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Redefining CSR as an Innovative Tool in Crisis Times: the Greek Approach



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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility is a vital principle that applies to a free market economy, but the pursuit of personal profit should be neither at the expense of collective or social welfare nor at the expense of future generations. Instead, profit's pursuit must be compatible with activities that improve the workforce, promote human dignity, strengthen the environmental protection and take into account the welfare of future generations. Furthermore, another objective of this paper is to present CSR in the Greek private and public sector and, after the presentment of the most recent survey of CSR's issues in Greece, it approaches CSR as a strategic tool and as the path to businesses' survival and their development under the current recession.

INTRODUCTION

In a constantly changing economic and social environment, businesses, practitioners, entrepreneurs and managers have to face the dilemma of the necessity of Corporate Social Responsibility. Since CSR is a process through which businesses and organizations manage their relationships with wide range of important stakeholders, which may affect essentially functioning, the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility becomes clear. From this point of view, scientists and people of the business world should consider CSR as an investment and not as a cost such it is an integral part of operational strategies which minimizes risks associated with the uncertainty. In addition, every aspect of business activity includes CSR. A corporate responsible business is one that demonstrates a sense of commitment to the various stakeholders through socially responsible practices and transparent functions. This article is an attempt of approaching the concept of CSR through the public and private sector in Greece, in order to reveal its contribution to the general development especially in times of crisis.

1. Definitions

1.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

The difficulty of forming a commonly accepted definition of “Corporate Social Responsibility” by companies reveals the way of its development. According to some scholars, CSR has its roots to the “corporate charity” that was focusing on the general social improvement. On the other hand, Corporate Social Responsibility is a much broader concept and directly relates to sustainable development as stated the senior management of the United Nations at Rio de Janeiro’s meeting in 1992. According to the definition of the European Commission, *“Corporate Social Responsibility is a concept whereby companies integrate voluntary social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interaction with other stakeholders”*. (Green Paper on Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility)

In addition, *“Corporate Social Responsibility means something, but not always the same for everyone. For some people, the idea of CSR has the legal responsibility or liability. For others, it means socially responsible behavior in the sense morality...Many people simply equate CSR to contribution to charity. Some think it is social conscientiousness. Many people*

who support CSR most strongly, facing it as a simple synonym for legitimacy in the context of property, the accuracy and validity. Many regard it as a kind of guardian to duty, which imposes higher standards of behavior mostly on businessmen than on citizens in general" (Votaw, 1972).

Despite the lack of a single definition, the dominant perception of CSR focuses on the following characteristics:

- It relies on principles and values which derive from a concept of active and conscious attitude of business to society.
- CSR is a voluntary action. CSR is not necessary therefore to legislation but must be beyond its legal obligations.
- It consults with stakeholders. The socially responsible business comes in consultation with "interested parties" or "stakeholders". The company's stakeholders are within its core (shareholders, management, employee representatives and employees) and external to the environment (public authorities, local community, subcontractors, suppliers, and consumers).
- CSR is not about charity activities. CSR does not intergrade into political public relations firm and must pass all the company's activities. CSR does not include projects of charity's content bearing no direct relation to production activities of the company.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility as the main Component of Business Strategy and Innovation

Approaching CSR with a starting point of innovation includes a number of advantages in terms of business, industry and society. From the business perspective, the significant benefit of innovative CSR lies in the fact that innovation in the field of CSR is easier adaptable, in comparison to other forms of innovation. From the point of the generally dangerous nature of innovation, innovative CSR can be an experimental ground, with controlled risks (MacGregor *et al.*, 2010). If the innovative CSR project is successful, then the company (or the organization) will enhance its legitimacy with society. Furthermore, innovative CSR focuses on opportunities for productive knowledge, which are achieved through the emphasis CSR brings to innovation (Preuss, 2007). In this way, innovative CSR could contribute significantly to the integration of CSR. In conclusion, it is a common sense that discussions on CSR and innovation rarely intersect, despite the fact that the two subjects treated increasingly as supplements of business competitiveness (MacGregor *et al.*, 2010). In

