

**THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION TURN IN INTEGRATION
RESEARCH**

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights how the study of public administration is brought back into the study of European integration and European Union (EU) governance. The public administration turn in integration research has brought generic insights into the broader field of public administration. The purpose of this overview is less to provide a complete picture of the public administration turn in integration research, but rather to reveal the varied and rich research agendas, and to stimulate further research. This public administration turn highlights (i) the impact of the formal organisation of core-executive institutions such as the European Commission; (ii) the conditional autonomy of sub-ordinate administrative units such as EU-level agencies; (iii) the integration of multilevel administrative systems through collegial structures such as EU-level committees; and (iv) the external penetration and differentiated impact of EU-level institutions on domestic public administration. The lack of systematic knowledge about the impact of administrative structures within EU-level and domestic public administration is thus steadily reduced.

INTRODUCTION

The study of international organisations and public administration have largely become separate scholarly realms (e.g. Cox and Jacobson 1973; Kettl 2000; Maor and Lane 1999; Simmons and Martin 2003). Since the classic administration school of Luther Gulick (1937) up to recent literature on public administration (Olsen 2006), scholars have largely dealt separately with domestic public administration and international executive institutions (IEIs) (e.g. Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993; Nugent 1997; Reinalda and Verbeek 2004; Rhodes, Binder and Rockman 2006). National and international administrative orders are often portrayed as two separate systems with rather few intersections (Jachtenfuchs 1997: 2). This article highlights how the study of public administration is brought back into the study of European integration and European Union (EU) governance. The purpose of this overview is less to provide a complete picture of the public administration turn in integration research, but rather to show the varied and rich research agendas currently under way, and to stimulate to further research. Moreover, there is a deliberate bias in this review article towards recent literature.

The 1990s saw a growing interest in public administration in integration research, for example by the burgeoning literature on IEIs generally (Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland 2005) and research on EU institutions and the Commission particularly (Keeler 2005: 571). In the field of public administration the 1990s also witnessed enhanced attention to European integration, as signified with the launching of the European Forum in the journal *Public Administration*. The public administration turn in integration research has brought generic insights into the broader field of public administration. This public administration turn highlights (i) the impact of the horizontal and vertical organisation of core-executive institutions such as the Commission; (ii) the conditional autonomy of sub-ordinate administrative units such as EU-level agencies; (iii) the integration of multilevel administrative systems through collegial

structures such as EU-level committees; and (iv) the external penetration and differentiated impact of EU-level institutions on domestic public administration as well as the filtering effect of domestic institutions, administrative cultures, traditions and histories on this “EU effect”. Thus, the lack of systematic knowledge on the impact of administrative structures within domestic and EU-level public administration (Olsen 2006) has been steadily reduced. More generally, the multilevel institutional embeddedness of public administration in Europe is highlighted. However, the future ambition of integration research should be to become a net exporter of theoretical concepts and empirical insights into the generic field of public administration.

This stock-taking exercise covers the following substantive fields: Section I introduces studies of the Community core-executive – the European Commission (Commission). Section II explores the parallel administration of the Community – EU committee governance. Section III discusses the emerging administrative spaces represented by EU-level agencies. Finally, section IV offers a brief overview of the literature on Europeanisation of domestic public administration.

I. THE COMMUNITY CORE-EXECUTIVE: THE COMMISSION

The Commission represents one of the most mature and powerful IEs world-wide (Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland 2005). The Commission occupies a pivotal role as the core-executive EU institution with key initiating powers and it runs the everyday administration of the Union. The idea of establishing an autonomous community executive was codified in Article 157 in the Treaty of Rome and subsequently integrated into the Staff Regulations. Yet, beyond single-case studies there is a surprising dearth of theoretically informed empirical studies of the dynamics of the Commission (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Gehring 2003;

Gould and Kelman, 1970; Johnston 2003; Rochester 1986). The autonomy of the Commission remains largely unexplored, contributing to contradictory assessments of it (Kassim 2004). The Commission is seen as rifted between member-state dominance (Hooghe 2005; Kassim and Menon 2004; McDonald 1997; Michelmann 1978), concern for the collective European good (Haas 1958), Directorate-General (DG) supremacy and portfolio concerns (Cini 1997; Egeberg 1996), as well as professional independence (Haas 1992). Academics, politicians and Commission officials seem to have different views of what the Commission is and what it should be (Durand 2006).

