

## **Basic Education and Cultural Heritage: Prospects and Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

*Cultural heritage and Sustainable development goes hand in hand. However, cultural heritage could only function as a conduit of sustainable development through proper education in order to raise awareness of its importance. This paper explored how to effectively teach local cultural heritage of Nasugbu and Balayan, Batangas to grade school and high school students within the existing framework of the K-12 Curriculum. The general structural inadequacies of the Philippine Basic Education system are highlighted as these greatly affect the teaching of the local cultural heritage of the two towns.*

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, Philippine basic education, K-12 curriculum

### **1. Introduction**

It has already been argued that any development that is not entrenched and weaved through the local people's consciousness, traditions, and values is bound to fail (Zerrudo, 2005). During the 1982 UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies, "development" was defined as a "complex, comprehensive and multidimensional process which extends beyond mere economic growth, to incorporate all dimensions of life and all the energies of a community, all of those whose members are called upon to make a contribution and expect to share in the benefits" (Sta. Maria, 2001 p.67). Thus, it is imperative to include the dimensions of culture and heritage when drafting policies on national development. This is where cultural heritage finds its significance.

Cultural Heritage has been defined as "all the beliefs, values, practices, and objects that give a place its own specific character (Zialcita, 2007, pg.1). With this, the importance of heritage conservation cannot be overstated. In sustaining the value, meaning and significance of cultural resources from the past, for the use of the present and inspiration of future generations (Zerrudo, 2008), development becomes sustainable as it directly spring from the people and is appropriate to the local communities. However, the process of cultural conservation is entwined with the issue of awareness. We cannot expect local communities to conserve something that they are not aware of. Therefore, the process of heritage conservation brings fort the importance of education.

RA 10066 also known as The National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 mandates the Department of Education, in coordination with the National Commission on Culture and the Arts' (NCCA) Philippine Cultural Education Program (PCEP), to "*formulate the cultural heritage education programs both for local and overseas Filipinos to be incorporated in the formal, alternative and informal education, with emphasis on the protection, conservation and preservation of cultural heritage properties*" (Article X, Section 38).

Responding to the requirement set by law, the Department of Education utilized the data from the National Cultural Mapping Project of NCCA PCEP to create the SAGISAG KULTURA NG PILIPINAS (SKP), the essential Knowledge on Philippine Arts, Culture and Heritage in the then Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) (NCCA,2014). With the shift in the new K-12 curriculum, steps in developing a culture-based curriculum with emphasis on mother-tongue instruction and learning approach were evident.

Although the K-12 Curriculum is already on its third year of implementation, criticisms and scrutiny on its substance and implementation abound (Pooten, 2012). It is within this context that this paper operates. This study focuses on the teaching of cultural heritage in the elementary and high school level while problematizing the present condition of our basic education system.

### **1.1. Research Question**

Within the backdrop of the Basic Education System of the Philippines and the increasing importance of cultural heritage in sustainable development, this paper problematizes the question: *how can we effectively teach local cultural heritage of Nasugbu and Balayan, Batangas to grade school and high school students within the existing framework of the K-12 Curriculum?*

### **1.2. Objectives**

This paper generally seeks to find ways of including elements of Nasugbu and Balayan's local cultural heritage on the existing curriculum of local elementary and high schools of the towns. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Know the present situation of Basic Education in Nasugbu and Balayan;
2. Know the topics on local culture and history being discussed in Grade 6 and Grade 7;
3. Identify core competencies and skills being developed on the given grade levels;
4. Identify effective teaching strategies and materials;
5. Identify problems and limitations encountered by the teachers;
6. Contribute to the existing literatures on Basic Education and Cultural Heritage.

### **1.3. Significance**

Development emphasizes public participation in cultural heritage activities to ensure sustainability (Zerrudo, 2008, p.198). Heritage appreciation is nurtured through community organizing and capacity building. An important step towards community organizing is education. By knowing how to integrate local cultural heritage within the framework of the K-12 curriculum, students are better equipped in participating on projects of sustainable development rooted on local culture and traditions. Corollary, this paper can serve as a starting point of a more comprehensive study on Basic Education and Cultural Heritage which can provide insights in and making pedagogical decisions and drafting education policies and laws.

