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**TOURISM  
IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

**Spa Tourism in Serbia and Experiences of Other Countries**



**THEMATIC  
PROCEEDINGS**

**I**



**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC  
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT  
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# HEALTH AND SPA TOURISM IN CROATIA IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPING ECONOMY OF RURAL AREAS

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## Abstract

*Health and spa tourism is increasingly finding its place on a demanding tourism market place. However, its survival is questionable. Why is that so? How can it be prevented? What type of spa tourism should be developed in order to remain recognizable and viable in the tourism market? What are the new forms of spa tourism that should be developed? Despite the fact that Croatia has great potentials for further development of spa tourism industry, this is not known enough. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to examine the above-mentioned dilemma. In addition to the primary objective of strengthening all forms of sustainable spa tourism, the paper will also encourage development of new forms by which Croatia can become more recognizable. The basic hypothesis of this paper will demonstrate the role, position, and importance of spa tourism, and its impact on the economic development of rural areas based on Croatia's experience.*

**Keywords:** *Croatia's spa tourism, selective forms of tourism, tourism product, tourism industry, economy, rural areas.*

## Introduction

Problems with a poor supply of tourism content, and a challenging tourism demand are increasingly present in the tourism industry. This imposes the need for continuous work on adapting the tourist offer in order to achieve the best possible results of the tourist economy. Since the beginning of the development of the tourism industry, Croatia has followed tightly a concept of massive development with a poor supply of tourism content, in addition to insufficient facilities and accommodation

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capacities. However, tourism market is changing more and more rapidly. Nowadays, it is not enough to offer ‘the sun and sea’ concept only, yet it is required to provide an additional content which will give the visitors another reason to return.

The state of modern tourism industry leads towards greater diversification of contents and services. Modern trends in tourism allow an individual to find a special place, with special amenities and features that are tailored to him individually. Tourists are no longer looking for ‘the sea and sun’ concept only. They are also looking for an active type of holidays which will allow them to learn more about the country they came to visit. They are also looking for different activities that were previously not available, and which today should be a part of a tourist destination. For this purpose, selective forms of tourism should be developed in order to offer a variety of facilities and to increase the attendance as well as the overall well-being of the country.

Because of the afore-mentioned and described state of Croatia’s tourism industry, it is necessary to discuss the development of selective forms of tourism. Croatia has great potential in the field of health-spa tourism. Resources in Croatia, both natural and human, are of great potential for development of this form of tourism, which could position Croatia high in the world’s tourism industry (Birkić et al., 2012, 39).

This paper seeks to identify the role and position of spa tourism as part of the selective tourism in Croatia. Through the work, we will include all the essential elements that make up the spa tourism (thermal, mineral, biological and climatological elements), its rich tradition, and possibility of further development of this type of tourism in Croatia.

### **The concept and importance of spa tourism**

In defining spa tourism, one has to start from the feature of health tourism. Health tourism is (Ivaničević 2005, 16) defined as “the border area of medicine and tourism, in which economic operators in the field of tourism and health institutions organize the stay of tourists in climate and health resorts primarily for the prevention of diseases, rehabilitation and treatment with the help of natural factors”. The basis of health tourism is made of natural factors or physiological medicine, which make it very different from conventional types of tourism (Kusen & Certinski, 2000, 255). Health tourism is defined by some authors (Kunst & Tomlinson,

2011, 5) as complex medical and touristic activities carried out in natural spas. Medical tourism (Jagysi, 2010, 12) includes trips with purpose of performing certain medical surgeries. Spa tourism can be defined as a tourist trip, during which the tourists for their stay may choose air and a health center, primarily for the prevention of diseases, rehabilitation, and treatment with the help of natural factors.