Commission dynamics more broadly, and Commission autonomy particularly, has been measured differently in the literature. Suggested yardsticks include (i) organisational traits of the administrative services that transcend the territorial principle of organisation (e.g. Egeberg 2006), (ii) the recruitment of permanent Commission Administrators outside member-state influence (e.g. Egeberg 2006), (iii) the socialisation of Commission officials towards supranational loyalties (e.g. Hooghe 2005; McDonald 1997), and (iv) role dynamics among member-state officials attending Commission expert committees (e.g. Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2003). For example, studies of the recruitment of Commission officials (Egeberg 2006) and studies of the behavioural dynamics within the College of Commissioners (Egeberg 2006; Smith 2003) picture the Commission as guided by portfolio concerns together with collective concerns and responsibilities largely outside member-state influence. Moreover, studies of political attitudes among top Commission officials view these attitudes as mainly based on nation-state (socialisation) processes, thus severely challenging Commission autonomy (Hooghe 2005). Finally, a vast literature pictures the Commission as increasingly integrated, fused and meshed with national government systems through committees, networks and agencies. Network models of the Commission view this European core-

executive as the central hub in an emerging multilevel administration that spans levels of governance. Network models also tend to view the Commission as lacking autonomy by being integrated into webs of external institutions, actors and processes (e.g. Hofmann and Turk 2006: 583).

Because decision-making processes in the Commission are shown to be strongly biased by the horizontal organisational structures of the Commission, poor co-ordination often happens between the different DGs (Stevens and Stevens 2000). The Commission is horizontally organised into 24 DGs and several hundred units that compete for influence and resources. Different DGs have developed idiosyncratic sub-cultures, *esprit de corps*' and institutionalised perceptions of appropriate problems, solutions and expertise (Bellier 2000; McDonald 1997; Shore 2000). A core claim of Hooghe (2005) is that socialisation of Commission officials mainly occur at the national level and less within the Commission. By contrast, Shore (2000) shows clear evidence of socialisation processes among Commission officials inside the Commission apparatus. According to Shore (2000: 131), there are evidence of "a strong sense of community and *esprit de corps* among staff – even among new recruits". Hence, current research disagrees on the transformative clout of the Commission to redirect behaviour and re-socialise Commission staff.

Whereas previous studies primarily studied permanent Commission full-timers (top and medium rank officials as well as Commissioners), Trondal (2006a) unpacks one under-researched laboratory within the Commission: Seconded national experts (SNEs). SNEs may serve as a critical case of Commission autonomy. SNEs are recruited to the Commission on short term contracts (maximum four years), they remain paid by their home government, and the majority foresee a return to past positions in domestic ministries or agencies when their

temporary contracts come to an end (CLEENAD 2003). Trondal (2006a) demonstrates that SNEs evoke a triangular behavioural pattern that is dominated by portfolio, epistemic and supranational dynamics. The suspicion early voiced by Coombes (1970) that SNEs are highly conscious of their national background is thus challenged (see also Hooghe 2001: 115). A long lived assumption in the literature has been that the “secondment system would tend to produce an unmanageable cacophony” of officials loyal to the national civil service (Cox 1969: 208). For example, the Spierenburg Report (§ 110) argued that, “...[t]he Commission should ensure that the use made of national experts does not rise significantly above its present level, or again the risk is run of distorting the European character of the administration”. The fact that SNEs are more supranationally than intergovernmentally oriented should be seen as a *crucial test* of the power of the Commission to transform and redirect the behaviour of its civil servants. Trondal (2006a) also shows that SNEs evoke decision-making behaviour similar to that of the College of Commissioners and permanent Commission officials (Egeberg 1996 and 2006). The College of Commissioners, hired on temporary posts to the Commission, strongly emphasise portfolio concerns by underscoring the importance of their own DG (Egeberg 2006). This observation highlights the astonishing primacy of departmental (or portfolio) dynamics both at the apex of the Commission (among the College of Commissioners) as well as at the substructure of the Commission (among SNEs). The portfolio dynamic therefore seems paramount within the Commission.

