

Chapter 27

THE IMAGE OF THE BELARUSIAN STATE IN STUDENTS' CONSCIOUSNESS DURING THE RECENT FINANCIAL CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The image of the state depends on what the economic and political situation in the country is, and on how accurate and timely actions of the authorities are. The objective of this study was to investigate the image of Belarusian State in common consciousness of students before, during and after the financial crisis. Transversal design was carried out in three stages: before the global crisis (September-November 2008), against the backdrop of the acute phase of its occurrence in Belarus (October-November 2011), and then November 2013. A total of 480 students (180&180&120) from Belarusian universities took part in the research. Semi-projective techniques (symbol-association ranking method and modified semantic differential with the stimuli concept of the "State of Belarus") combined with the "Citizen Questionnaire". The values orientations were also measured. The results of research showed that during the acute phase of the crisis there have been significant shifts in the reflection of the state in the minds of students. The financial crisis in Belarus led to a sharp decline in authority of the government. The image of the Belarusian State in 2011 was distorted in comparison with the data in 2008 and 2013. It clearly demonstrated the political resentment of citizens due to the effects of the financial crisis. Thus, errors and failures in economic policy had a negative impact on the image of the state and its characteristics as a socio-political institution.

Keywords: Belarusian State, financial crisis reflection, modified semantic differential, test of associations, political resentment of citizens, "citizen-state" system.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the State (as a form of organization of modern society and the leading subject of economic policy) is to ensure the unity and independence of the society, the maintenance of public order and security, as well as perform other functions through the power of social work and law. In assessing the current situation as stable or unstable responsibility rests with the State.

Local instabilities might lead to global consequences in the world space (economic, political, informational, cultural etc.), which is still being developed. As an illustrative example of this, the global financial and economic crisis has resulted in political destabilization phenomena such as the Occupy Wall Street protest movement (Ross, 2012).

Political subjects can get feedback from society and its groups about current situation by exploring the image of the state in the consciousness of people. It is important to research the youths' image of the state and their attitudes towards it. Youth is a specific social group, which to a significant degree determines further development of the country and society, and which is the main strategic resource of any state. Due to age specifics, youth is the group which is the most adjusted to any social changes. However, Olesich (2009) states that when young people, especially students, are dissatisfied with such changes, they might be eagerly involved in protest reactions and even in extremism.

2. BACKGROUND

Political psychology examines the image of the state as an important phenomenon in mass and individual political consciousness. Boulding (1959) had used the concept of the "image" to explain the causes of hostility. There are different concepts of the image of the state.

Fisher (1990) defines "image" as an organized representation of the social object in the cognitive system of the individual (p. 151). As noted by the leading Russian expert in the field of psychological semantics, the academician Petrenko, for the political and economic institutes to be able to function, certain figures of consciousness, which implement the economic and political behavior, are required (Petrenko & Mitina, 1997). According to Shestopal (2013), a political image as any other image, is on one hand - a reflection of some real characteristics of the object of perception, i.e. political power, leader's personality, state, etc. On the other hand, the image is a projection of expectations of the subject's perception. Political image reflects peoples' needs, motives, emotions, cognitions, concepts, stereotypes, values and demands of the public to authorities (Shestopal, 2013).

The image of the state as a socio-political institution is exposed to situational factors. It depends on the economic and political situation in the country and on how accurate and timely the actions of the authorities are. The economic crisis has acted as a natural political-psychological experiment. From psychological point of view, reforms or crises could be viewed as a "natural experiment" (Lewis, Webley, & Furnham, 1995). Typically, people in times of crisis feel more lost, dissatisfied, anxious and distrustful than usual (Maital, 1982). In terms of Easton and Dennis, whose theory of political support is based on psychoanalytic and behaviorist ideas, human factor intensifies the stress of political system (Easton & Dennis, 1969). This stress of political system, caused by economic crisis, is manifested in political behavior of citizens as distortion of their citizenship identity, decreased loyalty to their state (up to emigration) and protest activity (up to putsches and "color revolutions"). Therefore, in a context of the economic crisis it is expedient to explore the image of the state as a complex and integrative phenomenon, which determines and changes citizens' political behavior (Shestopal, 2013) and could be an informative empirical indicator of political consciousness of different social groups (Deyneka, 2013).

