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Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Gender Research

**A Virtual Conference hosted by
University of Aveiro
Portugal**

21-22 June 2021



**Edited by
Professor Elisabeth T. Pereira, Professor Carlos Costa
and Professor Zélia Breda**

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Proceedings of the

4th International Conference on
Gender Research
ICGR 2021

A Virtual Conference
hosted by

University of Aveiro
Portugal

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The University of Salerno's first Gender Equality Plan

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Abstract: The paper traces the roots at the heart of the Gender Equality Plan promoted by the University of Salerno (UNISA) in the framework of the European Project R&I PEERS *pilot experiences for improving gender equality in research organisations*. The implication of UNISA in gender policies goes back to 1999, with the establishment of the first Equal Opportunities Committee. Starting from that milestone, the paper traces the main steps of a gender policy that has aimed at increasing a sensitive culture against gender discriminations, understanding and knowledge about gender inequality, among the entire academic community. Likewise, the paper discusses how the insights emerged from focus groups and interviews regarding the perception of gender disparities within the university, supported the definition and arrangement of the actions and strategies of the Gender Equality Plan.

Keywords: Gender Equality Plan, Gender in Academia, Gender in research, Gender in education, Gender-awareness

1. Introduction

Gender disparities in higher education and research organisations have attracted a considerable number of studies over the past years (Alper, 1993; Cullen & Luna 1993; Lawless & Fox, 2005; Ceci et al., 2009) when statistical data and findings about gender inequalities in academic contexts have shown that the presence of women in tertiary education is increasing but the gender gap is still evident (Dobele et al., 2014; Loots & Walker, 2016; Treviño et al., 2015; Weisshaar, 2017).

UNESCO's World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education (2012) reveals, through statistical data and more than 100 maps, that although women are now a majority of tertiary level students in most countries, men continue to predominate in research positions (UNESCO 2012, p. 85). The latest available "She Figures" published by the European Commission, reveal a trend in favour of male academics. While in 2016 women made up 48% of doctoral graduates at the EU level, gender imbalance amongst researchers still endures as only one third of the EU's researchers are women. As we move up the academic ladder, women are less represented: they correspond to the 25% among Grade A academic positions (She Figures 2018). Although the number of women researchers in the EU-28 increased at higher rate on average than men (3,8 % for women and 3,4 % for men), this growth is not sufficient to overcome the gender imbalance characterising the top academic careers.

The situation within the Italian Academia reflects the same gender disparities in top hierarchical positions. According to the latest available data on the presence of women in academia by the Statistical Service of the Ministry of Research (MIUR 2020), the percentage of women is higher among students and doctoral students and then progressively decreases as the hierarchical ladder rises. Female researchers make up the 46,8% of the research staff in positions for starting academic careers and, as one progresses towards top positions, it is men who establish themselves and become the clear majority of professors. The data speak for themselves: women represents the 38,4% of Associate Professors (grade B) and only the 23,7% of Full Professors (grade A) (MIUR 2020). The under-representation of women among grade A and grade B professors corresponds to an under-representation of women also in institutional governance roles. Within the Italian Academia only 7 Rectors are women out of 83.

Although gender mainstreaming has recently become a recurrent aspect of tertiary education policy programs for the promotion of gender equality within academic contexts, there is still a great deal of resistance to implement these policies and make them operative. The Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) are part of the European strategies to integrate the gender mainstreaming strategies in academic contexts. Starting from this statement, the essay aims at tracing the main steps of a journey that has brought to the design of the first GEP of the University of Salerno (UNISA). The GEP was developed under the Horizon 2020 European Project R&I PEERS *Pilot Experiences for Improving Gender Equality in Research Organizations*¹, that has brought together 10 Research Performing and Research Funding Organisations of the Mediterranean Area. Before approaching this topic, the essay shall give an overview of the methodology used to collect the data employed to define the GEP



