OF LOCAL COUNCILS IN THE COMMUNITY

Regarding the role played by Local Councils in the communities, those interviewed converge on the idea of taking the concerns of

the communities to the competent government entities and taking the government's achievements to the communities, vice versa. In other words: "The role of the local council is to take the population's concerns to the government and also to take the government's achievements to the attention of the population" (E2). "The role of the local advisory council in the community is to serve as an intermediary between the people's word and the government" (E7).

In the words of another interviewee:

"The role of the local advisory council in the community is to bring the concerns of the population to the government, as well as transmit government information to the population and serve as an agent, a civic educator in the fight against uncontrolled fires, premature marriages, collective and individual hygiene among others" (E6).

Now, Decree Number: 11/2005 establishes in article 122, nº 2, that among the main tasks of Local Councils the following stand out:

- Collect and convey the development concerns of local communities;
- Collaborate with district authorities in disseminating information relevant to development, ensuring the return of information to local communities in the district;
- Participate in the process of preparation, implementation and control of provincial and district strategic development plans;
- Assess and give an opinion on the economic and social plan and district budget;
- Consider proposals for private investment and concessions for the exploration of natural resources and land use rights;
- Promote The participation from the population at Implementation of



initiatives in local development.

Analyzing the content of the interviewees' testimonies, it is clear that, in fact, there is a point of convergence between what the perceptions of the research participants are and what is reflected in the official State documents, especially in points related to social issues, economic, civic and natural resources.

### **DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE DISTRICT ADVISORY COUNCIL**

This category is dedicated to the decision-making process within the District Advisory Council. It sought to bring the perceptions of the study participants about this component, crossing it with the documents analyzed, observations made and those that are the reflections of the different authors evident in the theoretical framework of the present work, showing the points of convergence and divergence.

Regarding the mechanisms by which decisions are made in the District Consultative Council, it was found that the participants converge on the same point, according to which decisions are taken through the vote of the members of the body. "These decisions are taken through open votes (E2). "The mechanisms used in decision-making in the District Advisory Council are through voting" (E4). In the same line of thought, other interviewees explained that, when faced with an issue scheduled for consideration at the District Consultative Council session, it is placed in the plenary session for debate by the members, who are called upon to vote for its approval or no. Therefore, regarding this process, from the minutes analyzed, which have been systematically cited in this preparation, it was possible to verify that the agenda items were actually approved by voting by the members of the body. After voting on

both the session's agenda and the specific issues that embodied each point on the same agenda, the president of the body took the decision to grant, that is, declare approval or disapproval.

The legislation states that decisions taken by Local Councils must be in line with the country's reality and must meet the communities' desires (Decree Number: 11/2005 & Decree Number: 35/2012). In this regard, Forquilha (2009) states that most of the time the decisions taken by Local Councils end up not reflecting the opinions of their members but rather the partisan political wishes of the leaders of the body, that is, the party in power.

### **CONTRIBUTION OF THE DISTRICT ADVISORY COUNCIL TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

In this aspect, the interviewees stated that the District Consultative Council's contribution to local development consists of several forms, including: i) presentation of the communities' concerns or proposals to the CCD; ii) approval of development plans and projects to be implemented in the community; iii) definition of priorities by the CCD (E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6).

In fact, Decree Number: 35/2012, of October 5th and Ministerial Certificate, Number: 67/2009, of April 17th recall that Local Councils contribute to local development insofar as, among several aspects, their different commissions of work (i- economic matters; ii- social matters and health; iii- education, youth and sports matters; iv- infrastructure matters; v- governance and public security matters) develop actions in their respective areas of activity.

In the same vein and by way of example, on economic issues, MAEFP and MEF (2015), argue that Local Councils must, among several things, facilitate the resolution of

land conflicts and access to natural resources; control forestry exploitation; raise community awareness in the production of food and cash crops; coordinate actions with the District Economic Activities Services and with the local State body at the respective level.

## CONCLUSION

Starting from the results obtained and the respective discussion characterized by the triangulation of empirical sources, mainly the semi-structured interview, non-participant observation and documentary analysis, in a cross exercise with the literature consulted, it was possible to reach three major conclusions linked to the specific objectives and questions of investigation.