3. DESIGN

3.1. Research objectives and design

The objective of this study was to investigate the image of the Belarusian State in the students' conscious before, during and after the financial crisis. Transversal design was carried out in three stages: 1) before the global crisis (September-November 2008); 2) against the background of the acute phase of its occurrence in Belarus (October-November 2011); and 3) two years later (November 2013).

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Participants. A total of 480 students from Belarusian universities took part in the research. Groups at the first and the second stage (360 Ss) were the most balanced: 180 participants in each stage were 90 female and 90 male aged 19 to 24 (mean 21). 120 students took part at the third stage of the study (68 female and 52 male aged 18 to 22, mean 20.3). These were students of humanitarian and technical specialties.

3.2.2. Instruments. According to Hermann (1996), political psychology needs a combination of different approaches and methods. The research was based on a combination of questionnaires and semi-projective methods. Semi-projective methods make analysis deeper (Binford, 1984) by re-creating image of phenomenon in common consciousness, which is characterized by conscious and unconscious elements and intertwining of rational and emotional contexts.

A self-developed symbol-association ranking method with the stimuli concept of the "State" was used. The test materials contain two identical lists of association symbols. One of them demands associations with the state as a real (today's) institute, and the other as an ideal one (the way it should be). The list of associative concepts includes: *state functions* (governance, rule, direction and control) the state of society, embodying the *political activity*

products (rule of law, stability, freedom, order, social security), the specific *people and groups* that are associated with the State (President, ruling class, parties, the bureaucracy), some *form of interaction* between elements of the system "citizen-state" (a partner, a tyrant, a competitor, or nobody). The second method was the modified semantic differential (MSD) method (Deyneka, 2000) with stimulus "State of Belarus", which includes 20 descriptors.

The citizen's attitude survey on the second and third stages of the study was also used. This third method consisting of 24 affirmations with a seven-point scale of responses was titled "Citizen Questionnaire". It reflects the aspects of economic and political patriotism, economic optimism, solidarity, time perspective, and assessing the most pressing problems of society. It was investigated as follows:

- direct (positive or negative) and indirect (political optimism, patriotism, solidarity, time perspective) estimating the country's image and the authority of the government;
- sphere of the image of the country (economic, political, mental);
- control components of vital functions of the society (law, morality, tradition);
- pressing problems of the society at the moment (corruption, social and economic stratification, unemployment, migration).

All three tools were tested for constructive validity (by factor analysis) and reliability (Spearman-Brown criterion was used to check the reliability of homogeneity) and have proved to be effective for monitoring the image of the Russian state, and for cross-national comparative studies in Germany, France, USA, Mozambique (Deyneka, 2000, 2001, 2012; Deyneka & Minina, 2011; Matemulane & Deyneka, 2012; Deyneka, 2013). In addition, the structure of value orientations (Johnston, 1995) among students of Belarusian universities was studied.

Statistical analysis of Data. We used nonparametric statistical methods. The significance of differences was revealed using the van der Waerden X-criteria (van der Waerden, 1952; Storm, 1967). The correlation analysis was produced using Spearman method. The factor analysis was performed using principal components with Varimax rotation method.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Results of the first and second stages of the study

Results of the symbol-association ranking method are represented in Table 1. In the countries where the state is trustworthy test results show that the products of political activity and function of the state in the associative series occupy the first position, and not the subjects of power or form of interaction between elements of the system "citizen-state".

Table 1. Intergroup comparisons of the symbol-association ranking method with stimulus "State of Belarus": 2008x2011.

"The State of Belarus" (ranking associations)	The comparative periods						The van der Waerden X-criteria
	Before the global crisis (September-November 2008)			During the financial crisis in Belarus (October-November 2011)			
	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	
Political Parties	13	10.87	4.45	12	11.42	4.58	< 1.96
Social Protection	12	10.86	4.22	13	11.44	4.46	< 1.96
Domination	6	7.62	4,85	4	6.86	4.59	< 1.96
Partner	15	12.54	3.33	16	12.37	3.30	< 1.96
Nobody	18	13.83	5.01	10	10.87	5.67	3.70***
The ruling class	8	10.87	4.75	8	8.27	4.71	2.16**
Order	9	9.95	4.57	11	11.37	7.54	2.04**
President	1	2.97	3.64	1	3.87	4.08	2.53**
Leadership	4	7.03	3.95	7	7.81	4.13	< 1.96
Tyrant	11	10.29	6.30	2	6.44	5.79	6.25***

Table 1. Intergroup comparisons of the symbol-association ranking method with stimulus "State of Belarus": 2008x2011 (cont.).