### **1.4. Limitation**

The context within which this paper operates is limited only to the two towns of Batangas – Nasugbu and Balayan. It does not intend to draw a picture of the entire Basic Education System of the Philippines but is solely focus on the experience of local elementary and high school teachers from the two towns. As such, the generalizability of this study is limited; aggravated by the fact that qualitative methodology was used.

## **2. Summary of Related Literature**

Judging by the plethora of local studies published in recent years regarding the importance of cultural heritage, researches that examine effective ways of integrating local heritage in the Basic Education subjects remain sparse. However, foreign literatures available on the subject matter at hand mostly offer a discussion on the importance of such integration. For example, a study stressed the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy as it uses cultural references that develop a student's identity thereby empowering him academically, socially, and politically (Wu, 2011). Further, Mèndez (2006) highlighted the effectiveness of using the students' heritage to improve academic achievement in writing as it validates their lives and experiences. A study even highlighted the importance of culture and cultural heritage themes in non-traditional education setup as it fosters teamwork attitudes and leadership, research and presentation skills (Alkateb, 2013).

There is also proliferation of researches arguing for effective teaching strategies on cultural heritage within the schools' formal curriculum (Passagua& Williams,2012; Smith, 2011; Simşek, Elitok,&Kesici, 2013). Passagua and Williams (2012) argued for the usefulness of using food in teaching family heritage and cultural diversity.

While Smith (2011) found out that in using heritage place and landscape analysis in teaching history is more effective as students clearly saw their own histories as closely linked to and expressed through attachment to the place. A research also saw the importance of using drama as teaching method for heritage education of primary school children (Simşeket *et al.*, 2013). Kroma (1995) pinpointed specific areas in the sciences where indigenous knowledge needs promotion. She further contended “enrollment and retention in science and mathematics courses in developing countries are low, and this is due in part to a disjunction between the course content encountered in schools and the local knowledge of the students” (Kroma, as cited in Abayao, 2006, p.180).

What is also important to note are studies concerning the use of technology in effectively teaching cultural heritage. Ott and Pozzi (2011) investigated the increasing relevance of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools in enhancing Cultural Heritage Education. This is due to the fact that through these tools there is easier access and a multi-perspective view of Cultural Heritage artifacts. Cat, Mooney, and Howard-Wagner (2013) designed a process for creating online-system to share multiple experiences of Aboriginal Culture in New South Wales (NSW), Australia.

Studies also suggest that cultural heritage is not only to be integrated on subjects like the social sciences but other basic education subjects as well. Alajmi (2013) saw its applicability in the arts curriculum. While a research also suggested that it can be integrated in teaching mathematics (Averill, 2012). Aplin (2007) argued that cultural heritage and values education subject should be integrated as it contributes to ensuring that ensuring that the public, and hopefully the political elite, are engaged in a push for such just and sustainable development.

Existing researches likewise contend that the process of effectively integrating cultural heritage and basic education subjects requires changes not only with the formal curriculum but on attitudes and beliefs of both teachers and students as well (Averill, 2012). Furthermore, conceptualization of heritage and its teaching and dissemination are basically dependent upon the academic background, initial training, and professional context of the teachers and administrators (Jiménez Pérez, Cuenca López, & FerrerasListán, 2010). Not mention the role played by sector and school based support for teachers to cultivate their cultural understanding and how it can be applied in teaching (Averill, 2012).

As evidenced by existing literature, the process of integrating cultural heritage to that of basic education subjects opens up different issues. The inclusion of certain cultural heritage in formal schooling tends to legitimize power and distinction, as well as exclusion of those who do not have direct access to it (Okubo, 2010). Relatedly, Freire (1985), looking at the educational system in general, discussed the potential political consequences of every pedagogical practice. He argued that “the political make-up of education is independent of the educator’s subjectivity; that is it is independent if the educator is conscious of this political make-up which is never neutral” (Freire, 1985, p.179). The problem of politics in education is somewhat aggravated by erroneous conceptualization. Abayao (2006) argued that “...sometimes the problem of inappropriateness or ineffectiveness of policies are borne out of erroneous premises about the indigene...Often the indigene is fetishized and this leads to failure to see the indigene as a highly politicized cultural concept” (p.185).