However, Commissioners tend to evoke stronger supranational and intergovernmental behaviour than SNEs, due to their organisational position at the top of the Commission and due to their background from national politics (Egeberg 2006). Finally, recent research indicate that permanent Commission officials tend to evoke a stronger supranational behaviour compared to SNEs, reflecting the effect of socialisation of permanent officials

within the Commission over time as well as the recruitment of permanent officials by merit into permanent posts in the Commission services (Shore 2000 131; Wodak 2004: 107).

II. THE PARALLEL COMMUNITY ADMINISTRATION: EU COMMITTEE GOVERNANCE

What role do national civil servants play in EU executive governance? Research on EU-level committees aims at understanding how domestic public administration and EU executive governance is gradually and increasingly intermeshed, interconnected and interlinked. The European Commission integrates national civil servants into a parallel community administration that is largely organised at the frontier of the Commission.

Faced with an increasing agenda overload, one strategy available to the Commission is to import a large number of external specialists and experts in preparing initiatives and drafting new legislation. Decision-making within EU committees is about initiating and drafting optimal and effective policy proposals and aggregating interests towards stable equilibrium, creating preferences, meaning, identities and roles, and transforming these into integrated regulative, cognitive, normative and symbolic arrangements (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; March and Olsen 1994). Committees are ‘generic features of modern political life’, important venues for regulative decision making in the EU and important arenas where national and supranational decision-makers meet, interact, persuade, argue, bargain, adapt, learn and re-socialise (Christiansen and Kirchner 2000). Hence, decision-making within EU committees also pertains to the less acknowledged aspects of actor socialisation and re-socialisation, identity change and role-play (Checkel 2005). The identities and roles activated by national civil servants when they attend EU committees are moulded through processes of matching

perceptions of appropriateness to particular situations and through systematic and routinised allocation of scarce attention.

Only recently have scholars begun investigating systematically *the many faces* of EU committee governance (Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2003). For example, Beyers and Trondal (2004) compare Belgian and Swedish civil servants who attend the Council working groups and demonstrate how *diverse domestic institutional constellations* accompany different degrees of supranational orientation among these officials. The Beyers and Trondal study reveals that Belgian officials are more supranationally oriented than Swedish officials because of, 1) the vertically and horizontally (sector) specialized Belgian government apparatus, 2) the federal state structure, 3) the large number of competing veto-points in the Belgian polity, 4) the great number of actors involved in domestic coordination that challenge the role of the Belgian Foreign Ministry, and 5) the lack of trust in the Belgian federal government paralleled with a high degree of trust in the EU. The Belgian federal system is more ambiguous and garbage can-like than the Swedish state, accompanying stronger supranational orientations among Belgian officials than among Swedish civil servants.

Recent research confirms that EU committees are sites of vertical and horizontal fusion of administrative systems and policy instruments (Maurer and Larsson 2002). Trondal (2006b) demonstrates that EU committees serve as a vital component of a parallel community administration that cross-cut existing administrative borders of the member-states and the EU. The attention, energy, contacts, co-ordination behaviour and loyalties of national civil servants are to a considerable extent directed towards the Brussels committee system. The decision-making and agenda-setting processes within national governments are increasingly integrated into the EU agenda setting phase (Larsson and Trondal 2006). However, Trondal

(2006b) also shows that the re-socialising and transformative powers of the EU committees are heavily filtered and biased by the national institutions embedding the EU committee participants. Last, but not least, Trondal (2006b) reveals that the institutional autonomy of this parallel community administration is stronger within the Commission than within the Council and the comitology setting. Hence, the picture of one unified parallel community administration has to be sacrificed for the model of a multifaceted community administration that balances multiple partly overlapping dynamics.