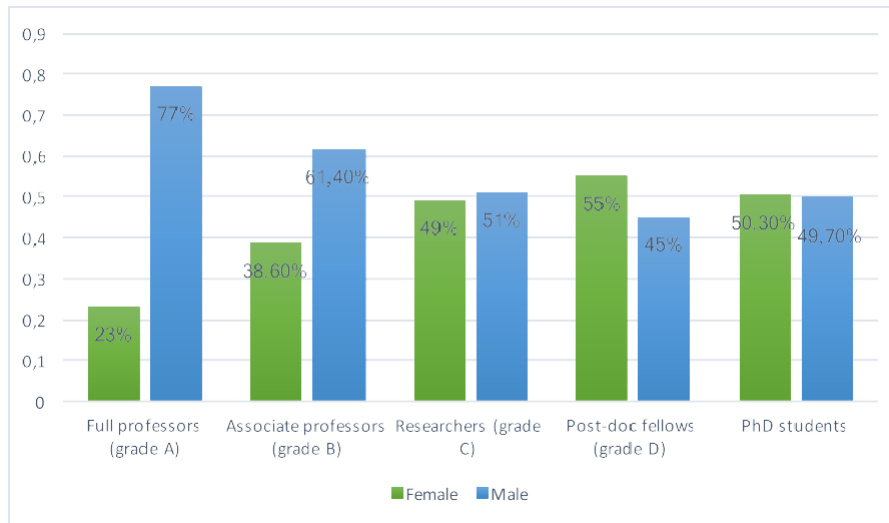
¹ This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 788171.

strategies. The methodology section will be followed by the case study of the University of Salerno and the first steps undertaken to design a GEP that echoes the involved actors' needs and necessities. The final section presents the concluding remarks. They will shed a light on the first results achieved and on future perspectives.

2. Overview of the method

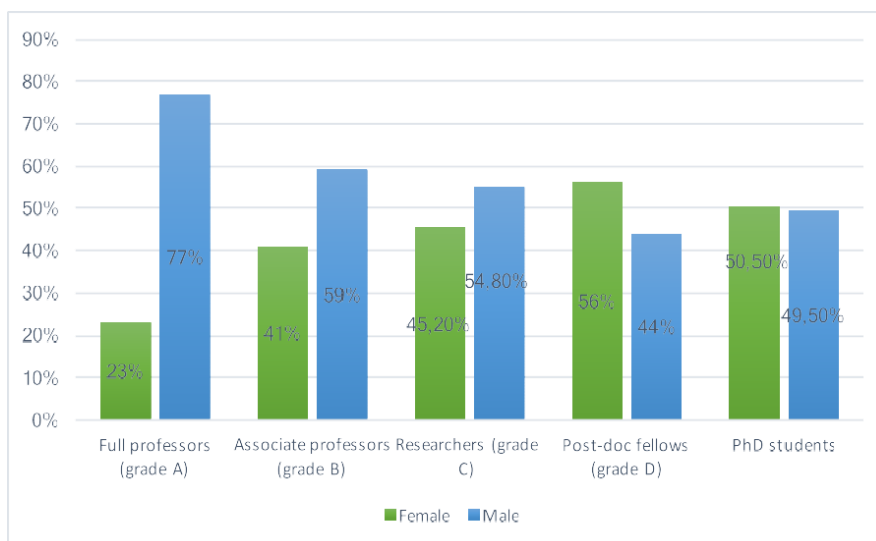
The data presented and analysed in this section were collected with the support of UNISA statistical office, in order to unveil the different layers of inequality among academic positions. The aim is to monitor gender asymmetry for the years covered by the R&I PEERS project (2018-2022). In this essay, the data of the years 2018 and 2019 are presented. The data relating to the remaining years (2020-2021-2022) will be evaluated in future studies. The data collected for 2018 provide an overall picture of the context in which the GEP was shaped.

Table 1: Percentages of professors/researchers per gender, year 2018



The analysis of statistical data discloses a picture that is not different from the national one (MIUR 2016, 2019 & 2020). Women represent, both in 2018 and in 2019, the majority of PhD students (50,3% in 2018 and 50,5% in 2019) and of post-doc fellows (55% in 2018 and 56% in 2019). However, the curve reverses and the gap widens when senior positions are under the magnifying glass. Women are poorly represented in the category of Full Professors. Both in 2018 and in 2019 they cover the 23% of grade A positions. The data confirm the trend in Italian universities highlighted by the MIUR statistical office (in Italian university women are the 23% of full professors in 2017 and the 23,7% in 2018, MIUR 2019 & 2020). The number of Associate Professors at UNISA increased in 2019, with 41% against the 38,6% of the previous year (table 2), a percentage that is higher than the Italian average (in Italian universities women cover the 37,5% of associate professors' positions, MIUR 2019).

