

# ACTIVE EVENT SPORT TOURISM EXPERIENCE: THE ROLE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, SAFETY AND SECURITY IN EVENT BUSINESS MODELS

MARKO PERIĆ, JELENA ĐURKIN & VANJA VITEZIĆ  
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Croatia

## ABSTRACT

The connection between tourism development and the natural environment is more intense in outdoor sport tourism than in many other forms of tourism. Natural settings (space), sport activities undertaken and the motivations of the people who participate in them interact to create sport tourism experiences. Tourist safety and security are also proved to be important elements of a tourist experience and it seems that sport tourists may be more sensitive to safety issues than non-sport tourists. This paper therefore aims to analyse the importance of the natural environment and safety and security issues, as constitute event business model elements, in providing sport tourism experiences. The natural setting is also examined as a motivation to participate in sport tourism travel. On the basis of 464 questionnaires gathered from active participants of 16 small-scale sport events in four different outdoor sports, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on motivational statements and revealed a conceptually clear seven-factor structure. One of them, titled 'Nature', was the second most important motivational dimension for participants but differences between particular sports were considerable. In terms of business model elements included in the survey, participants gave high importance to all elements related to the natural environment and safety and security. Scenic destination, scenic and interesting course, course safety and event safety were the most important elements of event business models for participants in all four sports. Environmental management and proper implementation of security and crowd control measures were also singled out as important event processes. However, results of ANOVA indicate statistically significant differences between the sports in seven out of nine business model elements. These findings shed some light on the managerial aspects of sport tourism practice, helping managers to better serve sports and tourism needs at a particular event and in the destination.

*Keywords: business model, event sport tourism, natural environment, safety and security.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Sport tourism is a complex phenomenon that is not only a simple sum of sport and tourism. Both similar and different from sport and tourism individually, sport tourism is multi-faceted and exists under a variety of forms and names [1–4]. Participants travel to take part in sport, to watch sport, and to visit sports-related attractions. Depending on different participation (active or passive) and motivation factors, sport tourists encounter various experiences as the ultimate value they are seeking [5, 6].

The sport tourism experience is indeed a complex (and) individual construct involving motivational, emotional, social, environmental, organisational and physical attributes [7–9]. According to Weed and Bull [4], three key components interact to create value (i.e. the experience) in sport tourism, namely the places involved, the activities undertaken and the motivations of the people who participate. The places that host tourists and their activities have some distinct characteristics (e.g. attractive landscapes, beautiful sceneries etc.) which are a subject of different interpretations [9–11]. On the other hand, the number of tourists and their activities could cause destruction of physical, economic or sociocultural means and reduce the quality of the satisfaction of tourists. For this reason, defining and respecting the carrying capacity of destinations becomes an imperative in tourism planning [12, 13]. In addition, safety and security are important elements of the tourist experience [14] and it

seems personal safety is more highly valued by sport tourists than by non-sport tourists [15, 16]. In sport tourism literature, many of these organisational, environmental and other attributes are analysed within the context of event and destination preferences [17, 18]. However, when it comes to business models which provide a description of how value (i.e. the sport tourism experience) is produced and delivered, and what value remains within, and for, an organisation, some components like the natural environment and safety and security have been significantly neglected [6].

This paper therefore aims to analyse the importance of the natural environment and safety and security issues, as constitute event business model elements, in providing sport tourism experiences. The natural setting is also examined as a motivation to participate in sport tourism travel. The fact that these issues were usually disregarded in previous research concerning business models makes this research innovative.

The paper starts with a short literature review examining a range of perspectives regarding the natural environment and safety and security in sport tourism and within a business model framework. The second section provides a description of the research method. The third section exposes and discusses the results. The final section offers discussion and concluding remarks, highlighting some further theoretical and managerial implications.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Natural environment and sport tourism

The connection between tourism development and extraordinary environments is even more intense in sport tourism than in many other forms of tourism [19, 20]. Whatever the sport tourism activity, it takes place in an interactive area which can be natural or artificial (created by people). What is more, the natural environment is a key resource when it comes to outdoor sport tourism that is much more dependent on natural environmental conditions [21–24].