Research also shows that national civil servants on meetings in EU committees develop allegiances towards the EU committees more extensively than towards the EU as a whole (Lewis 2005; Verdun 2000: 140). We thus witness the emergence of several small supranational ‘clubs’ within and around the EU committees – particularly in COREPER and the approximately 250 Council working groups (Fouilleux et al. 2002: 66). Somewhat contra-intuitively, supranational dynamics are revealed to be stronger in the Council working groups than in the agenda setting Commission expert groups (Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2003). This observation was also made by Haas (1958). He claimed that, “the Council pattern of compromise is far more federal in nature than would be indicated by the customary practices of intergovernmental conferences” (Haas 1958: 524). Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal (2003) also demonstrate that deliberative dynamics are not omnipotent within the comitology committees as asserted by Joerges and Neyer (1997), but that the Commission expert committees have stronger deliberative *modus operandi*. They thus (2003) seriously challenge sweeping generalisations of administrative fusion and bureaucratic *engrenage* (Wessels 1998) by demonstrating the different decision-making dynamics within Commission expert committees, Council working groups and the comitology committees.

III. TOWARDS EUROPEAN ADMINISTRATIVE SPACES? EU-LEVEL AGENCIES

There is a dearth of research on EU-level agencies in the EU governance literature. Studies of EU-level agencies is foremost centred on analysing agency establishment and reform (e.g. Geradin and Petit 2004; Kelemen 2002; Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2003). At present, only some few studies offer primary data on the actual decision-making dynamics unfolding within EU-level agencies. However, the agency fever in the EU attracts increased scholarly attention (e.g. Egeberg 2006). Diagnosis of the transformation of executive governance in Europe must embrace the diverse dynamics of EU-level agencies. The vast majority of the agency literature is centred on domestic agencies in general and US federal agencies in particular (e.g. Christensen and Lægreid 2006; Pollitt et al. 2004; Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2003). Empirical studies of domestic agencies observe unintended consequences of establishing agencies (Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2003), reduced political control (Christensen and Lægreid 2006), increased agency autonomy vis-à-vis the Parliament and partisan politics (Shapiro 1997), and vis-à-vis the ministry level (Döhler 2003).

EU-level agencies are depicted with multiple faces in research and in official documentation. Whereas the White Paper on Governance (2001) pleads for stronger Commission control on EU-level agencies, a recent Commission White Paper on EU regulatory agencies (2005) pleads for increased agency autonomy. Egeberg (2006), however, pictures EU-level agencies as the hub in an emerging multilevel union administration that is characterised by administrative integration between domestic agencies, EU-level agencies and Commission DGs. The study of EU-level agencies made a quantum leap after the Special Issue of *Journal of European Public Policy* on EU-level agencies in 1997 (Vol. 4, No. 2). A burgeoning literature portrays EU-level agencies by different images, notably as network administrations, as Community institutions, and as multilevel administrative spaces.

Firstly, EU-level agencies should be seen as multilevel network administrations that contribute to a subsequent Europeanisation of domestic agencies (Dehousse 1997; Eberlein and Grande 2005; Egeberg 2006). For example, there are strong indications of autonomisation of networking agencies in the case of the Italian antitrust agency (Barberi 2006). The linking up of national agencies to the Commission in unitary states like Sweden (Statskontoret 1997:21) and Denmark (Egeberg 2006) is indicative of multilevel networks of administrative governance where EU-level agencies serve as the central node. For example, Martens (2006) shows that national environmental agencies increasingly work directly towards the Commission. Martens (2006) also shows that national agency officials who participate in multilevel networks tend to have large amounts of behavioural discretion at their disposal. Similarly, the Swedish Environmental Agency has intimate contacts with the European Environment Agency (EEA) (Statskontoret 1997:21: 44). Most of these contacts are poorly formalised inside the Swedish administration (Statskontoret 1997:21). The intimate participation of Swedish agencies towards the EU-level agencies is partly coerced and partly optional, accompanying perceptions among Swedish agencies of administrative competition from the various EU-level agencies (Statskontoret 1997:21: 50). Increasingly, the multilevel networking of EU-level agencies is formalised and contractualised, thus institutionalising these networks as multilevel administrative spaces.

Secondly, EU-level agencies serve as Community institutions by being integral components of the larger EU apparatus. "...The Commission has played a key role in [the] establishment [of EU-level agencies], and has often seemed reluctant to see its children grow up and become truly independent" (Jacobs 2005: 7). The following example is illustrative: "In the case of the Environment Agency [EEA], ... the Commission expressed reservations regarding 18 of the

93 project proposals in the agency's first multi-annual work programme. These projects were subsequently excluded" (Groenleer 2006: 15). More generally, a supranational behavioural dynamic is observed among EU-level agency officials, both in EU-level regulatory and non-regulatory agencies (Trondal and Jeppesen 2006). Hence, EU-level agencies are pictured as integral components of the EU institutional apparatus.