addition, there are strong arguments in favor of a strategic approach to CSR. More specifically, in contrast to the autonomous nature of corporate philanthropy, CSR initiatives that have been incorporated into company's strategy can also create social and corporate benefits (Weaver *et al.*, 1999). However, empirical evidence on the business philosophy of CSR remained vague (Griffin & Mahon 1997). Furthermore, this narrow sense interpretation of various business cases ignores the fact that the conditions for the success of strategic CSR differ significantly between businesses (Griffin & Mahon, 1997). In this sense, the purpose of presenting the innovative concept of CSR is to support a more flexible business involvement in social and environmental challenges in relation to narrowly defined view of business cases. As Vogel noted (2005:19): «Companies are seeking a wide range of strategies ... CSR is no different: firms have chosen and continue to choose different levels of corporate responsibility, depending on the risks and opportunities that they face». Opportunities for participation in social and environmental issues abound for businesses in certain industries, but less in others. Similarly, opportunities for collaboration with key social actors may or may not be widespread. Through offering a collective exercise of corporate social responsibility, the implementation of innovative CSR can be possible in a wider range of businesses.

3. Corporate Social Responsibility in public and private sector

3.1. The public sector

The role of the public sector in corporate social responsibility is complex and emerging. Since the term "corporate social responsibility" has not maintained yet in a significant number of public sector services, many of their interventions have not adopted CSR initiatives, but nevertheless, they consider them as part of the agenda. There is a wealth of relevant experience among public sector services that they currently ignore. The following table (Table 1) categorizes the most possible interventions by the government on CSR issues (Petkoski & Twose, 2003).

Table 1. The roles of Public Sector

Public Sector			
MANDATING	Command and control' legislation penalties	Regulators and inspectorates	Legal and fiscal and rewards
FACILITATING	'Enabling' legislation	Creating incentives	Capacity building
	Funding support	Raising awareness	Stimulating markets
PARTNERING	Combining resources	Stakeholder engagement	Dialogue
ENDORISING	Political support	Publicity and praise	

Source: World Bank Institute

For market-oriented CSR issues, such as executives' fees, the public sector may choose to adopt a laissez-faire approach¹ or facilitate voluntary codes. The governments of developing countries have begun to understand the activities of CSR as a means to enhance sustainable strategies development as a component of national competitiveness strategies to compete with foreign direct investments and exports to place at the global level and improve poverty-focused mission of public policy objectives. There is a general agreement that the public sector has a role to play. Some researchers note that the government has generally adopted the CSR only to a "reactive" mode, in response to the demands of export markets, despite a more proactive stance. In this subject, have been the following suggestions:

- Ensure effective governance and a business environment that encourages CSR; establish a special "council" with a mission to encourage CSR and monitoring activities of public and private sectors, and to ensure that CSR is not "casual".
- Clarify businesses expectations regarding CSR, development and how to measure their responses to these expectations.

¹ Laissez faire: This approach advocates minimum government intervention (in French means "leave things as they are"). Proponents of this approach believe that the market ultimately gives the most efficient outcome and that state regulations distort the reality of the market, causing a loss of efficiency.

- Leading to yield "good example" e.g. through public procurement and awareness of investors.
- Promote the implementation of Local Agenda 21 with the participation of local businesses for the implementation of corporate social responsibility.

3.2. Corporate Social Responsibility in the Greek market

Corporate Social Responsibility both in private and public sector is a kind of obligation for socially and environmentally responsible operations. The Green Paper and the EU Communication 2002, in particular, approach this field through the commemoration of "social economy" organizations.

Especially in Greece, it is widely known that CSR practices in the public sector are quite controversial, since the country is still transitional stage of its market, from a previously monopolistic and privileged, preferential for the public organizations, free market, in which the increasing competition results in the same outcomes both for the private and public sector. At this context, there is an emerging need for organizations' adaption to the new circumstances as so as their quick response to issues raised by the development of CSR in order to confirm their public, charitable character and effectively address their new operating conditions.