For this reason, environmental aspects such as beautiful scenery or countryside are widely recognised as factors that strongly influence the sport tourism experience and customer satisfaction [8, 9, 25, 26]. Some environmental aspects like scenic course, scenic destination and expected weather conditions are often studied when preferences on sporting events and destinations are analysed [17, 18]. What's more, different types of tourists perceive landscape values differently [10, 11, 27]. Since these values are fragile, both consumers and providers must be aware of the environmental carrying capacity [12, 13, 28] and increase their efforts in preventing the negative impacts of tourism on soil, water resources, vegetation and animal life as well as on economic and sociocultural aspects of life. This will largely depend on their attitude on environment, that is, environmental value orientation which strongly determines the behaviour [20, 29, 30].

Another perspective discusses natural environments as a motivation to travel and to participate in sports, and various researchers highlight that landscapes and natural settings are indeed important sport travel motivators [31–34] and that nature has a strong influence on the tourist perception of a chosen destination [11, 19]. In other words, nature itself and the wish to experience nature are strong motivations to participate in outdoor sport tourism events. Event sport tourism has developed as the highest profile product within sports tourism [35]. In previous research, however, the focus has mostly been on mega events and/or whole destinations, while small-scale sport events have been insufficiently studied. Additionally, by calculating mean scores or performing factor analysis when segmenting sport tourists, many authors have found

that enjoying nature and experiencing nature and the environment are important dimensions when taking sport tourism trips (e.g. [36–38]). It can be presumed that the same motivations exist in different sports, and the desire to experience nature is one of them.

## 2.2 Safety and security and sport tourism

The frequency and severity of natural and environmental threats and human-induced incidents has dramatically increased in the 21st century. Studies indicate that tourist safety and security are proved to be important elements of a tourist experience [1] and an absolute prerequisite for a successful tourist operation [39–41]. As the most important decision-making aspects for a significant number of tourists [42], the risk perceptions of travellers concerning their personal safety are deemed as being influential on international tourism demand patterns. Consequently, unsafe destinations will have difficulties in attracting tourists [40, 43]. Tourism development will slow down for a shorter or longer time, depending on the response of all stakeholders involved in the tourism industry.

Sport tourism has additional features where safety and security are concerned. Since active participation in sports increases the possibility of injury, it seems that sport tourism implies a higher level of risks compared to other specific types of tourism. In this regard, course safety was proved to be an important attribute for active sport event tourists [18]. Additionally, many sporting events take place outdoors where safety is more difficult to ensure. The safety theme is also recognised as crucial in the context of sport facilities and spectator sports [44, 45], as well as active sport tourists [18, 46]. Therefore, it is argued that sport tourists (both active and passive) may be more sensitive to safety issues related to a destination and an event [15, 16, 47] in comparison with non-sport tourists. From the perspective of tourism supply, sport tourism providers need to minimize safety risks thus supporting the functional value of the experience [48]. Safety concerns (e.g. safer routes) are imbedded in the event organisation and organisational aspect of the experience which is under the control of the provider [8, 46].

## 2.3 Environment and safety and security within a business model framework

Despite some disagreements in definitions of the term *business model* and its basic elements, the majority of researchers agree that a business model is all about value – how value is created and delivered to the customer and how value is captured by the organisation itself [49–51].

Literature on business models in tourism mostly refers to e-tourism business models and travel agencies (e.g. [52–56]). This is understandable considering the significant influence that the Internet has had over the past 20 years, but it is certainly surprising given the importance that the tourism industry has in the world's economy. When it comes to sport tourism, Perić and Wise [57] used the business model framework of Johnson *et al.* [58] and compared the business models of two hospitality firms in sport (tennis) tourism. Recently, Perić *et al.* [6] proposed an innovative business model for sustainable sport tourism, consisting of 27 different elements, grouped within four broader clusters (value proposition, key resources, key processes and value capture). It seems the analytical possibilities of a business model framework have not been recognised by tourism researchers [59]. This applies to sport tourism as well, where a new service research agenda is proposed, to try fill the void that would link the concept of business models to the area of sport tourism management [60].