Finally, EU-level agencies could be seen as a vital component of emerging administrative spaces in Europe (Trondal and Jeppesen 2006). The current debate, however, does not allow for simple definitions of this concept (e.g. Siedentopf and Speer 2003). Yet, to constitute an administrative space a certain amount of agency autonomy is required. EU-level agencies may take on a life of their own, substituting institutional unity with agency diversity. An illustration thereof was revealed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on 26 October 2005. EFSA took an official stand on whether consumers should eat raw eggs and under-cooked poultry meat in the case of bird flu that directly contradicted the official Commission policy. Whereas the Commission spokesman argued that these products were safe, EFSA warned consumers against eating these products (EUobserver 2005). Another indication of agency autonomy is confirmed in the European Environment Agency (EEA). DG Environment has worried that the information gathering role of the EEA would grow into information analysis and eventually policy evaluation, thus becoming a true competitor to the DG (Jacobs 2005). Hence, agency autonomy is indeed noticeable.

Brining these images of agency governance together, Trondal and Jeppesen (2006) explore the transformation of executive governance in Europe by unpacking two images of agency governance. They demonstrate that EU-level agencies indeed combine the roles as autonomous administrative spaces and multilevel network administrations. However, the most

important role played by EU-level agencies seems to be as multilevel network administrations. Trondal and Jeppesen (2006) also reveal that EU-level regulatory *and* non-regulatory agencies tend to blend both models of governance. However, the role as a multilevel network administrator seems more central to the non-regulatory agencies, whereas the role as an autonomous administrative space is more paramount among the regulatory agencies. Moreover, the multilevel networking of EU-level agencies seems fairly autonomous vis-à-vis the domestic central governments. These networks seem primarily to tie together domestic agencies, EU-level agencies and particular Commission DGs.

IV. THE EUROPEANISATION OF DOMESTIC PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

During the last decade, the transformation of executive governance in Europe has been studied as the Europeanisation of domestic government and governance. The 1990s witnessed a scholarly turn and a shift in the research agenda from studying EU institutions and politics towards analysing of how the EU “hits” the constituent units (the member-states) (Keeler 2005: 570). Contemporary studies under the heading ‘Europeanisation’ are basically concerned with how EU institutions and politics impact on the member-states’ institutions and policies (e.g. Bulmer and Lequesne 2005; Featherstone 2003: 6). Despite major conceptual disagreements and ambiguities (Featherstone 2003), the main research interest seems to be ‘how Europe hits home’, or the transformation of ‘the domestic institutions of the member-states’ (Börzel 1999: 574). This literature mainly concludes that we are not witnessing a fundamental change in the member-states’ administrative structures and styles, legal rules, cultures, and collective identities (Anderson 2002; Goetz 2000; Olsen 2002). Most studies suggest that adaptation towards Europe is considerably mediated through and conditioned by existing domestic institutions, practices, cultures and traditions, thus contributing to a differentiated Europeanisation of domestic public administration (e.g. Kassim, Peters and

Wright 2000; Siedentopf and Speer 2003). Similar conclusions are drawn in the study of the new member and candidate states (Sedelmeier 2006).

Beyers and Trondal (2004) suggests a middle-range approach to the study of Europeanisation by highlighting how domestic public administration ‘hit’ the EU. Nation-states ‘hit’ Europe in different ways and to different degrees depending on how they are formally organised. By studying domestic civil servants attending the Council working groups they illuminate that Belgian civil servants are more supranationally oriented than Swedish officials, mostly due to different domestic institutional constellations. To account for this conclusion, they suggest a model of ambiguous representation that highlights eight conditions under which civil servants are likely to “go supranational”. This model focuses on those *primary* institutions at the domestic level that mould the representational roles of government officials, bearing in mind that EU institutions poses *additional* cues for supranationalism. The Beyers and Trondal study (2004) supports the general insight that domestic public administration filters and mediates processes of European integration writ large. As governance levels increasingly interact, what happens at one level affects substantially what happens at other levels. Despite the complexity involved in processes of system integration and transformation of public administration in Europe, the converging and homogenising effects of EU institutions are filtered, edited and translated when faced with domestic public administration.

