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Expanding the higher education experience: international summer schools in tourism

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ABSTRACT

Summer schools are a relatively recent form of higher education provision, especially in Italy. However, they shows interesting potentials both as integrative study to undergraduate, post-graduate and PhD students curricula as well as continuing education opportunities for professionals and for young researcher. Being short, intensive, focused and often located in heritage or tourist town or city, summer schools are often multipurpose and match education objectives with social and leisure ones. This paper, firstly, investigate the dimension of the phenomenon, providing elements on the historical evolution of the "summer school" concept in the world and suggesting a classification (FARP). Secondly, it provides an overview of the Summer School experiences carried out within the University of Bologna. Finally, the focus will be given to the experiences in the international summer schools in Geography of Tourism held at the Faculty of Economics in Rimini.

Keywords: Higher Education, Tourism, Geography, Summer School, Rimini

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1. Introduction

“International summer schools” (ISSs) are a relatively recent form of higher education provision, especially in Italy, and no significant scientific literature has been found in this regard. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to systematise the knowledge stemming out from practice and analogies, with a special attention to those ISSs specialised in the field of tourism.

In the Anglo-Saxon area, international summer school have a long tradition dating back to the early 19th Century. For instance, the University of Cambridge (UK) Summer Schools have been providing the opportunity for international students to study at the University of Cambridge on short courses since 1923¹. However, the first difficulty on analysing the phenomenon regards the definition itself. World wide, in Europe but also at Italian level, there is no clear definition of what a summer school in higher education should be², but this vary case by case, by university or by promoting institution.

² For the scope of the paper we exclude all the educational-recreational initiatives aimed at children or teenagers not yet in higher education, generally younger than seventeen year old. However, it has to be said that international summer programmes are relevant for the youngest; they might be language courses, sport courses, remedial or accelerated course, etc. and they are often located in “different as usual” locations, either in holiday one or just greener are in the city belts.

The analysis of a set of ISS programmes³ leads to the identification of some main characteristics. First of all, ISSs are run as short and intensive courses in summer time, i.e. generally from May to September, in the northern hemisphere, or from December to February in the Southern one. Moreover, these type of courses tend to be open to people of all ages and all nationalities and run by (or under the aegis of) a higher level institution (Universities, Colleges, Advanced Schools, Multilateral Education Institutions, etc.) or by umbrella sectoral or practitioners organisations.

ISS typologies can be characterised through the analysis of four dimensions: objectives, target people, funding sources and localisation.

As for objectives, intended here as the lead motivation to participate, these spans from: vocational, continuing education or professional development; remedial learning; accelerating learning; academic curriculum integration or diversification; research advancement; recreation and leisure and networking and intercultural experiences. Cooper *et al.* (2000) highlight that summer schools serve multiple purposes either for students, families and communities, confirming that ISS are complex educational programmes with formats that are very flexible.

According to educational objectives, however, four main typologies can be identified according to the level of difficulties/purpose: Foundation, Advanced, Research and Professional, that can summarised with “FARP classification”.

¹ This is stated in the booklet of the University of Cambridge dedicated to the 2008 International Summer Schools.

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³ This relates to a collection of about 40 programmes or courses around the world identified via Internet search. In addition to this a database of summer school courses in tourism has been created and it is composed of 20 entries.

These typologies are clearly related to the objectives participants and this relationship can be depicted with the following matrix (Table 1).

Table 1: Matrix of ISS FARP classification and motivation to participate

	Foundation	Advanced	Research	Professional
Professional development	*	**	*	***
Remedial learning	***	-	-	-
Accelerating learning	-	***	*	*
Curriculum integration	***	*	*	**
Curriculum diversification	***	*	*	**
Research advancement	-	**	***	**
Recreation and leisure	*	**	**	**
Networking	-	**	***	***
Intercultural experiences	*	**	**	**

Scale: "****" = very relevant relationship; "***" = relevant relationship; "**" =existing minor relationship; "-"

Furthermore, as other international programmes (i.e., Socrates, Tempus, Fulbright, etc.) the international dimension provides participants to have a short intensive cultural exchange opportunities, technical language knowledge improvement and longer term social/academic/professional networking.

The organisation and management of ISS programme vary significantly according to the institutions and funding sources. Each summer school courses can be organised autonomously or being part of a more complex and organised programme. The first is mainly the case for courses promoted by smaller organisations or with still early ISS projects. Financially, summer schools can be funded via participants fees, sponsorships or private (es: foundations, local, national or international organisation) or public aids granted via the university funds or via the participation to international projects⁴.

Participants to summer school, intended as target group of the programme, can be: high school students at their latest year as college entry preparation, including languages, and introductory basic subjects; undergraduate students; post graduate and PhD students; researchers; professionals; executives; retired and other type of people.