Stability	14	11.11	4.91	17	12.73	7.06	2.86***
Control	2	5.99	3.62	3	6.52	4.03	< 1.96
Bureaucracy	10	9.66	4,99	6	7,69	4.83	2.05**
Management	3	6,14	3.59	5	7.12	3.28	3.41***
Freedom	17	13.08	4.52	18	13.91	4.49	< 1.96
Competitor	16	12.60	3.41	15	12.17	7.06	< 1.96
Legitimacy	7	9.18	4.18	14	11.55	4.62	3.65***
Regulation	5	7.54	3.86	9	8.86	3.76	3.17***

Note: a) the smaller the rank place of the associative concepts, the more it is important;
 b) significantly different[^] * – p<0,05 (criteria > **1.96**); ** – p<0,01 (criteria > **2.47**); *** – p<0,001 (criteria > **3.29**).

In Table 1, the data of ranking associations with the term "The State of Belarus" in 2011 was also deformed with the data in 2008. "Tyrant" got the second place in the ranking of associations (after "president"), then go "control", "domination" and "management". Products of political activity - order, stability and legitimacy - significantly shifted to the periphery. (A perfect image of the state went even further from the real one in 2011 than in 2008). Thus, errors and failures in economic policy had a negative impact on the image of the state (and its characteristics) as a socio-political institution.

Table 2. Intergroup comparisons of MSD: 2008x2011x2013.

The MSD descriptors (and the level of significance of differences)	The State of Belarus in 2008		The State of Belarus in 2011		The State of Belarus in 2013		van der Waerden X-criteria 2008x2011/ 2011x2013
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Moral/immoral***	0.91	1.33	-0.20	1.88	1.15	1.40	4,25/5.16
Decisive/indecisive	0.21	0.06	-0.06	0.71	0.71	1.50	< 1.96/3,23
Legal/illegal***	0.67	1.63	-0.25	1,91	1.61	1.49	4,06/6.08
Responsible/ irresponsible***	0.86	1.46	-0.10	1.81	0.94	1.61	4,62/4.85
Stimulatory/coercive**	-0.64	1.73	-1.18	1.64	-0.20	1.84	2.75/4.40
Safe/dangerous***	1.32	1.49	0.17	1.79	1.37	1.42	6,00/5.57
Credible/not credible***	0.40	1.54	-1.14	1.71	0.60	1.66	7,26/7.52
Constructive/ destructive***	0.85	1.33	-0.22	1.62	0.61	1.44	5,83/3,91
Democratic/ totalitarian***	-0.28	1.80	-1.19	1.67	0.34	1.71	4,67/6.83
Native/alien***	1.99	1.40	0.94	2.00	1.69	1.66	4,54/3.14
Progressive/backward***	0.22	1.68	-0.67	1.63	0.31	1.51	4,77/4.88
Controlling/not controlling***	1.70	1.54	1.54	1.69	1.42	1.24	< 1.96/< 1.96
Calm/disturbing***	1.74	1.46	0.14	1.87	1.44	1.52	7,34/5.83
Friendly/hostile***	1.76	1.28	0.47	1.85	1.73	1.22	6,34/5.74
Independent/dependent***	0.20	1.78	-0.66	1.89	0.19	1.93	3,88/3.57
Enabling/not enabling***	-0.57	1,53	-1,22	1,57	0.23	1.51	3,86/7.10
Fair/unfair***	-0,06	1,41	-0,81	1,62	0.27	1.45	4,17/5.43
Prospective/hopeless***	0,47	1,76	-0,55	1,73	0.04	1.53	5,13/2.75
Profitable/unprofitable***	-0,20	1,51	-1,27	1,52	-0.42	1.56	5,74/4.36
Humane/inhumane***	1,01	1,68	-0,14	1,77	1.14	1.39	5,55/6.10