Studies of Europeanisation reveal that heads of government play a central role in the domestic EU business, that national parliaments occupy a weak but steadily stronger role in domestic EU governance, that turf-wars occur between foreign ministries and sector ministries, and that domestic subordinated agencies are fairly autonomous when handling EU affairs (Kassim 2005; Wessels, Maurer and Mittag 2003). The impact of the EU on domestic governments

may for example contribute to strengthen and centralise the state and the civil service (Byers and Bursens 2006; Page and Wright 2007), or to fragment the state and the civil service (Egeberg 2006). However, recent research also demonstrates forcefully the multiple roads that lead to the *differentiated* processes of Europeanisation of domestic public administration (Featherstone and Radaelli 2003). Notably, the institutionalist and social constructivist schools reveal how the “EU effect” is filtered and mediated through pre-existing domestic institutions, rules, norms and cultures (e.g. Bulmer and Burch 2005; Checkel 2005; Hèretier et al. 2001). Larsson and Trondal (2005), however, explore how differentiated Europeanisation of domestic public administration is caused by the differentiated formal organisation of the EU itself. Larsson and Trondal (2005) demonstrate that the Commission *mainly* strengthens the lower echelons of the domestic government hierarchies, notably professional experts within sector ministries and agencies. By contrast, the Council of Ministers seems mainly to strengthen domestic politico-administrative leadership, the Foreign Office and the Prime Ministers Office. Multilevel interaction of administrative systems between the Commission on the one hand and domestic public administrations on the other occur largely outside the control of the domestic politico-administrative leadership. However, this tendency is to some extent counterbalanced by the sectoral interlocking effect of the Council of Ministers (Larsson and Trondal 2005). Hence, whereas the Council of Ministers contributes to strengthen the state, the Commission mainly propels a fragmentation of domestic public administration.

Across the Commission-Council spectrum Ekengren (2002: 152-153) shows that “EU time” have fostered a weakening of domestic hierarchical governance. In the case of Sweden, EU membership has accompanied new administrative perceptions of time (Ekengren 2002). The Commission has added external, faster and more ambiguous rhythms and time schedules to the pre-existing domestic ones, challenging the potential for politico-administrative control over

domestic EU decision-making processes. In short, the entry of Commission timing in domestic government has led to an increased need for, but a lack of capacity for, inter-ministerial co-ordination (Ekengren 2002).

CONCLUSION

The public administration turn in integration research has brought generic insights into the broader field of public administration. This scholarly turn highlights the impact of the formal organisation of core-executive institutions, the conditional autonomy of sub-ordinate administrative units, the integration of multilevel administrative systems through collegial structures, and the external penetration and differentiated impact of EU-level institutions on domestic public administration as well as the filtering effect of domestic institutions, administrative cultures, traditions and histories. Moreover, the public administrative turn has brought added insights with respect to conditions for institutional change and persistence, the role of deliberate design, the prospects for the co-existence of multiple, overlapping, co-evolving and conflicting governance dynamics, the emergence of multilevel administrative systems that challenge existing patterns of democratic steering and accountability, the concurrent existence of administrative co-ordination and fragmentation, as well as actor-level identity and role transformation among government officials. Hence, the lack of systematic knowledge about the impact of administrative structures at the domestic and EU level has steadily been reduced.

Still, empirical puzzles remain to be solved. The first puzzle is the coming together of moderate institutional changes and fairly radical policy changes in public administration (Olsen 2003). The second puzzle concerns the co-existence of radical system changes at the EU-level and moderate system changes at the domestic level of public administration

(Wessels, Maurer and Mittag 2003: 439). The third puzzle has to do with whether fundamental system transformation occur within public administration in Europe towards an autonomous ‘administrative space’, or whether administrative reforms merely represent minor adjustments within existing politico-administrative orders (March and Olsen 2006: 14). Theoretically informed empirical studies should assess and account for puzzles of these kinds.

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