It is interesting to note that access to these course is generally open, but often the acceptance of applications is subjected to a selection process. This is generally done according to the quality and relevance to its *curriculum vitae* and a motivation letter. This is the case when grants to participate are available or a prior advance knowledge is requested.

In rare cases the acceptance is related to the place of living of the applicant. This choice is often linked to the objective and target of the ISS, but also to the country's migration policies. An example in this latter direction can be found in New Zealand universities. In this context summer schools are mainly conceived for students of local universities as form of remedial learning or academic curriculum integration as universities provides courses available during the year. Therefore, the access to the course is naturally foreseen for

⁴ For example, ISS can be a task included in national short education programme, LLL Programmes, International cooperation projects, in 7th RTD Framework Programme, Interreg, or other programme promoted within the UN system education and training system.

university students, even if not excluding non-university ones, but providing that they are resident in New Zealand, thus the internationality characters in these case is fairly weak.

The choice of the place of lectures is varying: lectures are either organised in the spaces of the organising or partner institution in their central location (i.e. the main university campus, the headquarter of the association) however, most often, these are located in satellite branches in more touristically attractive or remoter areas.

In a tourism perspective ISS can be classified as special interest and cultural tourism products, leading to a certain number of arrivals, overnight staying as well as expenditure in local economic activities (entertainment, food, etc.).

For the place hosting the event, summer schools are high positioned territorial marketing opportunities at international level. Moreover, in the case of summer schools in tourism subjects, these provides opportunities of collection of planning input to local authorities and entrepreneurs as students are often actively involved in project works, field visits, seminars and meetings in contact with the hosting territories.

2. The relevance of the Bologna Process end EU policies in the development of Summer Schools programmes

In order to analyse the broad policy context at European level, in which ISSs can be included, it seems to be relevant to cite the “Bologna Declaration on the European Space for Higher Education” that followed the so called Bologna Process. In particular, launched in 1999, this process aimed at creating an European Higher Education Area by 2010 and at developing a major reform process through 46 countries that is still currently on-going. The main objective of the Bologna Process is the promotion of an European system of higher education on a worldwide scale that attempts to answer some of Europe’s social and economic challenges, by enhancing the quality of its education, research capacity and graduate employability (European University Association, 2008). At the same time this process provides tools to connect national education systems with the recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, mobility and exchange between institutions.

Moreover, other policy are very relevant to most of the typologies of ISSs: the Lisbon Agenda for Growth and Jobs and Social Inclusion, the Copenhagen Process for enhanced European co-operation in Vocational Education and Training, the initiatives under the European Research Area and those policies promoting cooperation with acceding, neighbour and third party countries.

Thanks to their multipurposeness, ISSs, are tools that can apply in a large set of programmes and measures supported by the European Union both in the 27 member states as well as in non-EU countries. These includes the Erasmus Intensive Programmes (IP), the 7th RTD Framework Programme, Edulink, Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)⁵, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), the Tempus programme and the EU's programme for worldwide academic cooperation (Erasmus Mundus).

⁵ The Lifelong Learning Programme is at present on of the most active initiative of the European Commission fully dedicated to education. In particular, with a significant budget of nearly €7 billion for 2007 to 2013, it replacing previous education, vocational training and e-Learning programmes, which ended in 2006. The programme enables individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe, with four sub-programmes focusing on different stages of education and training involving schools (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), vocational education and training (Leonardo da Vinci) and adult education (Grundtvig) (EACEA, 2009).

Therefore, summer schools can be regarded as one of those additional tools for the modernisation and the organization of higher education systems as well as a tool to strengthen international cooperation. In fact, usually structured as intensive courses on different subjects, international summer schools are designed to broaden intercultural and interdisciplinary studies as well as a base to establish a longer term international social network.

It has to be said, however, that despite the potentiality to be included in these broad policy framework, ISSs in tourism seems still marginally touched by these programmes and, instead, the results of spontaneous initiatives led by some universities or other professional institutions.

3. The International Summer School Programme of the University of Bologna

After some scattered and not widely recognised experiences, the strong emphasis on internationalisation led the University of Bologna to develop an international summer school programmes, in order to increase or improve:

- The mobility of students, researchers and professors;
- The new and well based formal and informal agreements with international partners (also for future scientific and academic collaboration);
- The participation to EU Programmes (for instance: Erasmus Intensive Programme to support specific Summer Schools).

In 2004 the University of Bologna decided to create a complete and organized summer school programme aiming at centralizing the administrative service within the international relations department and gain national and international high visibility; at organizing new programmes as part of institutional courses and generate a sense of corporate identity; at promoting activities among students and professors with the help of specific communication tools, such as:

- Annual marketing campaign,
- A website: www.unibo.it/summerschool,
- A dedicated call for co-financing the start-up of new courses,
- A promotional gifts,
- A coordinated image logo and template.