Table 2: Percentages of professors/researchers per gender, year 2019



In order to overcome these disparities in the numbers that predominate in senior positions, the first step of the GEP design involved the use of interviews and focus groups to explore challenges and possible solutions to issues regarding the promotion for women in academia. The aim was to come up with practical solutions and identify the strategies for a proposed GEP structure. The first stage of this process implied interviewing professors, researchers, post-doc fellows and administrative personnel belonging to two institutional bodies: The Interdepartmental Centre for Gender Studies and Equal Opportunities (OGEPO) and The Guarantee Committee for Equal Opportunities, Well-being in the workplace and Non-discrimination (CUG). The intention was to identify a set of strategies to be merged into the GEP, considering the actual needs of the participants. The aims of those interviews were twofold: on one hand, they were meant to collect data about the different perspectives on gender equality within the academic context, on the other, they were conducted to increase the number of adhesions to the R&I PEERS project.

In total 111 interviews were conducted: 85 professors and researchers and 14 administrative employees belonging to the OGEPO; 4 professors and 6 administrative personnel belonging to the CUG. The participants' inputs about what measures to implement to foster gender equality, were grouped into six main topics:

Table 3: The inputs emerged from the interviews

Perception of gender disparities within the institution
Women in decision-making bodies
Women and career advancements
Gender perspective in research and curricula
Gender sensitive language
Services helping to balance professional work and private life

The second stage of this process involved focus groups with the professors, researchers and the technical-administrative personnel of those Departments belonging to the OGEPO (twelve Departments were involved). They were organised and guided by the then Rector's Delegate for Equal Opportunities to promote discussion and elaborate and contextualise the overall topics and questions that were considered during the interviews. The size of the focus groups varied from two to five participants and they were undertaken at the two UNISA campuses. Each group had a moderator assigned to lead the discussion. He/she provided an introduction before presenting some contextual background. Timeframes for focus groups ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. They saw the participation of the R&I PEERS project coordinator and supporting partners who shared knowledge, opinions and experiences. The focus groups became an opportunity to start a collaborative relationship aimed at creating a GEP that addressed the participants' actual needs.

The interviews and the focus groups delineated those barriers and challenges the R&I PEERS project would have to face to implement the GEP. They emphasised, in particular, the importance to overcome those cultural constraints that affect gender identities, gender relations and gender roles. Italy has long been a country where cultural and religious factors have had a great impact on women's autonomy and opportunities. The limited participation of women has been particularly evident in Southern Italy – where UNISA is located – where cultural norms, a family-oriented environment and care duties have affected and reduced women's participation in the labour market for a long time. Similarly, the results derived from the focus groups and the interviews shed a light on the practical actions necessary to overcome those conscious and unconscious barriers that limit the full participation of women in academic context.

Before discussing how the actors' inputs were merged into the GEP strategies, it is appropriate to point out that the design and implementation of the GEP should not be considered a stand-alone milestone. It should be placed in a wider context as it represents the outcome of a set of gender policies that UNISA has been implementing in the field of gender equality for the last 20 years. The progress carried out since the establishment of the first Equal Opportunities Committee and the increasing consensus towards gender issues among the academic community have paved the way for the GEP. The GEP of the University of Salerno marks the outcome of a gender policy that dates back to the last decade of the XX century, when a small group of women, two professors and a librarian, strongly wanted to put into practice the laws relating to equal opportunities.

3. The first steps towards raising gender-awareness at UNISA

The establishment of the first Equal Opportunities Committee dates back to September 1999. Originally, the group saw the participation of only the technical and administrative personnel, without the presence of professors, researchers and students, who would cooperate starting from 2014, with the establishment of The Guarantee Committee for Equal Opportunities, Well-being in the workplace and Non-discrimination (CUG), the University board that protects, enhances and promotes the dignity and rights of individuals in the context of work, study and research activities.