In the last few decades, the competitive landscape has changed in favour of the environment and firms started to treat sustainability as a business strategy in itself. However, despite the fact that Sustainability Business Models (SBMs) [61, 62] acknowledged environment and community as true stakeholders and therefore devoted its interest to the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability as well, the environment is rarely considered as an element of a business model. For instance, Perić *et al.* [6] studied 102 publications on business models and found that *environment* is considered a business model element only twice (see [63, 64]). However, when mentioned in the context of business models, the environment has a meaning of a turbulent and competitive business setting that impacts firms' survival and does not refer to a nature setting. As the natural environment is considered a key resource for sport tourism providers, especially when it comes to outdoor activities, efforts aimed at protecting the environment and its carrying capacity should be viewed as another key process. On the other hand, Perić *et al.* [6] found no results for *safety* and *security* but after in-depth analysis, they proposed that safety should be part of the customer value proposition (like experience), whereas security, as an organizational issue, should belong to key processes.

### 3 METHOD

A self-administered questionnaire (available at: <https://www.1ka.si/a/100714>) was used to analyse the importance of the natural environment, safety and security from the perspective of active sport event participants. The questionnaire was developed within the project SPORTBIZMODEL and contained eight parts altogether, only three of which are the focus of this study: motivation; business model elements with focus on environmental and safety and security issues; and socio-economic and demographic data (age, gender, education, income). Items measuring motivation for sport participation (28 in total) were selected from the Physical Activity and Leisure Motivation Scale (PALMS), originally developed by Morris and Rogers [65], and expanded with four items regarding natural settings [8, 31, 34] and items regarding charity and prizes [17, 18]. The section investigating the importance of the natural environment (four items) and safety and security issues (five items) as parts of the business model was constructed based on previous research on event and destination preferences [17, 18] and business models in sport tourism [6]. Participants answered the questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-Strongly disagree to 5-Strongly agree (for motivational items) and 1-Not important at all to 5-The most important (for business model items). The questionnaire was prepared in printed and online versions in four languages (Croatian, Slovenian, English and Italian).

A survey was conducted from July 2016 to April 2017 in Croatia and Slovenia. Respondents were active participants of 16 small-scale sport events in four different outdoor sports (see Table 1): trail running (three events), sport fishing (four events), mountain biking (seven events), and cross-country skiing (two events). The 464 questionnaires collected were acceptable for this study. Descriptive analysis was applied to explore the sample profile of the study. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using the extraction method Principal Axis Factoring with direct oblimin rotation was used to reduce the 28 motivations to a smaller number of factors. Participants were then grouped based on particular sports, and the groups' mean responses in relation to the motivational factors and business model elements related to the natural environment and safety and security were examined. ANOVA was used to identify possible statistically significant differences between the groups in terms of the factors derived from the EFA and proposed business model elements.

Table 1: Events' portfolio in chronological order.

Events	Sport	Date	Place	No. of part.
Risnjak Trail	TR	9 July 2016	Crni Lug, National Park Risnjak, Croatia	399
Gorski kotar Bike Tour 2016	MTB	15–17 July 2016	Gorski kotar, Croatia	30
Black Hole Marathon	MTB	23 July 2016	Črna na Koroškem, Slovenia	145
Kamenjak Mountain Bike Tour	MTB	5–7 August 2016	Tršće, Gorski kotar, Croatia	26
Rekreatur 2016	MTB	25–28 August 2016	Savinja and Šalek Valley, Kranj, Slovenia	100
Fužine2Sea	MTB	28 August 2016	Fužine – Crikvenica, Croatia	248
38th Assault on Vršič	MTB	3 September 2016	Kranjska Gora, Slovenia	672
Ogulin Trail 2016	TR	17 September 2016	Ogulin, Croatia	178
3rd Sakura UL Cup	SF	18 September 2016	Mrzla vodica, Lokve, Croatia	40
Dalmacija Ultra Trail	TR	21–23 October 2016	Omiš, Croatia	349
Pike Masters II	SF	29 October 2016	Orešje, Zagreb, Croatia	40 (20 teams)
3rd Prologic “Carp Challenge Mrežnica 2016”	SF	25–27 November 2016	Duga Resa, Croatia	20 (10 teams)
Marathon Tamar	CCS	18 January 2017	Rateče, Slovenia	36
Pokljuka Marathon AS	CCS	4 March 2017	Pokljuka, Slovenia	78
Downhill Lošinj 2017	MTB	22 April 2017	Veli Lošinj, Croatia	121
Golden Trout 2017	SF	23 April 2017	Čabar, Croatia	42