For CSR issues related to Greek market, such as public servants' payments, the public sector may choose to adopt a laissez-faire approach or facilitate voluntary codes. The CSR factors for which market players are weak may suggest a stronger role for creating incentives in the public sector. This may include the negotiated strategic alliances with business or civil society, based on the distribution of costs and risks. Governments of developing countries begun to face CSR as a means to enhance sustainable strategies and as a national competitiveness strategy, through which they compete with foreign direct investments and push exports globally. There is a general agreement that the public sector has a role to play. It has been observed that when companies do not seem willing to deal with CSR issues, government must undertake a leading role. At this point there is a need to:

- Ensuring effective governance and a business environment that encourages CSR. This means that government must provide a functional legal and regulatory framework and an effective distribution of mechanisms for public services.

- Establishing a special "Board" or organizations with the mission to encourage CSR and to monitor the activities of public and private sector, ensuring that CSR is not "occasional".
- Clarifying businesses' expectations concerning CSR and development issues.
- Eliminating the corruption and encouraging the transparency in relations between government and organizations.
- Promoting transparency at the Local Authorities, and addressing government's corporate lobby.
- Providing tax privileges and another mechanism in order to consider CSR as an advantage rather than a cost. This may include tax reliefs for organizations that leverage the social capital by co-working with local communities as part of their core activities.
- Creating CSR vision and strategy, and the appropriate climate for organizations to cooperate with the government to the direction of this strategy.
- Emphasizing on the deficiencies in the current CSR agenda, especially those refer to the coordination with small and medium enterprises (SMEs).
- Implementing the Local Agenda 21 concerning corporate social responsibility.

Concerning the Greek private sector, there is a large and increased number of companies that implements CSR practices into the corporate culture. On the other hand, the following table (Table 2) provides a means to investigate the possible alignments between business practices and CSR responsibilities of the Greek public sector.

Table 2. The alignment between the priorities of the Greek Public Sector and CSR

CSR Categories	Greek Public Sector's Priorities
Economy – Cash flow to the public sector – Employment and development of human resources – Technology transfer and rights for intellectual property	– Trade and foreign investments – Fiscal and monetary policy – The development of the private sector and industrial policy – Infrastructure development – Employment and human resources
Environment – Environmentally friendly products and services – Assessment and management of environmental impact – Environmental reporting and	– National institutions and reforms – Health Services – Training and development of young people – Poverty reduction – The environmental protection and management
Society – Health and safety working conditions – Bribery and corruption – Human rights – Violence and Conflict – Assessment and management of social impact – Stakeholders and community engagement	– Food safety – Political stability

The role of the public sector in CSR is complex since the term has not maintained yet in a significant number of public services, but nevertheless, could be considered as part of the agenda. There, is a wealth of relevant experience among public sector services currently ignored.

3.3. The Private Sector: CSR as a competitive advantage

The incorporation of the concept and principles of Corporate Social Responsibility business practice marks a new concept, which governs the vision, values and principles under which businesses operate. In this context, businesses seek to effectively combine economic performance development with their contribution to the community and to the environmental protection, in addition to complying with the legislation. Corporate Social Responsibility has, therefore, two distinct application areas: the internal and the external. Within the internal business environment, human resources' best tactics (reinforcement, training, motivation, assessment, development etc.) and environmentally friendly procedures are the main application areas of CSR. Typical cases of practical implementation of CSR in the internal environment of a company are:

- The continuous and systematic development of skills and abilities of human resources which aim at professional and personal development.
- The recognition of diversity and equal opportunities, the systematic and interactive communication between managers and employees.
- The insurance and the continuous improvement of hygiene and safety and quality in the workplace.
- The rational management of natural resources and the systematic effort to save them.
- The application of new technology, environmentally friendly and similar systems of production.

On the other hand, the external environment of the company CSR extends to all directly and indirectly affected parts of the business and more specifically: the local community, the suppliers, customers, NGOs etc. Each firm seeks to act as a "citizen" - a member of the local community in which it operates. Therefore, many companies perceive their social role as the adoption of socially responsible actions; best meet the requirements of the new era and send messages to all stakeholders. The business benefits of adopting good practices can be:

- Satisfied and productive workforce
- Positive response to public
- Improved corporate image, reputation and customers
- Better response to customers' or consumers' demands
- Improved quality of products and services

In today's uncertain business environment, the concept of CSR wins one important role as a “strategic tool” for an improved image and business competitiveness. Corporate social responsibility as a strategic and competitive advantage is an important issue in the contemporary business world when taking into account social and environmental impacts. However, it is important to remember that creating competitive advantage through CSR is feasible only if the benefits to society are real, and only if those benefits indirectly associate with the philosophy of social strategies (Husted & Allen, 2001). As a source of competitive advantage, CSR actions should create realistic and consistent results for society. Companies in which corporate social responsibility has its roots, it is not difficult to meet the new market’s expectations, like the anticorruption, the respect for human rights, the environmental management, supply chain, etc. The following table (Table 3) summarizes all of the above, and in particular, how the different sources of CSR constitute a source of competitive advantage.