Zeroing on the K-12 Curriculum, it is contended that the mother tongue based multilingual education component of the new curriculum creates confusion as the Department of Education identified eight mother tongues in the Philippines (Pooten, 2012). Pooten (2012) further argues that the time allotted for the AralingPanlipunan (Social Science) subject in the new curriculum is greatly reduced. But it is in this subject area where the values of patriotism, nationalism, cultural preservation, and feeling of identity are imparted to the students.

### **3. Brief Methodological Comments**

Qualitative Methodology was primarily used in this paper. As such, the data collection process was more interactive as evidenced by semi-structured interviews of the key informants – local public school teachers, principals, and District supervisors from Balayan and Nasugbu - chosen via convenience sampling. The research question was not strictly prefigured but rather emergent as the research question was refined in the course of interviews with the informants. In order to supplement the data from the interviews, the research resorted to a review of existing K-12 curriculum guides and teacher’s module issued by the Department of Education, after which, themes and categories were developed to facilitate interpretation and analysis.

#### 4. The Research Setting

The municipalities of Balayan and Nasugbu can be considered as microcosms of the developing rural area whose splendor is further enriched by its historical, social, and cultural heritage. In these two towns, we can see how local culture can carry on and thrive in the face of industrialization.

Balayan is the earliest-recorded town in Batangas and recognized as a cradle of Christianity as early as 1581. The proximity of the area to the Taal volcano made the soil rich and ideal for planting sugar cane and coffee, which served as Batangas' main export during the galleon trade. As the early land-owning families of the town became prosperous from the cash crop economy during the Spanish colonial period, they started to venture into other industries as well such as shipbuilding. Testaments to the Balayan's affluent past are the ancestral *bahay na bato at kahoy* or wood and stone houses lining up several streets near the town center. Although galleon trade has long been gone, the sugar cane industry in Balayan remains as an integral part of the town's economy.

The same thing can be said of the sugar industry in Nasugbu. The Central Azucarera Don Pedro in Nasugbu is the largest sugar mill and factory in the area, processing raw materials from nearby towns and from Nasugbu's own vast agricultural land. Sugar proves to be an integral part of the people's lives and the towns' history as seen in the abundance of native delicacies and *kakanin* in the local cuisine.

Both Balayan and Nasugbu are also coastal towns. Thus, salt making and seafood are also part of their livelihood and cuisine. Balayan, in particular, is also known for its distinct Bagoong, which is recognized as the town's main product and is a source of pride for the people. Nasugbueños, on the other hand, take pride in their breathtaking resorts and beaches.

As first class municipalities, Balayan and Nasugbu have numerous public and private schools—from the primary level to post-graduate level—even in the outskirts *barrios*. The state of education in Balayan and Nasugbu will be further discussed in the following section; but with what is known so far about the two towns, some initial ideas can already be taken note on what aspects of local cultural heritage can be incorporated into the educational system.

#### 5. Findings<sup>1</sup>

The presentation and analysis of data is divided according to five major themes: the general state of primary and secondary education in the towns of Nasugbu and Balayan; the inclusion and integration of local cultural heritage into school lectures and activities; the teaching methods commonly used by instructors; the materials and facilities used in teaching; and the problems and limitations faced by various stakeholders in the education system. Understanding these facets will enable the researchers how to effectively teach the local cultural heritage of Nasugbu and Balayan to grade school and high school students within the existing framework of the K-12 Curriculum.

##### 5.1. General State of Primary and Secondary Education in Nasugbu and Balayan

As first class municipalities in the province of Batangas, both Nasugbu and Balayan have seen an increasing number of public and private schools for the past few years. Such occurrence has been beneficial for students and teachers alike as individual school populations became more evenly distributed among the schools. Teachers warmly welcomes this change because the class size is not only more manageable but also more conducive to learning. The current typical class size of 40-50 students in a classroom is seen as a great improvement from the previous 70-80, a setting that left many students with only the ground to sit on and often without learning materials.