The first achievement of the original Committee remains a set of guidelines, elaborated in 2001 in which the Committee defined its role and objectives to promote the culture of equal opportunities within the university community. The main objective was identified with the implementation of positive actions to guarantee equal opportunities in the access to education, training and career progression. The first proposals aimed at the creation of a playroom or a nursery. However, the project remained under construction for almost nine years, until the recent establishment of the nursery, whose first application for enrolment was issued for the academic year 2010/2011. UNISA was the second Italian Athenaeum, after Parma, to host such a structure.

One of the core commitments the Committee worked for was the appointment of a Rector's Delegate for Equal Opportunities. The appointment took place in 2000. The Delegate started a sort of census through focus groups, of how many among her colleagues were sensitive to gender-related issues. The focus groups were mainly organised to lay the foundations of an interdisciplinary working group. The delegate inaugurated a prolific network with several professors interested in GE both in their teaching and research activities. Initially, she found support from the Humanities Departments and that original group worked to promote a network between UNISA and the territory with the aim to inspire a wider discussion on gender issues, through the organisation of seminars, workshops, public debates. The network aimed at encouraging a mutual learning and a better understanding of gender equality. The first results achieved consolidated the bond the University established with the Regional Bureau of Equal Opportunities and the Court of Salerno with whom UNISA established the inter-institutional agreement to prevent and combat violence against children and women. Furthermore, the events organised to promote a greater gender awareness began to receive larger consensus from professors and researchers of scientific fields. As the number of academics concerned about gender topics increased, the appointment of an Equal Opportunities Commission became indispensable. It came to life in 2006 and eventually officialised the commitment that original group of women, two professors and a librarian, had defended and spread since the late 1990s.

Since the year of its establishment, the Commission has identified as its main objective the promotion of a culture against all forms of discrimination supporting, year after year, a program of positive actions: participation in national congresses, organisation of seminars, workshops, exhibitions and events about gender-related issues. The original network the Delegate had set up with the support of the Humanities Departments slowly extended, gathering the consent of numerous other professors, researchers and administrative employees. This growing network led to the establishment, in 2011, of the Interdepartmental Centre for Gender Studies and Equal Opportunities (OGEPO), the first official research group on gender equality founded at UNISA. The Centre now includes 12 out of 17 departments and merges different disciplines, both humanistic-social, and technical-scientific. The OGEPO aims at promoting the gender dimension in research and curricula and at increasing gender awareness within and outside the academic community, through an active cooperation between human sciences and technical-scientific knowledge. The positive actions implemented so far, from the OGEPO's foundation up to the present, have influenced and fortified the network on the territory. The cooperative dimension is one of the OGEPO's major points of strength. The Interdepartmental Centre collaborates with several regional and national bodies in the field of gender equality, from the Regional Councillor for Gender Equality to local associations assisting victims of violence, from activists and volunteers of anti-violence centres to actors and performers engaged in social campaigns against gender-based violence. The Centre has been also increasing the partnership with the University of Naples "Federico II", with the University of Benevento and with the Confindustria Association, the Italian organisation representing manufacturing and service companies. The major objective is disseminating and encouraging the dialogue and interaction among University, industry and society.

The expansion of the network has certainly favoured UNISA's participation in the Horizon 2020 R&I PEERS project "pilot experiences for improving gender equality in research organisations". The seeds planted by the first

working group established at UNISA have borne fruit, sanctioning the creation of a Consortium of ten EU and non-EU organisations that are now involved in the R&I PEERS project. Such a great achievement is the demonstration that the foundation and consequent expansion of a network with partners sharing the same common goal, is fundamental for the affirmation of ideas. Ideas need minds to carry them forward.