Table 3. Sources of CSR as a tool of competitive advantage

CSR	Source of competitive advantage	Type of competitive advantage
Compliance	The costs associated with CSR is considered as a cost of business	Typically, an edge position, based on cost, strives to create superior efficiency in delivering value
Strategy	CSR expenditures made perceived as an investment in set of distinctive competencies company	Could the cost and / or differentiated position be either more adequate or more effectively create value proposition for the customer
Compulsory	Costs considered as CSR "Tax" imposed by non-governmental organizations or other external stakeholders will reduce the ability of company to create value for other relevant stakeholders	<i>Does not exist</i>

Sources: (Munilla & Miles, 2005) by (Day & Wensley, 1988), (Hunt, 2000), (Karna, Hansen, & Heikki, 2003) and (Miles & Covin, 2000).

3.4. The language of numbers

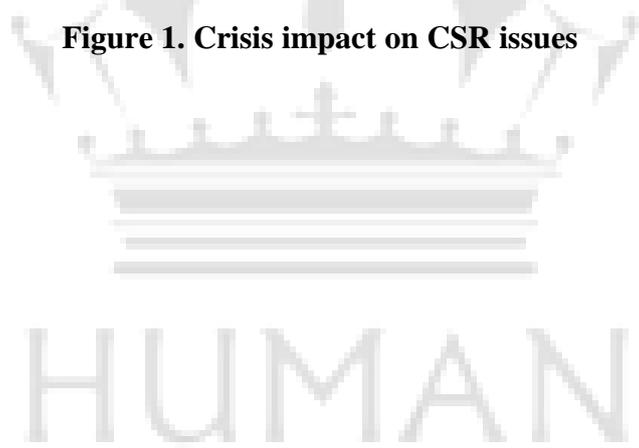
According a research by the Institute of Communication, the main conclusion was that active citizens are now the majority. *"The longitudinal survey of the Institute of Communications from 2003 until today, in cooperation with the international organization "Globe Scan" and Panteion University reveal the osmosis phenomenon with the Greek society."* The results of the last counts in 2011 extensively investigated the relationship between CSR and social media. The main findings were:

1. Greek citizens-consumers have changed their behavior and become more active. The reward by consumers (56.6%) is currently the dominant expression of consumerism in Greece and internationally.
2. Publicly active citizens/consumers increase was recorded in aware citizens/consumers (24.1%).
3. Citizens/consumers ask companies to produce safe and healthy products (87.8%), which do not harm the environment (84.8%), and more specifically, socially and environmentally responsible products (77.6%).
4. About 56% of Greek consumers (spontaneous) cannot mention either one company to meet its obligations towards society.
5. Industry companies with high technology are meeting the social obligations.
6. The 82.2% reports that they regularly choose to pay more for products and services that are socially and environmentally responsible, and 75.6% believes that a consumer can affect in how a company will behave responsibly.
7. There is a great need for public information. The 72.7% of people have heard little or nothing about corporate improvement efforts.
8. The «word of mouth» and Internet information sources in 2012 seemed to have a very significant increase, although they remain high through the update news (77.7%) and advertising (69.9%).
9. The majority of responders (56.6%) recognize the "role" of social media in the business operation.
10. Social media are channels of communication with the general public (32%) and promote transparency in businesses operations and procedures (31%).
11. The direct relationship between CSR and social media recognizes the 13% of the public.