Small as the class size may seem, the students that comprise every learning milieu is far from homogenous. They come from different background and bring with them different personalities and attitudes. Even in schools located near the town center, some students hail from the *bayan* itself while others are from the *bukid* or nearby farmlands. This creates diversity in the school culture itself. As put by Mrs. Eliza Enriquez\*, a grade 7 teacher in Lumbangan National High School, "*Iyong kultura kitadoon, may magalang na bata, meron naming hindi.*"

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<sup>1</sup>For the sake of confidentiality, the names of key informants for this study were replaced with pseudonyms

*Merong palaaral, merong mga batang hindi pa nakakakita ng gadgets*” (“culture is seen there: there are respectful kids, and there are those who are not so. There are studious ones, and there are those who have never seen gadgets”). Thus, it takes truly gifted and passionate teachers to mold empowered and learned citizens out of this assortment of individuals.

All of our informants are educators by training. It is common for teachers in Nasugbu and Balayan to have finished or to be currently working on their Masters or Doctoral degree in Education. Perhaps this persistence and devotion in continuously enriching their training is a significant factor why teachers are given such high esteem in their communities. Another indisputable reason is the immense responsibility that the teachers take on a daily basis. Teachers who handle primary (Grades 1-4) and intermediate (Grades 5 and 6) levels teach almost all subjects. On the other hand, those in high school usually have to teach only one to two subjects, often closely related to their field of expertise.

Aside from currently teaching subjects that were their major back in college, our informants also started teaching right after they finish their degree and pass the board exam for teachers. All of them grew up in Batangas and got their degrees in local colleges, making it easier for them to be employed in nearby schools. The Department of Education (colloquially referred as DepEd) implements a policy regarding *localization*, or hiring teachers who hail from within the school district. This policy does not only foster better rapport between educators and students because of their shared background and experiences, but also coincide with the Department of Education’s advocacy for contextual learning, which is given even more emphasis in the new K-12 Basic Education Curriculum Framework.

With the shift into the K-12 Framework, teachers and school administrators are given several seminars and trainings to help them cope and navigate through the new education curriculum. Such events are held over semestral breaks on October and May. Aside from introducing the changes brought by the K-12 system, some of these week-long seminars also delve into the “*integration process*” or the practice of making the academic lessons more relatable and understandable for the students by citing the local context, beliefs, and traditions as examples. Although teachers are encouraged to practice integration, there has yet to be a repository of local culture from which the teachers can draw examples.

In school, Teaching Modules crafted and provided by the Department of Education guide teachers in their lectures and course content. Teaching Modules also have corresponding Learner’s Manuals for public school students that serve as their textbook. The top-down approach in the course content of school lectures ensures consistency among the schools all over the country while providing enough leeway for the integration of local cultural heritage at the same time. However, this provision is not always utilized due to several circumstances, including the aforementioned absence of consolidated information regarding Nasugbu and Balayan’s history and culture.

Aside from contextual learning, another pedagogical practice espoused by the Department of Education is experiential learning. By doing and putting into application the concepts that they learn inside the classroom, students develop better appreciation and comprehension of their studies. With the shift into the new K-12 curriculum that heavily stresses the importance of skills and output, learning by experience will hopefully be practiced more often in the coming years as compared to the past where opportunities to see lessons in action are very rare.

## **5.2. Inclusion of Local Cultural Heritage in School**

Schools in Nasugbu and Balayan are part of the complex national education system. Thus, the intention to include local cultural heritage into the education of the youth, along with most practices and priorities in the academic setting, is contingent to several stakeholders and key actors, including but not limited to the local DepEd officials, the school principals, and the teachers themselves.

As the Department of Education’s liaisons to the municipalities, local officials such as the Division Superintendent and District Supervisors have relatively extensive authority over education-related projects and programs in their area, including efforts to regenerate interest and appreciation for local culture. For instance, the HEKASI Program of the Batangas Division Superintendent previously initiated “Kulturang Batangueño”. Starting 1992, schools within the division were encouraged to research on the history of their school, barangay, and municipality and reserve one room in their school as a museum of some sort, featuring local culture and prominent Batangueños. While programs like these get immediate results, the political nature of the system often take precedence, and particular efforts are left without follow-through after the division superintendent changes.