The courses included in the Bologna ISS programme are addressed to undergraduates, postgraduates as well as to PhD and professionals from all over the world. Usually courses last from a minimum of five days to four weeks, and are rewarded with ECTS credits, that implies recognition of the activities in any EU Institution. This educational activity improves the exchange of intercultural and every-day experiences for a brief intense period in a residential setting. The 2009 programme⁶, in addition, has introduced some major changes: the division of two set of summer schools: the ones aiming at research advances and the ones to advanced intensive education. The latter managed directly by the Faculties. That is tackling the central Advanced and Research typologies, recalling the FARP classification introduced in the first paragraph of this paper.

⁶ This information is extracted from the 2008-2009 call for proposal for Summer School

The monitoring data provided by the DIRI - International Relations Department of the University of Bologna (DIRI, 2009) - shows the increasing interest on international basis of the academic value of summer schools (Table 2).

Table 2: Students in the International Summer Schools of the University of Bologna.

Year	Number of courses	Growth rate in number of courses	Students	Growth Rate In Students	International Students	Share Of International Students
2003	18	-	482	-	200	41%
2004	16	-11%	807	67%	200	25%
2005	32	100%	1.383	71%	800	58%
2006	49	53%	1.800	30%	800	44%
2007	50	2%	1.200	-33%	750	63%
2008	50	0%	1250	4%	750	60%

Source: elaboration on data by UNIBO-DIRI (2009)

The International Summer School programme currently involves a Summer School Office to support the organization of the courses and this office in part of the line of activities "Summer Schools" within the International Relations Department. Currently the summer school programme has the recognition both by the university governing bodies as academic programme and by the faculties of the summer courses projects that assigns the ECTS credits.

After a selection that follows a call for proposal addressed at full time faculty staff lecturers, researchers and professors, the University of Bologna ISS programme foresees, the assignment of financial aid for – at least the first three years of the course, pushing towards financial self-sustainability. This is a grant type, a co-financing contribution provided by the DIRI directly or via Faculties.

Furthermore the programme set some rules: the duration of the courses (from 1 to 4 weeks), residential setting, involvement of international professors, classes taught in English, final certificate with ECTS credits and organization in classrooms, labs but also cultural activities and field visit as part of the schedule (DIRI, 2009).

After a massive implementation of courses during the first years of ISS programme, when the number of new courses doubled, the University of Bologna is now facing a stabilisation. The number of courses has been confirmed from 2006 to 2008, but the number of students has considerably decreasing, on the contrary the ISS offer has a positive impact on international students, who represent the larger group of participants.

This stable and slightly declining trend is mostly due to specific point of weakness, where communication strategies and economic sustainability play a fundamental role. A single summer school should be self-financed after a start-up phase (e.g. 3 years), but in most cases the number of participants hardly cover organizational costs, with an impact on the assessment of tuition fees and the capacity of further invest in promotion and communication activities. Fund-raising activities are also not well established, thus private financial resources are not to be considered and let to the single summer school organisation to be organised by the proposing professors, leading to extra efforts, taken away to the focus on the content preparation, and organisational costs.

4. The summer school in Geography of Tourism

Reviewing the Summer school in the field of tourism provided around the world⁷, ones can realize that these are very limited and rarely they are included in the most famous summer schools programmes. The scouting done via internet led to the identification of 20 summer schools, of which 75% located in the European continent, and 25% in the Australian one. These summer schools, according to the FARP classification, in the tourism field identified are mainly Professional (40%) and Advanced studies (35%) followed by Foundation ones (20%). Only one can be regarded fully dedicated to research topics, despite some in category of advanced studies contains some elements of it.

The only summer school found in geography of tourism are those organised by the University of Bologna.

In the Rimini Campus, the first summer school in geography of tourism has been held in 2006 stemming out from both the researches held in that period by the economic geography group on GIS (Dallari and Grandi, 2005; Grandi, 2006) and thanks to the fact that the Faculty of Economics and the Polo acquired a set of 25 licences of ArcGIS. This summer school was named "*Spatial Decision Support Systems (SDSS) for Tourism Planning. Summer school in Geography of Tourism*" and it was organized with the collaboration of an external company specialized in GIS and environmental modelling: Gecosistema. This Summer School has been developed as a hands-on-training course aiming at providing to students with an operational knowledge of the tools to build spatial decision support systems (SDSS) for tourism planning using geographic information systems (GIS). The first edition was organized as a two-week course, but soon it was understood that it was too long period of vacation, especially for professionals. So as of 2007 the number of days where reduced to one week. In the latest edition it was also split in three modules the first dedicated to foundation elements on GIS and Spatial Decision Support System, the last one dedicated to the insight on tourism planning with the use of GIS and SDSS.