4. CSR in times of financial crisis

The most common definition of the financial crisis refers to “*the rapid and unexpected changes caused by internal and external conjuncture in the behavior and activities of the decision units in the economy; the household i.e. individuals, firms, and the government*” (Can Kose, 2012). Although, as the financial crisis of a country we mean: the “*macroeconomic depressions emerging in certain periods unexpectedly or due to inadequate or improper managerial choices*” (Apak, 2009). The recent financial crisis has led to serious damages, even to the bankruptcy of large financial institutions around the world. It is undeniable that this crisis caused serious problems in a huge number of people and organizations due to the damage and losses it had caused. But, for the most optimistic people, engaging in CSR activities and using the opportunities that a crisis can bring, is vital in order to overcome obstacles. In addition, CSR activities help to overcome some social problems caused by the crisis. Subsequently, it follows a model which explains the effects of the crisis on CSR in different directions by using Maslow’s and especially Carroll's CSR pyramid.

Figure 1. Crisis impact on CSR issues



The above model (Figure 1) reveals that there are two propositions concerning the impact of the crisis on CSR pyramid: Firstly, crisis is a threat to the responsibility dimensions at the base of the pyramid. Maslow’s motivation theory suggests five interdependent levels of basic human needs (motivators) in a strict sequence starting with the lowest level. First of all,

physiological needs for survival (to stay alive and reproduce) and security (to feel safe) are the most fundamental and the most pressing needs. Then, there are the social needs (for love and belonging) and self-esteem needs (to feel worthy, respected, and have status). The final and highest level needs are self-actualization needs (self-fulfillment and achievement). Furthermore, he stated that human beings are “wanting” beings, they cannot be fully satisfied and thus does not generate more needs. In CSR terms, if a person engaged in activities that relate to creativity, s/he will prioritize meeting this need or if there is a threat to his/her safety need then s/he will not be able to continue his/her creativity activities, s/he will prioritize those activities which aim to sustain his/her life. The main point here is to remember that organizations are social living beings that people create, and that’s the reason why crisis’ affects areas distinct.

4.1. CSR as an antidote to the financial crisis

The current economic conditions have left their fingerprints on every aspect of Greek and global society. This period revealed the most pronounced weaknesses of each organization in the public or private sector separately. In previous years, when economy supposed to be in prosperity, no one focused on the natural and human environment. Similarly, the current economic and political scene invested in a value system which practically proved unstable and inefficient as it was not anthropocentric. The position of the “development” had occupied the “adaptability”. At this point, CSR involves the respect of culture, human dignity, equal opportunities, quality living, and above all, it involves the conservation and environmental protection. On the other hand, companies are an integral part of society and community. That is the reason why CSR is a strong competitive advantage which helps the competition among European countries.

Environmental, social, and governance programs can create an opportunity to generate revenues in the long run. By identifying new market opportunities and minimizing all sorts of risks from the operating environment, firms have considered CSR as an opportunity, not as a cost, and have the strong belief that through CSR they can achieve sustainable and more value-creating strategies.

Furthermore, CSR’s objective is not the advertising or the promotion, and should not be treated as “fashion”. CSR aims to the balanced achievement between profitability and sustainability. In addition, all actions should start from the fundamental principle of democracy and the respect of human rights.

The socially responsible organizations are a significant principle of the free market economy. Initially, the recognition of a company as socially responsible helps to the improvement of internal cohesion among employees while it increases their productivity. In financial terms, cost savings with the parallel environmental investments' achievement, positively contribute to business reputation. Labor law is the backbone of how employees react in CSR actions. According to the following research, Greek consumers' decisions are affected by CSR actions and one in five is willing to spend more for products with social and environmental background.

Finally, companies are made up of people and CSR invests in people, so a change in the general culture will contribute not only to the development of profit but also to the general upgrade. The following table presents briefly some main false and right tactics that adopt companies usually in times of crisis. On the other hand, there is a false consideration that CSR is a luxury for big organizations. European business world is currently characterized by strong resistance, with significant part of the public opinion to share the view that companies show little interest in socio-environmental issues, in comparison to past decades. According to "Eurobarometer" survey on 4th April 2012, the 39% of Europeans believe that companies do not care about their social impacts, while the 39% believe the opposite. It is commonly accepted that this period revealed the most pronounced weaknesses of the public or private sector separately. However, CSR is highlighted as a business management tool of planning strategy. On the other hand, companies are an integral part of society and inextricably linked to the community. That's the reason why CSR is a strong competitive advantage among European countries. It strengthens the relationships between organizations and consumers, it helps the improvement of organization's reputation and finally leads to better financial results and to improved quality of products/ services.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt about the benefits of responsible business practices for the business environment. Specifically, through such practices, increases the share of firms in the market, improves the margins and attract the 'best' employees and customers.