Nowadays one faces numerous threats and dangers to their physical, psychological and mental health. Population health and the environment in which s/he lives is exposed to various harmful effects. Taking care to maintain and improve the health, quality of life, as well as with a purpose of prevention, treatment, recovery and rehabilitation of various diseases, medicine, kinesiology, and other professions tend to their methods and programs to meet human needs for health and in the fight against various diseases. According to (Ivaničević, 2005), the following are the needs and programs for the promotion of health and a better quality of life:

- Healthy climate and environment
- Healthy diet
- The acquisition of positive and quitting of harmful habits
- Good mental health
- High quality of life
- The good condition of locomotor system
- A health heart and blood vessels
- Active holidays, recreation and sport
- Socializing culture and entertainment
- Spirituality

Spa tourism uses segments of tourist offer, which include professional use of natural healing factors and procedures of physical medicine, and rehabilitation in order to maintain and improve health and improve quality of life for tourists.

### **Health is extremely strong motive for all types of tourist movements**

Issues in this paper are accessed from the viewpoint that the tourism is motivated largely as a result of urbanization. Urbanized areas greatly damage the physical and mental condition of a person. Each escape from the urban environment helps us establish a balance of physical and mental condition. Therefore, we can rightly say that the health tourism functions incorporated in all kinds of tourist movements. It is medically proven that

any change in the environment has a positive effect on a person. It is therefore entirely correct attitude the one which was highlighted by a number of authors (Alfieri, 1977, 199; Hitrec, 1998, 2; Kušen, 2006, 177; Vukonić & Čavlek, 2001, 454) stating that the health is one of the oldest, permanent and the strongest motives of tourist movement and that tourism in all its forms is done in the function of health. The positive effects of tourism on the health sphere is confirmed through medical tourism function. This function was known in pre-touristic era, especially in the time of ancient Greece and Rome. The Greeks in ancient times were renowned for their health springs such as Epidaurus and Euboea, while the Romans founded baths and spas where they went to rest and leisure. This motive is strongly influenced by the overall development of tourism and tourism development trends in the world show that this motive in the future will gain even more importance because of the quality of health services are become increasingly interesting to tourists.

### **Spa tourism using the natural healing factors that keep health and improves the quality of life for tourists**

Modern life is the cause of many diseases and illnesses to the human body. People today are increasingly moving away from nature, living and working in inappropriate areas and conditions. Spending less time in nature limits its beneficial effects on health and its possible disease. Annual vacations are an opportunity to stay in nature and surrender oneself with its beneficial effects. Modern tourism is increasingly recognized as the value of natural healing factors (Trdina, 2008, 54), stressing them, promoting and using to offer health and spa tourism.

The basis of the tourist potential which has an effective impact on the health of tourists and that especially encouraged to change the usual environment are natural healing factors. Spa tourism, could be detected as a form of professional and under the supervision of the use of natural medicinal resources and procedures of physical medicine and rehabilitation in order to maintain and improve health and improve quality of life. The rule is rarely used just a natural healing factor. The spa tourism is used by favorable effects of climate, solar radiation, thermal mineral water, lake, sea algae, peloids (marine and freshwater), sand and naphthalene. The user is a tourist hotel, the camp and privately located guest who lives chosen way of life, until the day set aside for the implementation of the above mentioned factors and procedures (Ivanišević, 2005, 16). They are healthy and those with chronic

impairments of the locomotor system, with certain diseases of the respiratory, circulatory and other systems and skin. Through various programs of medical tourism provides users with beneficial effects on health.

The reasons for linking health, disease and tourism lies in the fact that tourists are they healthy and the sick, of all ages, different professions, occupations and worldview. Unfortunately, except in rare cases, natural healing factors are still used in tourism freely without professional supervision and on their own responsibility.

### **Research methodology**

This research is based on primary and secondary sources, and the approach and methods based on the views of domestic and foreign authors. The paper specifically explores the dilemmas that suggest questionable sustainable development of spa tourism. The authors ask, why is this so? How can it be prevented? What kinds of spa tourism should be developed to remain recognizable in the tourism market and a viable? What new forms of spa tourism to develop?

Despite the fact that Croatia has great potentials of spa tourism, it is not sufficiently accepted on this demanding tourist market. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to examine the said dilemma. The objectives of this paper are first and foremost consideration of priorities for strengthening all previous forms of sustainable spa tourism and encourage the development of new after that Croatia can become recognizable. This will be achieved SWOT analysis, exploring the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats to development. The basic hypothesis of this paper is to prove the role, position and importance of spa tourism, and its impact on the economic development of rural areas on the example of Croatian experience.