Table 2 contains the results obtained by the modified semantic differential. Table 2 using MSD showed that during the acute phase of the crisis there were significant shifts in the reflection of the state in the minds of students. Only 2 of the 20 descriptors ("decisive" and "controlling") didn't show difference between the State's representations in 2008 and in 2011. Only the descriptors "native" and "friendly" remained in the positive zone of the semantic space according to data of 2011. The financial crisis in Belarus led to a sharp decline of the authority

of the government. Analysis of descriptors showed that the Belarusian government was recognized as totalitarian, not credible, coercive and forbidding. Estimates for the descriptors “moral”, “humane”, and especially “fair” decreased.

Situational factor reflected in the system of values of young people. Some negative manifestations of value’s orientations can be seen in Table 3. So, the role of money and entertainment has increased (block of the terminal values). The role of values of tolerance and sense of humor has declined and intolerance of shortcomings of people increased (block of the instrumental values).

*Table 3. Intergroup comparisons of Value Orientations: 2008x2011
(only statistically significant differences are shown).*

Value orientations (ranking test)	The comparative periods						van der Waerden criteria
	Before the global crisis (September-November 2008)			During the financial crisis in Belarus (October-November 2011)			
	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	
Terminal Values							
Comfortable Life (Money)	6	7.98	4.59	4	6.60	4,27	2.939**
Pleasure (Entertainment)	16	14.03	3,87	15	12.78	4.14	2.641**
Mature love	2	4.62	4.85	2	6.86	4.59	2.890**
Instrumental Values							
Non-Forgiveness (Intolerance of shortcomings)	18	16.00	3.26	18	15.00	3.96	2.158*
Broad-Mindedness (Tolerance)	7	8.57	4.55	13	10.22	4.86	3.233***
Cheerfulness (Sense of humor)	3	6.30	4.87	4	7.49	4.84	1.966*

If we turn to personal value orientations as a factor of the representation of Belarusian State in common consciousness, the orientation on the “happiness of others” has most clearly manifested itself. It showed the greatest number of significant correlations with the estimates of the MSD descriptors. Students with more pronounced collectivist orientations showed a more pronounced grudge against the state during the acute phase of the crisis.

4.2. Results of the third stage of the study

We proceed to the analysis of data obtained two years after the financial crisis (in late 2013) on the background of the stable phase of development of the country.

According to the ranking of associations, the image of Belarusian State in the minds of the students showed almost the same characteristics as that in 2008. It still does not match with the image of the ideal state in which the products of political activity occupy the first position in the associative series. But the functions of the state (leadership, management, control, regulation) took the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th places immediately after the “president” (1st place) and “tyrant” has moved to the end of the list (16th place).

The MSD data showed a shift from negative to positive territory semantic space and also return to the data obtained before the crisis (Table 2). Only two descriptors (small values) were in the negative area of semantic space – “stimulatory” and “profitable”. At the same time Belarusian power ceased to be “totalitarian” and again recognized as “democratic”. The State in modern Belarus estimated as a moral and humane, calm and safe, legal, responsible and controlling. High scores are also assigned descriptors such as “native” and “friendly”. Thus, in the image of the state, which quickly overcame the financial crisis and cope with the difficulties, all the indicators, confirming the features of the welfare state, not just moved into positive territory, but also significantly increased.

Complementing the data obtained by symbol-association method and MSD with the multifactorial survey "Citizen Questionnaire" (Table 4), we can say on the positive trends in the civic consciousness of Belarusian students. Comparative analysis of the questionnaire in 2011 and 2013 shows that in 2013, relations in the "citizen - state" system (citizen is a conditional group as students) are not perfect, but they differ greatly crisis relations. Many students believe in the prospect of the achievements of Belarus in a global world. The subjects expressed a high degree of pride for their country again and lower willingness to migrate from Belarus. With regard to economic optimism, it remained at a low level.

Table 4. Intergroup comparisons of Citizen Questionnaire: 2011x2013.