Note: TR – Trail running; MTB – Mountain biking; SF – Sport fishing; CCS – Cross-country skiing

#### 4 RESULTS

The respondents profile for each sporting activity is presented in Table 2. Descriptive analysis showed that the events are male dominated, with sport fishing being a completely male sporting activity. Mountain bike and cross-country skiing participants are slightly older when compared with trail and sport fishing participants and in most cases they are married and have children. The majority of trail running and mountain bike participants have university or higher degrees, while sport fishing participants usually have secondary school qualifications. Most of the respondents have a monthly net income between 500 and 1,500 euro.

EFA was performed on the motivation scale. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.844) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $p < 0.001$ ) confirmed that the

Table 2: Sample profile.

Variable	TR (N=140)		SF (N=89)		MTB (N=183)		CCS (N=52)	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
GENDER	N=139		N=88		N=176		N=51	
M	89	64.0	88	100.0	118	67.0	37	72.5
F	50	36.0	0	0.0	58	33.0	14	27.5
MARITAL STATUS	N=139		N=86		N=175		N=50	
Single	70	50.4	37	43.0	89	50.9	22	44.0
Married	69	49.6	49	57.0	86	49.1	28	56.0
HAVING CHILDREN	N=135		N=87		N=176		N=50	
No	73	54.1	33	37.9	89	50.6	19	38.0
Yes	62	45.9	54	62.1	87	49.4	31	62.0
EDUCATION	N=138		N=88		N=174		N=51	
No education	1	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Elementary	0	0.0	1	1.1	6	3.4	0	0.0
Secondary	28	20.3	65	73.9	65	37.4	27	52.9
University	90	65.2	19	21.6	84	48.3	20	39.2
Postgraduate	19	13.8	3	3.4	19	10.9	4	7.8
MONTHLY NET INCOME	N=132		N=84		N=164		N=48	
0–500 EUR	13	9.7	12	14.3	27	16.5	13	27.1
500–1000 EUR	53	39.6	44	52.4	69	42.1	16	33.3
1000–1500 EUR	33	24.6	21	25.0	42	25.6	10	20.8
1500–2000 EUR	21	15.7	3	3.6	17	10.4	5	10.4
2000–3000 EUR	6	4.5	2	2.4	6	3.7	4	8.3
3000–4000	5	3.7	1	1.2	1	0.6	0	0.0
>4000 EUR	3	2.2	1	1.2	2	1.2	0	0.0
AGE	N=128		N=86		N=173		N=51	
Average age	37.8		40.4		37.5		38.3	

Note: TR – Trail running; MTB – Mountain biking; SF – Sport fishing; CCS – Cross-country skiing

analysis was appropriate for the collected responses. Four items were dropped ('To raise money for charity', 'To get away from pressures of everyday life', 'To better cope with stress' and 'To help me relax') because their factor loadings were below 0.3 for all factors. The analysis revealed a conceptually clear factor structure (Table 3). Seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 emerged (1-Nature, 2-Appearance, 3-Competition, 4-Socializing, 5-Enjoyment, 6-Skills, and 7-Health), which accounted for 74.47% of the variance. The first factor, called 'Nature', explained 24.897% of variance and consists of four items, all associated with natural environment ('Because I want to connect with nature', 'Because I seek an

Table 3: Results of the exploratory factor analysis.