Some programs on the other hand have been more fortunate and are already considered as staple activities in schools because administrators and principals were able to make it as traditions. For instance, the Festival of Talents included in the DepEd calendar of activities is still held in schools. Ms. Grace Garcia\*, a principal in Balayan West Central School, sees that the performances of students in the festival can be effective in promoting local culture. Other school programs are also held during the birth anniversary of local prominent figures, where students reenact segments of the hero's life. Once again, such activities foster interest among students, but it is not a universal practice. This means that only schools whose administrators undertake the additional endeavor to organize cultural projects get to be familiarized with the value of heritage.

Thus, it is ultimately up to the teachers to seize the leeway provided in the K-12 curriculum and to incorporate local culture into their lessons. Through the practice of *integration*—especially in Araling Panlipunan, Arts, and Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan—the concepts taught inside the classrooms are associated to more familiar situations experienced in everyday life. One of key informants is Mr. Arturo Aquino\*, a grade school teacher in Balayan who has long been interested in local history and culture. Even as he was just starting in his vocation as a public school teacher, he was already reading beyond the typical reference materials provided. Now, after almost three decades in service, he still shares to his students many things about their town's history and traditions that are otherwise unfamiliar to his colleagues.

Inspiring as Mr. Aquino's perseverance may be, it does not escape him that his proactive role in the conservation of their culture is brought by his own efforts, or *sariling sikap*. He did not get to know what he knows because of some institutional endeavor to give importance to Balayan's cultural heritage; and as such, he is an isolated case rather than a part of a trend. Teachers are also predominantly young in both Nasugbu and Balayan. Even the elder teachers admit that is quite unlikely for them to have inclination towards learning about cultural heritage and actually integrate it into their lessons. With so many tasks given to teachers, most of them teach only what is stated in the curriculum. Thus, in the classroom setting, culture is most likely only brought up in passing and rarely discussed thoroughly.

### 5.3. Teaching Methods

The Department of Education provides public school teachers with their own copies of *Teacher's Modules* for their specific subjects to help them cover the laid down topics in the Basic Education Curriculum—regardless whether it is the old one or the new K-12 program. Aside from providing the course content, helpful readings, and tests to assess the progress and skills of the students, the *Teacher's Modules* also include sample teaching strategies. The methods suggested in the modules may still be modified and supplemented according to the teacher's creativity. Thus, classroom sessions are not limited to usual discussions with visual aids. Through experience, our key informants learned that the most effective teaching methods are those that seek the active participation of the students—such as role-playing or dramatization, reporting, and picture analysis.

Regardless of the technique employed by the teachers, classroom sessions should ideally go through the phases referred to by the informants as the 4As: activity, analysis, abstraction, and application. In the activity stage, lessons are usually introduced creatively through games or orientation. Lectures and class discussions typically comprise the analysis part. The main idea of the lecture is generalized and reiterated in the abstraction part. Lastly, the application phase allows the students to experience the concepts taught to them. While this final stage is crucial in helping the learner appreciate and truly understand what was taught, classroom sessions rarely have enough time, resources, and even information to reach this point.

### 5.4. Resources: Materials and Facilities

Aside from the Teacher's Modules, the Department of Education also provides corresponding *Learner's Manuals* for the students. It covers the same topics as the Teacher's Modules and helps the students keep up in the lectures with notes and seatwork exercises. Teachers are free to introduce additional learning materials to complement the tools and information given by the Learner's Manual. Master teachers and school heads screen potential supplementary materials to ensure that these fit the learning competencies stated in the curriculum.

Teachers also use *devices* or visual aids during their lectures to enliven class discussions. According to our key informants, most teachers now have at least some basic proficiency in technology and use PowerPoint presentations from time to time, which get the attention of the students. However, the number of LCD projectors per school is significantly few compared to the number of sections that need to use them.

As such, most teachers still resort to the conventional self-made visual aids such as pictures cut out of newspapers or printed from the Internet.

Computerized presentations and projectors are not the only fruits of modernity that have reached the first class municipalities of Nasugbu and Balayan. Local DepEd officials and school administrators are proud and thankful that their schools have e-classrooms to ensure the students are given 21<sup>st</sup> century education. E-classrooms promote learning through educational multimedia technologies. Audio-visual devices are also present so teachers can utilize educational videos and movies in their classes. However, the mere presence of such facilities and equipment is insufficient to truly assure globally competitive education. Just like the state of LCD projectors, the number of e-classrooms per school is not enough for the students. Large schools have at least one e-classroom while really small schools sometimes only have one computer set used by school administrators to make records and reports.