In the new situation, economy, environment and society are the three main pillars which evaluate the enterprise's work. The main conclusion is that the increasing importance of the social role of business is a major issue, which directly relates to the diffusion of culture of

CSR and its integration into the wider business policy. Whatever the reason for the adoption of CSR principles it is now absolutely clear and unequivocal that businesses today cannot ignore Corporate Responsibility. Experts and scientists admit that the corporate profile ensures integration and incorporation of a company in the social environment of the community. At the same time, enhances the consolidation of corporate reputation, which is an intangible asset for an organization. As stated "CSR Network", one of the leaders in providing guidance for Responsible Business in the UK, *"with their non-commitment to Corporate Responsibility, companies manage inadequately and incompletely not only their impact on society and the environment but also their own finances benefits"*.

CSR may be a visionary form of leadership. "Smart" Businesses today realize that they cannot exist as isolated examples of prosperity in an environment of intense and global deprivation.

Finally, through the advantages and positive dimensions, CSR offers in the field of Human Resources, enterprises may save money through increased productivity and reducing the cost of recruiting and training staff. This fact is particularly important, especially in times of the current financial crisis.

An effective management of CSR requires the coordination of many parts in a company. The real meaning behind the philosophy of CSR is not only donations or charities often accompanied by extensive photographs in print and online type. There are many ways which can treat the individual business in order to leave its mark on public opinion as a company that increased Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethics. One of the most important and integrated ways is through annual reports were beyond financial results reflected the social and environmental in over time. The creation of such a report is more noticeable as a communication tool with stakeholders (shareholders, customers, employees, partners, society, banks, governments, suppliers) that can lead to a competitive advantage and better reputation if used rationally.

In conclusion, corporate social responsibility is now becoming much more a part of corporate governance as there is a recognition that a company or an organization cannot – in the long-term or short-term period – operate in isolation from the wider society in which it operates (Cadbury, 2002).

6. Proposals

The international experience and practice have shown that actions aimed at environmental protection emerged as allies of employment and create new jobs. Simultaneously they promote solutions that improve the production process of manufacturing enterprises and contribute significantly to sustainable development. Interventions in areas of entrepreneurship (recycling) contribute significantly in reducing operating costs for businesses and in the creation of new business units that generate new turn green jobs without limit positions in other areas.

Forms and aspects of contemporary entrepreneurship, listed as "actions of green entrepreneurship" (low-carbon carbon, recycling, etc.), are eminently good CSR practices. Moreover, the general environmental protection, but also the exploitation of comparative natural advantage the country and strengthen the regional role. Basic Business greening tactics are:

- Use of renewable natural resources in sustainable manner and pace.
- Protection of biodiversity.
- Production of safe, durable, recyclable and more energy efficiency.
- Reward employees for finding ways of producing and disposal serving the best business practices.
- Involving employees, customers, suppliers and members of local societies in developing and evaluating environmental tactics.
- Establish annual environmental report, which will propose solutions and publish the results to shareholders, employees and the general public.
- Information for customers to use, store, recycle and pinning the company's products.

Today businesses have to incorporate into their strategy and implement practical development of social policy. In order to be achievable the company's policy, there is a need of right CSR tools at its internal and external environment. Regular meetings of all staff in order to learn about the nature of social responsibility through the distribution of information brochures, electronic messages and newsletters etc. is vital for CSR's promotion. On the other hand, CSR's promotion at the external environment of a company/ organization is achievable through distributing brochures to customers, clients, suppliers, unions, the local community, public and local authorities. Other information sources are the ads, news

bulletins, business reports and the company's website if it is feasible. Finally, the various activities and events by business for fundraising are a very reasonable method of propulsion and extension. Moreover, European Commission encourages companies to implement fair employment practices and to respect human rights by organizing conferences and seminars through the DG Enterprise and DG Employment, Social Affairs and Social Integration of CSR in order to promote major concepts of entrepreneurship and local development, which are essential components of Corporate Social Responsibility.

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