The citizen Questionnaire		Groups				van der Waerden criteria
		2011		2013		
N°	The Statements	M	SD	M	SD	X
3	For the sake of progress, one can refuse many cultural values.	3,64	1.89	3.32	1.82	2.167
4	I believe that economic situation in Belarus will improve in 3 years.	2,53	1.71	2.97	1.68	3.424
5	Implementation of new laws in my country almost always makes me anxious.	4,87	1.88	4.02	1.92	3.900
7	The overall conditions in Belarus allow people making long-term plans.	2.12	1.57	3.39	1.61	7.217
8	I always try to obey the laws of my country.	4.81	1.70	5.40	1.55	3.714
9	If I had an opportunity to leave Belarus, I would do it without hesitation.	5.51	1.83	4.71	2.00	5.312
12	Belarusian citizens understand and accept the main political goals of their government.	2,92	1.62	3.66	1.54	5.010
14	The main problem of Belarus is a high level of corruption.	4.51	1.65	4.14	1.51	2.552
15	I believe that our country is able to achieve a lot in a global world.	3.52	1.80	4.00	1.69	2.824
16	I am saddened by the possibility of rising retirement age in the country.	4.37	2.07	4.81	2.07	2.242
17	In general, we can acknowledge the decency of the Belarusian governmental officials.	2.68	1.66	3.39	1.66	6.007
18	For me, my own material well-being is more important than protection of the cultural environment.	4.56	1.63	5.40	1.56	3.250
19	Principles of morality in our society work better than the law.	3.78	1.69	4.71	2.00	3.097
21	In today's Belarusian policies, there is a coherent development strategy and a clear set of priorities.	2.79	1.64	3.76	1.51	5.580
22	Governmental authorities are responsible for all the problems of the modern society.	5.10	1.76	4.47	1.39	4.408
23	I consider the problem of immigration to be the most acute problem in our country.	3,15	1.85	3.70	1.81	2.548
24	I am proud to be a citizen of Belarus.	4,43	1.97	5.50	1.66	5.482

Students are much less accusative toward authorities because of current problems in the country. Honesty of the Belarusian statesmen in 2013 was rated higher than in 2011. Effectiveness of social regulators, namely respect for the law and the role of morality increased in the student consciousness. As for the traditions and cultural values, there is a paradox observed. On the one hand, students expressed reluctance to abandon the cultural values for progress. On the other hand, they expressed a high degree of agreement that the material well-being is more important than preserving the cultural environment.

Table 5. The factors of global optimism.

Weight of the factor (10.3)			
Belief that Belarus is able to achieve a lot in a global world (0.670)	The overall conditions in the Belarus allow people making long-term plans (0.654)	The presence of the image of the future (0,638)	Coherent strategy for national development (0.507)
I am proud to be a citizen of the Belarus (0.539)	Belarusian citizens could have sacrificed personal interests for the wellbeing of the society (0.505)	Principles of morality in our society work better than the law (0.449)	Faith in the improvement of economic situation in the next three years (0.430)

(For each characteristic is indicated by the factor loadings in parentheses)

The matrix of the six factors was obtained from factor analysis of the questionnaire data after rotation technique. The first most significant factor was named “*factor of global optimism*” (Table 5). Faith in their country and its rightful place in the global world, the presence of the image of the future of Belarus, the possibility for citizens to set long-term goals (stability) formed the core factor. The adoption of national development strategy and the economic optimism are also signs of a factor. It is important to note that national pride, solidarity (sacrifice) and reliance on morality also included as features in the factor. Strong correlations between factors signs suggest that students associate global optimism with mental peculiarities Slavic nature and manifestations of patriotism, identification with their country.

Table 6. Orientation factors for material well-being.

Weight of the factor (7.83)		
For me, my own material well-being is more important than protection of the cultural (0.664)	If I had an opportunity to leave the Belarus, I would do it without hesitation (0.629)	For the progress's sake one can refuse many cultural values (0.619)
Any citizen must always rely only on himself/herself (0.496)	Governmental authorities are responsible for all the problems of the modern society (0.484)	Implementation of new laws in my country almost always makes me anxious (0.417)

The second factor was named “*factor orientation to material well-being*” (Table 6). Willingness to emigrate and abandon cultural values, as well as charges and claims to power were signs of this factor. Correlation analysis showed that who are more focused on material wealth are more willing to leave the country ($r = 0.31, p < 0,001$).