In this study to estimate the impact of tourist spending of spa tourism in the economy of rural areas, will be used for input-output analysis performed for the Croatian economy in 2005 made by the (Šutalo et al., 2011). For the purposes of this study used data on actual visitors and overnight stays from the official statistical records of the Croatian.

Evidence for the hypotheses will be carried out on the example of Croatian, basing it on a normal approach and method which is well

known among local and foreign scientists. Time of the research period of the last 5 years on the territory of the continental Croatia where spa tourism is realized and developed.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Condition and quality of the offers of spa tourism in Croatia**

One of the main economic determinants of Croatia is the tourism industry. Although Croatia is the world's most recognizable tourist destination by offering along the coast, the continental part of Croatian has a long tradition of thermal tourism. Croatia also has environmentally safe destinations, with its natural beauty, abundant natural healing factors, and with its human resources, it could become an oasis of health tourism.

A large part of the offer of continental tourism in Croatia relates to the spa. Some of them offer a classic medical services, while the majority's offer is based on wellness as a modern tourist trend. However, while some renewed capacity and its offer to adapt to market requirements, many of them have still not recognized health and spa industry as a motive for vacations of the future. Spas today are one of the most important forms of tourism on the continent.

Spa tourism provides various facilities at the thermal health resorts. The content of spa tourism is based on natural healing factors which combine different kinds of medical, preventive and wellness programs, adjusted to various needs of tourists.

The target groups of users of services of health tourism (Ivanišević, 2003) come throughout the year from neighboring countries with more expensive services, such as Italy, Germany, Austria, France and Switzerland. Also, customers come from neighboring countries where the service is worse, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. During the tourist season, the spa tourism services used by Croatian immigrants and older population of tourists.

The list of places with natural healing factors in Croatia (Ivanišević, 2003, 24; Brusić, 2012, 33), 156 are classified as sites or applications by type of factors as following: climatotherapy, thalassotherapy and balneotherapy. In Croatia, medicine operates 18 medical sites.

In this study we have 10 spas that their services are based on the healing thermal waters and make up the bulk supply of spa tourism in Croatia (Table 1).

**Table 1:** *Health resort in Croatia that use sources of medicinal and thermal waters*

Number	Location	Name	Medical factor
1.	Bizovac	Bizovačke toplice	Btmv
2.	Daruvar	Daruvarske toplice	Btv
3.	Ivanić Grad	Naftalan	Btmvn
4.	Krapina	Krapinske toplice	Btv
5.	Lipik	Lječilište	Btmv
6.	Livade	Sv. Stjepan	Btmvp
7.	Stubica	Stubičke toplice	Btv
8.	Topusko	Lječilište	Btv
9.	Tuhelj	Tuheljske toplice	Btvp
10.	Varaždin	Varaždinske toplice	Btmp

*B- balneotherapy, tv- thermal waters, Tmv- thermo-mineral waters, p-peloids*

**Source:** *As applied by the author (Inanišević, 2003), <https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/dodatak:Popis-termalnih.lječilišta-u-hrvatskoj> (24.3.2016.); [www.zane.hr/wps/wcm/connect/d6d9cab6.../ZANE+Bilten+0313.pdf](http://www.zane.hr/wps/wcm/connect/d6d9cab6.../ZANE+Bilten+0313.pdf) (24.3.2016)*

Spa tourism industry in Croatia consists of 10 spas that have a health-related function which is based on the healing of thermal mineral waters. They are mostly located in the continental Croatian territory.

The qualities of the spa are excellent bioclimatic factors and thermal water with sulfur and fluorine, suitable for the treatment of various diseases, such as: spine injuries and diseases of the spine; rheumatism; neurological conditions and diseases; orthopedic diseases and deformities; post-operative conditions and conditions after injuries of the musculoskeletal system; rehabilitation for children 2-14 years and adults.