Statement	Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I undertake this particular sport activity...	.798						
Because I want to connect with nature	.798						
Because I seek an unpolluted environment (clean air and/or water)	.783					-.138	
To enjoy beautiful surroundings	.733						
Because I want to be in nature (outdoors)	.619				.264	.148	
To improve my appearance		.919					
To improve my body shape		.885					
To maintain a trim, toned body		.737					.125
To be the best in a group			.874				
To compete with others around me			.757				
To be fitter than others			.729				
For the prize(s)			.674			-.133	-.115
To enjoy spending time with others				-.833			
To do the activity with others				-.818			
To be with friends				-.802			
Because it makes me happy					.863		
Because it is fun					.847		
Because it is interesting					.658	-.217	
Because I enjoy doing this sport	.198	-.100	.137		.615		
To obtain new skills						-.822	
To improve existing skills						-.742	
To maintain a current skill level						-.415	.118
To maintain my health							.885
To improve cardiovascular fitness							.726
To be physically fit		.134					.633
% of variance	24.897	16.417	9.989	8.117	5.422	5.321	4.309

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

unpolluted environment', 'To enjoy beautiful surroundings', and 'Because I want to be in nature').

When it comes to the mean values of responses regarding items within factors, those related to 'Enjoyment' and 'Nature' have the highest level of agreement, above 4.50 (Table 4). There are statistically significant differences in mean values among the sports in six out of seven motivational factors. Regarding the groups' mean responses in relation to nine business model items related to the natural environment and safety and security, participants from all four sports rated highly all nine of them (from 3.76 to 4.34) (Table 4). 'Scenic destination'



Table 4: Mean values and ANOVA results of motivational factors and business model elements.

	TR	SF	MTB	CCS	F	Sig.
Motivational factors (overall mean)						
Nature (4.51)	4.57	4.71	4.39	4.42	8.017	.000
Appearance (3.17)	3.22	2.57	3.35	3.44	12.718	.000
Competition (3.00)	2.67	3.52	2.99	3.03	13.915	.000
Socializing (4.32)	4.27	4.43	4.41	3.93	7.927	.000
Enjoyment (4.59)	4.67	4.68	4.53	4.36	7.628	.000
Skills (4.04)	3.98	4.19	4.03	3.99	1.782	.150
Health (4.24)	4.38	3.75	4.32	4.47	21.086	.000
Business model – related items (overall mean)						
A scenic and interesting course (4.26)	4.46	3.99	4.28	4.10	7.720	.000
The destination is scenic (4.34)	4.36	4.28	4.36	4.31	.345	.793
The expected weather conditions are favourable (3.76)	3.51	3.84	3.95	3.61	5.817	.001
Proper implementation of environmental protection measures (4.16)	4.24	4.29	4.09	3.94	2.867	.036
Course safety (4.17)	4.08	3.97	4.27	4.38	4.556	.004
Event safety (4.16)	4.14	3.93	4.26	4.28	3.809	.010
The destination is a safe place to stay and visit (4.19)	4.07	4.24	4.22	4.33	1.795	.147
Proper implementation of security measures (3.98)	3.89	3.84	4.10	4.08	2.862	.037
Proper implementation of crowd control measures (3.91)	3.99	3.65	3.92	4.08	3.759	.011

Note: TR – Trail running; MTB – Mountain biking; SF – Sport fishing; CCS – Cross-country skiing

was the most important for the whole sample, with no statistically significant differences between sports. However, there are statistically significant differences in seven out of nine items regarding the average importance among the sports. ‘Scenic and interesting course’, ‘course safety’ and ‘event safety’ were other important elements for participants in all four sports. ‘Favourable weather conditions’ was the least important item for the participants in all four sports but differences between them were considerable.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Given the spatial (places), physical (activities) and social (people) aspects of sport tourism experiences [4, 21], this paper seeks to examine the role of the natural environment and safety and security in providing this particular value within the setting of small-scale outdoor sporting events belonging to four different sports (trail running, sport fishing, mountain biking and cross-country skiing).