4. The Gender Equality Plan of the University of Salerno

Recommendations from EU reports over the past two decades, from the ETAN report (2001) to the “Mapping the Maze: Getting More Women to the Top in Research” (2008), from the 2011 report on “Enhancing excellence, gender equality and efficiency in research and innovation” to the “Interim Evaluation: Gender equality as a crosscutting issue in Horizon 2020” (2017), have stressed the need to overcome those barriers that restrain women researchers’ careers in universities and research organisations. Undeniably, universities play a vital role in addressing gender equality gaps. The European Research Area (ERA) emphasises the importance of gender equality in research, with the three goals of gender balance in research projects, in decision-making and the integration of gender dimension in research and innovation content. These goals are supported by article 16 of the *Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program* which is completely devoted to gender equality. One of the main objectives covered by the *Horizon 2020 Science with and for Society* work program is supporting universities and research organisations into engaging in structural changes through the implementation of tailored Gender Equality Plans (GEPs).

A GEP is a strategic and tailor-made tool that defines the legal, organisational, economic and social framework and the operating conditions to implement gender mainstreaming in organisations. It aims at ending those obstacles, both visible and invisible, which make it hard for women to reach senior positions, and at promoting concrete measures that encourage female careers. GEPs are part of the European strategies to enhance gender equality in academic contexts, where horizontal and vertical segregation is limiting the full participation of women both in research and in leadership positions.

At the heart of the Horizon 2020 R&I PEERS project, GA 788171, (*Call: Science with and for Society, H2020-SwafS-2017-1*) lies the implementation and the consequent improvement of 7 GEPs in R&I related organisations of the Mediterranean area. UNISA’s GEP is the first of the 7 GEPs developed in the framework of the R&I PEERS project. The other 6 GEP’s implementing organisations are: Cyprus Neuroscience and Technology Institute (Cyprus), Centro de Investigación Cooperativa en Nanociencias (Spain), MIGAL Galilee Research Institute LTD (Israel), ZRC SAZU Institute of Culture and Memory Studies (Slovenia), National Agency for Scientific Research Promotion (Tunisia) and General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (Greece). The 7 research organisations are assisted by three supporting partners: National Research Council-CNR (Italy), Confindustria Salerno (Italy), Digital Leadership Institute (Belgium).

The 7 GEPs developed within the R&I PEERS project aim at addressing the common challenges still present in research institutions in achieving gender equality, specifically the enduring obstacles, the unconscious bias and limitations to the recruitment, advancement and mobility of women, above all in the STEM area, where women receive fewer opportunities, as students, as researchers and as leaders. Moreover, the R&I PEERS GEPs address the issue of the scant presence of women in top-management positions and the limited integration of the gender dimension in research programmes, which obstructs research excellence as well as the full potential for innovation. This waste of talents will negatively affect the European and global economies.

UNISA GEP was shaped in response to the main critical issues identified by the participants during the interviews and the focus groups. In developing the plan of interventions, the working group consulted the GEAR tool proposed by the EIGE and the GARCIA Toolkit for Integrating Gender-Sensitive Approach into Research and Teaching. The overall structure of the GEP was eventually discussed and elaborated with the other six Research Performing and Research Funding Organisations of the R&I PEERS project.

The following table displays the five areas of intervention addressed in UNISA GEP, all equally important for achieving gender equality within the academic environment.

Table 4: The GEP Key Areas

Key area 1: Gender perspective in research and curricula	Key area 2: Work-life balance	Key area 3: Improving the use of gender neutral language in UNISA's documents	Key area 4: Raising awareness of gender equality	Key area 5: Reducing gender gap in decision-making bodies
7 actions	6 actions	2 actions	5 actions	3 actions

The GEP is structured around 23 positive actions, with the aim of improving the participation of women both in research and in leadership positions. From promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research content and curricula, one of the six ERA priorities, to the correct use of gender-neutral language in the organisation's documents, the GEP aims at awareness-raising among the entire academic community to uncover those (un)conscious bias that limit the participation of female scientists in research and in decision-making bodies. The 23 strategies the University aims at implementing mirror the actual needs arisen from the analysis of data collection following the interviews and focus groups.