Some large schools in Nasugbu and Balayan also have a Home Economics Building for students to apply their lessons in cooking, food preservation, baking, and sewing, among others. While the subject that deals with these topics is a very practical course, many schools are still unable to provide the facility where the skills and proficiency can actually be honed. In most schools, teachers have to improvise the equipment that are called for in the competencies and topics prescribed by the DepEd curriculum. Mrs. Bernadette Aquino\*, a teacher of *Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan* in a school in Balayan said that since her school does not have an oven, her classes use the local *pugon* and some large tin cans when baking. She has seen that substitution produces substandard outputs but at least her students somewhat get the idea of what they are being taught.

### **5.5. Difficulties in Teaching**

The section on teaching materials and facilities has already introduced the pressing issue of inadequate resources for the students. While the lack of large-scale facilities such as e-classrooms, HE buildings, and AV rooms may still be forgivable to a certain extent, the shortage in the number of Learner's Manuals received by some schools is hard to let slide. Mrs. Enriquez recalls that some days, each textbook in her classes would have to be shared by two students. On other days, they draw lots on who gets to use the textbook. There also seems to be a disparity between the unwritten policy of school officials for their teachers to have laptops and the shortage of LCD projectors. Although many teachers would like to use multimedia presentations in their classes, their plans do not always push through because they would have to first make sure that no other teacher is using their school's only LCD projector.

Moreover, although it is crucial for teachers to start incorporating local cultural heritage into their lectures, it will be challenging to even start seminars about the matter. The trainings given over semestral breaks only last for five days, at most, and teachers feel that this is not enough for them to learn all they need to know to smoothly transition into the K-12 curriculum. Not all trainings also have monitoring and evaluation processes. If such trend regarding the trainings and seminars given to public school teachers in Nasugbu and Balayan were to change, then stakeholders can consider also giving seminars about local heritage in order to equip educators with sufficient knowledge that they can integrate into their course content.

However, even with the desire to highlight and preserve their rich cultural heritage, the teachers of Nasugbu and Balayan would have to work around the curriculum guide handed down by the Department of Education. The changes brought by the K-12 curriculum is restricting to begin with. With the emphasis on developing functionally literate Filipinos with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that will enable them to be globally competitive, the curriculum makes it easy to get lost in honing ICT proficiency and entrepreneurial skills at the expense of neglecting the appreciation for history, culture, and the humanities. Case in point, going through the revised course content for Araling Panlipunan under the K-12 curriculum shows that Philippine History will now be taught only up to grade 6. How then can we encourage the youth to give importance to their heritage when the educational system itself does not sufficiently recognize its value?

School administrators and local DepEd officials themselves admit that cultural heritage and putting the concepts into application are not given enough emphasis in schools because of the way the curriculum itself was constructed. The two matters do not directly correspond to learning competencies prescribed by the Department of Education. Subsequently, these are not assessed in the National Achievement Test or NAT. As such, come examination time, the statistics will not really mind whether local culture was taught to the students

## 6. Conclusion

To understand the experiences of the educators in Nasugbu and Balayan, one must locate it within the larger context of the field of Basic Education in the Philippines. One must understand the interplay of power and capitals involved within the field to understand the logic of practice within public schools. The experiences of our educators from the two towns are not isolated from the larger social context where they are located; their experiences are “minute points of intersections of biography and history within society” (Mills, 1959, p.1).

Before the question of how to effectively teach the local culture and history of the two towns within the framework of the existing curriculum can be addressed, the fundamental problems of the Philippine Education System must first be resolved. Dwindling budget is more than an economic concern as it greatly affects the pedagogy of the teachers. This constraint is further exacerbated by how the general curriculum is structured as it encourages acquiring skills rather than a genuine appreciation for local culture and heritage. What could be gleaned from the experiences of our educators are the structural inadequacies of Philippine education in general. Thus, to undertake a project of effectively teaching cultural heritage in elementary and high schools, an assessment of the Philippine education system is a must.

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