The third factor was named “*factor relations between citizens and the state*”. Citizens’ understanding (and acceptance) of the purposes of the Government, the recognition of decency statesmen, obedience to the law and disagreement with the statement “Governmental authorities are responsible for all the problems of the modern society” were signs factor. The remaining three factors describe the current problems of society.

5. DISCUSSION

According to the Leiser, Bourgeois-Gironde, & Benita (2010), people tend to be more inclined to attribute intentional causes of the crisis than systematic. Reflection of the Belarusian State in the minds of youth clearly demonstrated the political resentment of citizens due to the effects of the financial crisis. According to specialists and analysts, recession and currency crisis, which started in 2011, were provoked by increased spending on social programs in context of forthcoming election in 2010 (Stern, 2011) and by unjustified raise of people’s salaries and income, which led to increased inflationary pressure (Kruk, 2011). Financial crisis resulted in a decreased standard of living. Mean salary (in USD) has decreased 1.6 times, from \$500 to \$312, in a situation of growing prices and shortage of goods. Since April 2011, there has been a drastic fall in employment levels, especially in construction and finance areas. For

the first time during rather long period of time, workers of different sectors in Belarus went on strikes.

The Belarusian government and the long-term President had kept the economic situation within the framework of relative stability and prosperity of citizens despite the global financial and economic crisis in all European countries. However, in 2011 they had failed to protect the citizens from financial loss and psychological stress, which is reflected in the results of our study of youth consciousness. Belarus has seen huge queues to exchange currency (financial panic). Citizens were buying food and household goods (consumer hype). The authorities' professionalism and political flexibility were sufficient to overcome the crisis and not be in a situation of a "color" revolution.

If the territorial image of the country is to be considered, Belarus is a socially oriented state with strong presidential rule, "vertical power" and prevalence of state ownership. Belarus is generally perceived by Russians as the "sanctuary of socialism" and European center of social, ethnic and confessional stability. It is said to be characterized by high level of safety, smooth highways and clean streets, lack of beggars, inexpensive medical services, orderliness and friendly people (Sharuho, 2009). According to specialists from the Gallup Institute in Mail.Ru (2013), median income of a family in Belarus is 15 085\$ per year, which is higher than in Russia, or Poland, or Baltic countries.

Nevertheless, thanks to the strength of the stock of political conservatism and statehood and the effectiveness of social control (law, morality, traditions), the political resentment of youth hasn't transformed into destructive forms of political behavior. The result, which we received, corresponds to the data provided by Leiser et al. (2010), according to which of the factors affecting the dynamics of the crisis in the country, a factor of State's non-interference in the development of the crisis is essential and not positive. At the same time, an important role in overcoming the consequences of the crisis was played by such qualities of the Belarusian mentality as patience, hard work, discipline and responsibility, moral and normative behavior, as well as sacrifice.

The concept of "tense system" (Ross & Nisbett, 1991), as well as "unbalanced system" ("citizen-state"), "paternalism" and others may be useful for the analysis of the psychological causes of a favorable outcome of the crisis in 2011.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The research that was carried out has proved that semi-projective methods are effective in studying the everyday political and economic consciousness. It is advisable to monitor the state of consciousness of certain social groups, especially the youth.

The financial crisis in Belarus led to a sharp decline of the authority of the government, but the experience of statehood and the effectiveness of the social controls (law, morality, traditions) prevented an escalation of the situation. Behavior of citizens in crisis situations is determined not only by situational factors, but also by mental peculiarities.

With regard to the values of students, the collectivist orientation was largely associated with the grudge against the state.

The image of the state, which quickly overcame the financial crisis, became better. All the indicators, confirming the features of the welfare state significantly increased in the student consciousness.

Belarusian students demonstrate emotional connection with their country now but the system of goal-setting is a problem area in civilian politics and requires special attention.

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KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Political image: political image as any other image, is on one hand - a reflection of some real characteristics of the object of perception, i.e. political power, leader's personality, state, etc. On the other hand, the image is a projection of expectations of the subject's perception. Political image reflects peoples' needs, motives, emotions, cognitions, concepts, stereotypes, values and demands of the public to authorities (Shestopal, 2013).

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