The approval phase involved different bodies of the University. The GEP was first approved by the OGEPO (Interdepartmental Centre for Gender Studies and Equal Opportunities) and the CUG (Guarantee Committee for Equal Opportunities, Well-being in the workplace and Non-discrimination). It was further presented to the Board of Directors and the Academic Senate. The two bodies approved the GEP in March 2019. After the GEP official approval the workforce was established and divided into separate teams. Each team works at a specific task and has chosen a person in charge who, every three months, must relate to the supervisor of UNISA GEP the progress of the activities and if there are any results achieved. Despite the emergency due to Covid-19 led to a rescheduling of the original plans, the organisations of events and other actions moved to the virtual space. Virtual events, such as seminars and workshops, registered a great increase in attendees, following an intense dissemination campaign that involved students' associations, social pages (Facebook and Twitter) and the distribution of flyers, both printed and virtual. Among the activities carried out, attention should be given to the establishment of UNISA's first Master on Gender Equality, Female Leadership and Diversity Opportunity. The Master passed the evaluation phase and will officially start next academic year (November 2021). A fundraising campaign will accompany the launch of the Master, to support deserving students who wish to attend the Master. This is thought as an alternative solution to sustain students and overcome those financial barriers that the pandemic has inevitably amplified. The fundraising campaign will be addressed to external stakeholders such as enterprises, municipalities, private and public companies that will cover the Master fees through the recognition of one or more scholarships.

The pandemic affected mostly those strategies that comprised the construction of new infrastructures (nurseries, baby-points and playgrounds). One nursery was completed in spring 2019 designed to welcome mothers who are students, researchers and employees of the University. Similarly, pink parking spaces were inaugurated around the two campuses, as part of those policies aimed at promoting the well-being in the workplace. The remaining construction works will be resumed next academic year. Likewise, those activities that require a physical presence have been temporarily suspended, such as the organisation of summer camps for the employees' children. The table below displays the main strategies implemented so far and those in progress.

Table 5: The GEP strategies implemented so far and those in progress

⇒ Gender perspective in research and curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshops for students, PhD students and researchers with national and international experts about the inclusion of a gender perspective in research projects and in curricula - Activation of Master and Postgraduate courses on GE and diversity management - Promotion of courses on gender equality as free choice courses among students of all disciplines. - Fundraising activities for financing grants for research projects and post-doc projects that include a gender dimension; financing awards for MA thesis developed with a gender perspective. - Guidance session for high-school students to promote GE and studies and job opportunities within the STEM field 	⇒ Work-life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of ad hoc rooms/ nurseries, as dedicated spaces for breastfeeding, milk pumping, diaper changing. Identification of spaces within the bathrooms for installing baby-changing stations. - Identification of flexible working methods more congenial to the conciliation of time: such as smart-working and teleworking - Pink parking spaces around the two campuses
⇒ Raising awareness of gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of the R&I PEERS website on UNISA's official site, OGEPO's website and social pages - Improvement of Gender Budgeting - Involvement of students and PhD students' associations in the main strategic actions of the project aimed at building gender awareness - Strengthening educational and training initiatives on the elimination of gender-based violence 	⇒ Reducing gender gap in decision making bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of annual statistical indicators of the career paths of female and male researchers at the beginning of their careers

5. Concluding remarks

The paper highlights the first steps of a gender policy implemented at the University of Salerno since the late 1990s, a policy that has brought to the design of its first Gender Equality Plan. Starting from the very first commitments of the University towards gender-related issues, the paper presents the steps that have gradually

brought to the GEP implementation, in the framework of the European project R&I PEERS. The actual needs of the academic community emerged from focus groups and interviews were taken into consideration during the design of the GEP. The aim of running interviews and focus groups was to trigger responses to research questions regarding perceived barriers to obtaining senior academic positions.

The 5 Key Areas of the GEP exemplify the main critical issues acknowledged by the participants during the interviews and the focus groups. In this way, the GEP is structured as a document that mirrors the research staff's real necessities. In order to ensure the GEP sustainability after the project lifetime, the design phase emphasised the urgency to consider the points of view of the actors involved, their perception of gender imbalance and, also, the cultural environment that affects gender roles and gender relations.

UNISA GEP is currently undergoing the monitoring phase. Several strategies are in progress while other ones are about to start. The great challenge will be promoting the strategies sustainability beyond the project duration, ensuring that the actions implemented will be embedded in the normal routines and policies of the University and will not be limited to the R&I PEERS project timeframe.

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