For the establishment of Local Councils as spaces for participation and decision-making, the rules defined for their constitution were followed, showing that institutionalization proved to be decisive for the organization and structuring of practices that enable the democratization of public administration.

In general, the established rules conferred rights that guarantee society and citizens are included in participation spaces, but also principles for the exercise of collective dialogue through the deliberation process, having concluded that Local Councils at village, locality, administrative post and district levels operate in the district of Ribáuè.

However, it was observed that the fact that the guidelines placed the District Consultative Council under close dependence on public power structures, in terms of its functionality, generates dysfunctions translated, mainly, by its enormous link to the local government and the lack of autonomy in these instances of participation and deliberation, interfering with their potential to exert influence on public policies.

In the dimension of influencing the decision-making process, it was evident that

the Ribáuè District Consultative Council exerts minimal influence, that is, little notable, that is, it is not consolidated, since, in practice, they end up performing almost only one function merely consultative or even characterized as legitimizing previously taken decisions, especially with regard to the main governance instruments, the plans and annual balance reports (PESOD) of the district government through open voting, which in some cases without diving into in depth the topics under discussion, even the meaning of your vote.

Based on the results, it was possible to verify that, although there is a minimal tendency for the Ribáuè District Consultative Council to be able to influence the president of the body in the decision-making process, seen from the point of view of freedom in speaking and presenting opinions in the sessions, there are still constraints to its effectiveness, since, with regard to the formation of the agenda on the topics taken to the general assembly, in these spaces, it is dominated by the district government, generating a weak thematization from segments of society civil society represented. This training, when combined with the linking of the district advisory council to the government agenda, reinforces the persistence of practices that are adverse to more participatory forms of co-management. This act was evidenced in the analysis carried out in documents consulted (minutes of the sessions), where all the agenda proposals presented to this body were unanimously approved, without, however, taking place an in-depth discussion.

In the present study, the high predominance of local government and the weak influence of representations of civil organizations in the district consultative council of Ribáuè were found to interfere with the ability of actors (members of the body) to ensure their political autonomy.

leading to the formation of institutional links with public authorities in the district and the weakening of a possible sharp and critical clash around the governing process at the district level.

In the local development dimension, there was an important gain derived from local councils, which has to do with the fact that they have contributed, in a certain way, to local governance, hence the assessment made through the testimonies of the interviewees, the Documents analyzed and observations made point to a positive direction. There are, therefore, public policies that were deliberated and decided upon and that were incorporated into local government programs.

Such decisions contributed to the achievement of significant achievements at the district level, both in the municipalized area and outside it, recorded over the years under study, with regard to the opening of water holes and the construction of some drinking water supply systems, in local health units. There was also the construction of new classrooms, small health units, the construction and rehabilitation of buildings for some local secretariats and administrative posts, bridges and local roads, as well as the expansion of the Cahora Bassa<sup>2</sup> electricity supply at the headquarters of the Administrative Post and in some villages where the medium voltage line passes.

However, there are still constraints to the implementation or transformation of such public policies into concrete actions at the desired speed within the communities that

2. Cahora Bassa is the main hydroelectric dam built in Mozambique, constituting the country's main source of energy and one of the main ones in the SADC region, in Africa.

demanding them. Apparently, this is partly due to the reduced financial resources that the local government has to respond to the population's demands. Therefore, the study allowed us to realize that regarding the expectations of social participation and the decision-making process, there is still a huge distance between the ideal and the real.

However, the results showed that in order to have a more accurate influence on decision-making processes over local government that contributes to increasing the legitimacy of decisions, it is possible in the context studied, but that it is still necessary to deal with the various obstacles identified when throughout the study, without disregarding that local councils constitute a main means of presenting and resolving demands, despite the budgetary limitations that still persist.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Ultimately, and taking into consideration, the conclusions of this study associated with its limitations, new studies are suggested in ways that can deepen this theme, exploring new lines of research related to the subject, both in the case in question and in other cases, this will allow the theoretical and specific knowledge base to be expanded, with an updated vision and approach. Even so, it seems important to highlight the importance of this work, as it makes an important contribution to academia and to the enrichment of the current bibliographic collection.

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