Furthermore, they are effective for treatment of urological diseases; gynecological diseases; post-traumatic conditions; convalescence; treatment of disorders in the vascular system, circulation and peripheral nervous system; treatment of a wide range of rheumatic complaints; treatment and rehabilitation of bone tissue; traumatic damage caused by road accidents and other injuries; improve the general physical condition

of the disabled and the elderly, treating chronic inflammation and post-operative conditions of female genital organs; treatment of primary and secondary sterility; physical education treatments for athletes.

Further, they are known for treatment of diabetes with neurological or anginous complications; post-operative rehabilitation of coronary infarct patients and surgery patients; treatment of patients with heart surgery and convalescents; treatment of patients suffering from diseases in the peripheral vascular system and surgery patients in the vascular system; treatment of coronary diseases and the like.

For the accommodation of tourists in the 10 analyzed spas in Croatia, 2,449 beds are available.

**Table 2:** *Number of the building and units offer external and total tourism in the Republic of Croatia in the period from 2010 to 2014*

Year	Objects		Capacity (beds)		%	
	Spa	Total	Spa	Total	Objects	Beds
2010.	10	2.117	2.547	909.951	0,5	0,3
2011.	10	2.189	2.544	934.564	0,5	0,3
2012.	10	2.326	2.510	880.170	0,4	0,3
2013.	10	2.427	2.493	925.773	0,2	0,3
2014.	10	2.428	2.449	977.414	0,2	0,3

**Source:** *Croatian tourism in numbers (2010, 2012, 2014), Zagreb, MTRH, HT*

Data in Table 2 shows that 10 facilities in spa tourism make up 0.2% of total facilities, and 0.3% of the total capacity of beds in Croatian tourism. The facilities and capacities in total Croatian tourism are small, but very important for continental Croatia and its rural area.

### **Business aspects of Croatian spa tourism**

Given that Croatia's spa tourism industry can offer up to 2,449 beds in 10 spas, in the last 5 years the following is the achieved revenue (Tables 3 and 4).

**Table 3:** Actual visitors to the spa and the total Croatian tourism in the period 2010-2014 (in thousands)

Year	Number of visitors of spa industry in Croatia	Total number of visitors (tourism, general)	% of spa visitors out of grand total	Spa index	Total index
2010.	28	10.604	0,3	-	-
2011.	27	11.456	0,2	96	108
2012.	26	11.835	0,2	96	103
2013.	31	12.433	0,2	119	105
2014.	34	13.128	0,3	110	106

**Source:** *Croatian tourism in numbers (2010, 2012, 2014), Zagreb, MTRH, HT*

From the data in Table 2, one can see that the Croatia's spas annually visited by 26 to 34,000 tourists, which in total Croatian tourist traffic consists of 0.3%. One may also notice that the number of visitors to spas experienced robust growth of 19% in 2013, 10% in 2014, growing faster than the total in the Croatian tourism when the same grew 5 and 6%. The situation with overnight stays in Croatian spas is similar (Table 4).

**Table 4:** *Nights of the spa and the total Croatian tourism in the period 2010-2014*

Year	Number of visitors of spa industry in Croatia	Total number of visitors (tourism, general)	% of spa visitors out of total	Spa index	Total index
2010.	197	56.416	0,3	-	-
2011.	197	60.354	0,3	100	107
2012.	200	62.743	0,3	102	104
2013.	199	64.818	0,3	99	103
2014.	220	66.484	0,3	111	103

**Source:** *Croatian tourism in numbers (2010, 2012, 2014), Zagreb, MTRH, HT*

The number of tourists and overnight is growing from year to year. In 2014, spa were visited by 34,000 tourists or 10% more than the previous year and realized 220,000 overnight stays, which is 11% more than the previous year. Very interesting data on the use of capacity in the facilities of spa tourism are given in Table 5.