Regarding motivations (i.e. the people perspective), seven factors emerged, and mean scores suggest 'Nature' is among the top three most important dimensions in all four sports. People do indeed participate in outdoor sports to experience and merge with nature. Socializing, health issues and skills mastery are less important motivations. These results support prior research (e.g. [11, 31, 34, 37, 38]), noting that the dimension of experiencing nature is relevant to both recreational and tourism contexts as a strong motivation for taking sport (and) tourism trips. As an important motivation, it strongly contributes to the overall sport tourism experience, as claimed by Bouchet *et al.* [21], Klaus and Maklan [9] and Perić *et al.* [60] and, therefore, allows for finer profiling of the value proposition within a business model framework. However, the importance of the 'Nature' factor differs significantly depending on the sport. It is interesting to note that 'Nature' is more important for sport fishing participants than it is for the participants in the other three sports. Based on this discussion, the natural environment was confirmed as a strong motivation for participating in outdoor sporting events.

The natural environment, along with safety and security issues, was further discussed regarding the importance these features have for a sport tourism business model. Active sport event participants gave high importance to all elements related to the natural environment and safety and security. When it comes to the natural setting, it is not only about the course (the natural environment in a narrow sense) but also about the destination as a whole. This study's findings are in line with Getz and McConnell [17] and Buning and Gibson [18] who also found that a scenic course and destination are important sporting event and destination attributes. The lesser importance of 'expected weather conditions' can be explained by the fact that competitions in these sports are not cancelled in case of bad weather conditions and that competitors in these sports get used to them. However, when evaluating the environmental features some statistically significant differences between sports exist implying that the perception and valuation of the same features could differ depending on types of tourists (see [10]). It turns out that the tourists' valuation of landscapes should therefore be taken into consideration when developing recreational activities associated with tourism [27]. Further, active sport event participants want to see event organisers doing everything they can to keep their business models' core resource, that is, the natural environment (both course and destination), clean and protected from environmental risks. Using the latest and safest equipment and technology, event organisers can contribute to environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources, thus supporting the destination's carrying capacity [12, 13, 21]. Undoubtedly, environmental management should therefore be an important process within tourism enterprise business models [6, 59].

Findings further confirm previous conclusions on how important safety and security issues are for tourism experiences [14, 16, 18, 26]. Course, event and destination safety are indeed the key elements appraised by active sport event attendees, thus contributing to the overall value the event participants receive (i.e. these key elements belong to the customer value proposition). In addition, the proper implementation of security and crowd control measures is of high importance for active sport event participants and should, therefore, be one of the key processes within the event's business model as claimed by Perić *et al.* [6]. However, since the mean values are lower, it seems safety issues are less important than natural settings attributes (except for weather conditions). Some differences between sports exist, and the reason sport fishing participants gave less importance to safety and security issues might lie in the small-scaled nature (up to 45 participants per event) and intimate atmosphere of examined sport events.

To summarise, sport in general is the common theme for all respondents included in the sample, but other factors are also decisive in creating active sport event experiences. The high mean scores of the 'Nature' dimension (as a motivation to participate) and of the natural environment and safety as business model elements, given by the active event participants, show the importance of respecting the physical environment and safety in the examined sports. From a conceptual viewpoint, these findings shed some light on the managerial aspects of sport tourism practice. The results of this study can be used by the small, private-owned businesses, predominant in the event sport tourism economy, to refocus and innovate their business models and implement more effective strategies. These results should also be taken into consideration when sport resorts in general and sporting events in particular are planned and built. Such efforts will help sport tourism providers to better serve sports and tourism needs at a particular event and in the destination but also to preserve the destination from negative impacts caused by tourists' activities. Failure to do so could impact future attendance, as well as word-of-mouth about the event.

Despite our attempts to rigorously and objectively analyse the selected literature on safety and environmental issues in the context of sport tourism and business models, this paper comes with several limitations. First, our sample was derived from manifold sporting events. Focus on only one sport, or the introduction of new sports, could deliver different results. The same would apply if the focus were on large-scale sporting events. Second, in line with Gangaas *et al.* [29], it would be interesting to examine whether the participants' motivations and preferences on particular business model elements depend on their environmental value orientation. Also, event sport tourism industry has other features that should be explored within a business model context and their interaction/relation to nature, safety and security elements (e.g. transport), examined. Future research on business models in the sport tourism industry should seek to overcome these limitations.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been supported in part by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project UIP-2014-09-1214.

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