**Table 5:** *The average number of overnight stays by type of facility and the beds in the spa and the total Croatian tourism in the period from 2010 to 2014*

Year	Percentage of nights spent		Percentage of nights spent (per bed occupancy)	
	Spa tourism	Total tourism	Spa tourism	Total tourism
2010.	7,0	5,3	66	62
2011.	7,3	5,3	66	65
2012.	7,7	5,3	67	71
2013.	6,4	5,2	80	70
2014.	6,5	5,1	88	68

**Source:** *Croatian tourism in numbers (2010, 2012, 2014), Zagreb, MTRH, HT*

Table 5 shows the average overnight stays at the facility and the bed in spa tourism and comparison with the realization of Croatian tourism in general. In both cases, the objects in spa tourism have performed better compared to the entire tourism in Croatia. In the facilities of spa tourism the average stay of tourists ranged from 6.4 to 7.7 nights while in total Croatian tourism this stay averaged from 5.1 to 5.3 nights. The same can be said of the achieved average overnight stays per bed. The spa tourism is 66-88 nights per bed and the total Croatian tourism on average ranges from 62 to 71 nights per bed.

Finally it should be noted that tourism is one of the most important drivers of economic development in Croatia, which undoubtedly puts it among the key components of the national economy and foreign trade. The role of tourism in the economic system results from its economic functions. Tourism, which from an economic point of view is composed of a number of sectors and activities through tourist spending, causes direct and indirect effects on the economy. In this regard, research (Šutalo et al., 2011) established the direct and indirect effects of tourism in Croatian economy in percentage amounts is 14.6% of total revenues and 14.7% of the total value added. For the realization of direct and indirect effects of tourism in a number of branches and activities in the national and regional economy confirmed by other authors (Frechtling, 1999; Kesar, 2008). The above statement is true for spa tourism to the tourist spending generated effects in a number of branches and activities at the level of the national economy, as well as in local and rural economy.

Spa tourism contributes to the enrichment of the Croatian tourist product, provides employment growth, and it prolongs the tourist season. This carries a full range of other positive socio-economic impacts, both in communities where it is being developed and in the national economy.

### **Developmental aspects of spa tourism in Croatia**

The rating perspective and the development of spa tourism in Croatia is based on the SWOT analysis presented below. This SWOT analysis, were found strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the development of spa tourism in Croatia.

**Table 6:** *SWOT analysis of the prospects and development of spa tourism in Croatia*

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<p>The number of outstanding geothermal springs and medicinal mud</p> <p>Temperature abundance of geothermal resources</p> <p>climate benefits</p> <p>The beauty, diversity and preservation of the landscape</p> <p>Wealth uninhabited, economic unused areas</p> <p>Year-round operation of health tourism</p> <p>The easy availability of healthy and high quality food</p> <p>Tradition of health tourism in the seaside resort</p> <p>The expertise of the medical staff</p> <p>Environmental preservation destinations</p> <p>The existence of traditional manifestations</p> <p>The hospitality and kindness of the local population</p> <p>There are grounds for the development of small family businesses in tourism</p> <p>High security of the country</p>	<p>The lack of vision of tourism development in continental Croatia</p> <p>The lack of recognizable tourist identity</p> <p>Insufficient perception of health tourism as a driver for the development of continental tourism</p> <p>underdeveloped Croatian</p> <p>Insufficient exploration of geothermal potential (location, temperature, the healing properties)</p> <p>Categorization and equipment of objects in destinations</p> <p>The interweaving of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Tourism</p> <p>Lack of modern med-tourism and spa / wellness facilities</p> <p>Poorly developed tourist infrastructure in health tourism destinations</p> <p>Unclear legislation in the sphere of health tourism</p> <p>Insufficient knowledge management of tourism development in Continental Croatian</p> <p>Lack of knowledge for initiating health tourism projects</p> <p>Insufficient system to encourage the development of health tourism offer</p>

Opportunities	Threats
<p>Strong demand for health-resort services</p> <p>Create a unique tourist offer with emphasis on the cultural and natural heritage</p> <p>Easily accessible experiences of other countries in the development of health tourism</p> <p>Compliance with the trends in Europe and the world with quality and program content offers</p> <p>Raising public awareness of the economic potential of health tourism</p> <p>The possibility of the development of EU funds</p> <p>The interest of foreign capital</p> <p>The introduction of European quality standards</p> <p>The relationship of health to other specific forms of tourism</p> <p>Increasing the quality of services</p> <p>Cooperation with other regions- create the continental tourism</p> <p>Create a new recognizable tourism destinations (Continental Croatia)</p>	<p>Low interest holders of public authority for the development of health tourism projects</p> <p>Lack of cooperation between the public and private sectors in the health-tourism projects</p> <p>Investment in health and tourist projects without a vision for the development and management of health-tourism destination</p> <p>Harsh competition already developed health tourism destination in the competitive environment</p> <p>Slow development of tourism infrastructure</p> <p>S relations</p> <p>The lack of cooperation with relevant institutions at regional and national level</p> <p>The higher investment costs and demanding process obtaining investors and operators</p> <p>Lack of money for the restoration of cultural heritage</p> <p>Setting migration of population from the rural areas</p>

**Source:** *As applied by the author (Birkić, Vinter Marković, 2012, 48) i (Bartoluci, Hendija, 2012, 19), (Institut za turizam Zagreb, 2014, 28)*

Health-related resorts in Croatia have high comparative advantages in attracting more tourists. A very long tradition of spa tourism facilitates the execution of tasks related to this type of tourism. The advantage of the environmental and conservation of the environment which is usually only found in almost all Croatian, but is especially true of spa town where there is no developed industry.

Croatia has a very favorable geographical position thanks to the proximity of health and health resort main European tourist markets. The tourism market is characterized by an aging population, which opens the possibility of directing the offer in that direction. With an aging population, the European tourist market is characterized by the way of life of the working population in terms of noise, stress, lack of movement and

overweight. Thus, an increasing number of active population that suffers the consequences related to this kind of life, but in these environments are constantly warned that the disease can be avoided by prevention. Given the proximity of these markets and the long tradition of Croatian health tourism, our health and health resort with great opportunities for development of various anti-stress and wellness programs, and should continue intensive orientation part of its bid to prevention programs.

Tourist attraction to Croatia is unquestionable as it is indisputable fact that Croatia has top medical staff which is its cornerstone of competitive advantage in the provision of health and spa tourism.

Confirmation that Croatia is an interesting destination for health tourism is provided by the growing interest of foreign agencies that want to bring their insured in Croatia for the implementation of quality medical rehabilitation using natural healing factors.

The main impetus for the further development of health tourism in Croatia are:

- Quality of available thermal waters
- Long tradition in the use of resources
- Good geographical position
- Proximity to the source markets
- Ecological preservation area
- Variety of complementary tourist offer

It is of crucial importance to present a greater valorization of specification and material resources, as a significant development of health spa tourism is not possible without the permanent and target-oriented support in the elimination of a series of regulatory barriers and facilitating the entry of entrepreneurs in investments of this type.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Given the presented facts and figures, one may be led to the conclusion that the spa tourism in Croatia is underdeveloped compared to many current and potential competitors, with unquestionable advantages, such as a tourist attraction, favorable climatic and biological conditions, geographical location and top medical and travel when.

Such possibilities offered by natural and human resources should be more and better utilized, and a basic requirement that the situation improves is an appropriate and active approach of all stakeholders of the country with the relevant ministries, tourism workers and businessmen.

Faster and more intensive development in the area of spa tourism contributes to a number of positive effects: opens the scope for a year-round receipt of tourist and achieves greater future of tourism in certain areas in Croatia, reduces unemployment (creating the conditions for new jobs), provides opportunities for launch of various forms of complementary products with this type of tourism, and ultimately contributes to the further development of the national tourism and the economy.

Spa tourism, one of the most significant trends in tourism today, has to take a better place in the overall content of Croatia's tourism industry. Numerous sources of healing thermal waters in the Croatia's inland need adequate infrastructure in order to position themselves in the market as a quality tourist offer. One of the great advantages of such types of tourism industry is that it can remain in business throughout the year.

However, in order to develop this valuable potential in the best way, it is required that certain changes be implemented, mainly to guide the development of the continental area, and thus the spa tourism. Furthermore, a greater flexibility and readiness of institutions in spa tourism is required, as well as of their employees to comply with new trends and transitions to market economy.

Also, an additional effort should be put towards developing complementary types of tourism industry, in addition to the health tourism. It is necessary to adopt adequate legislation (the regulation of certain types of services) that at the moment does not exist, and ultimately, provide favorable financing models due to large investments that are required in arena of health tourism.

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