Following the researches held by the economic geography group and the work done within the UNESCO-UNITWIN network in "Culture, Tourism and Development", a second summer school was launched in order to provide an advances in territorial development (hereafter also only TD), focusing on the contribution of culture, in its broad term, and tourism. In 2008 the title was "*Territorial Development: culture, itineraries & creativity*" highlighting the focus on culture, itinerary and creativity in geography and tourism development, whilst in 2009 the title was "*Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development: Strategies to Develop Local & Regional Tourism*". The second edition of this ISS was dedicated to cultural tourism and challenges at local and regional scale. In this second ISS lectures are divided in class traditional ones, short 10-minutes "geo-tips" and lecture on the field, visiting locations, institutions and experiencing itineraries.

The number of students attending the ISS in geography of tourism held in Rimini (Table 3) has generally increased, however data are showing a certain obsolescence of the first ISS and the central role of the promotion activities. This latter point is crucial as it is mainly left to the local organisers taking away resources that should be focused more on content and educational objectives. Analysing the data stemming out of the Evaluation Feedback form provided by DIRI and distributed in 2009 in the TD ISS, only 44% of the students (i.e. 7) participated thanks to the "cold" marketing (casual internet search and search through the

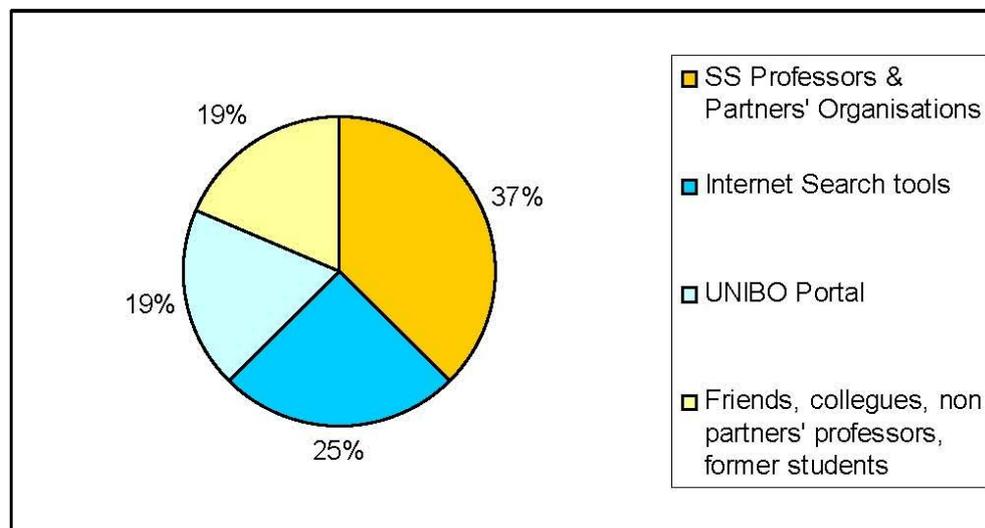
⁷ See footnote 3.

institutional unibo.it portal) whilst substantial to reach a sustainable number of participant was a “warm” communication strategy such as word of mouth, partnership and personal mailing (see Table 4).

Table 3 – Monitoring data of the ISS in Geography of Tourism in Rimini

Year	Name	Students	Growth Rate In Students	International Students	Share Of International Students
2005/2006	SDSS	6	-	0	0%
2006/2007	SDSS	8	33%	4	50%
2007/2008	SDSS	11	38%	5	45%
2008/2009	SDSS	4	-64%	1	25%
2005/2006	TD&CT	-	-	-	-
2006/2007	TD&CT	-	-	-	-
2007/2008	TD&CT	11	-	1	9%
2008/2009	TD&CT	16	45%	4	25%

Table 4 - ISS in Territorial Development 2009 edition: means of communication used to know about the Summer School



In the geography of tourism ISSs the age and learning phase is quite diverse and distributed quite normally across the main class of age and this creates a good mix in class spirit creation (Table 5 and Table 6 as far the ISS in TD is concerned). Topics and lectures are organised in a way that every level can have a satisfactory educational experience. For the 2009 ISS in TD this approach seems confirmed by the overall evaluation data collected (Table 7) showing a very high appreciation of the course.

Being tourism a central element of the summer school topics, study visits have a double role of being an educational experience as well as a leisure one. Moreover, some initiative of the Rimini territory has been promoted as significant case study and object of publication internationally, therefore these summer schools become a territorial marketing opportunity.

Table 5 – ISS in Territorial Development 2009 edition: age of participants at the (% according to class of age)

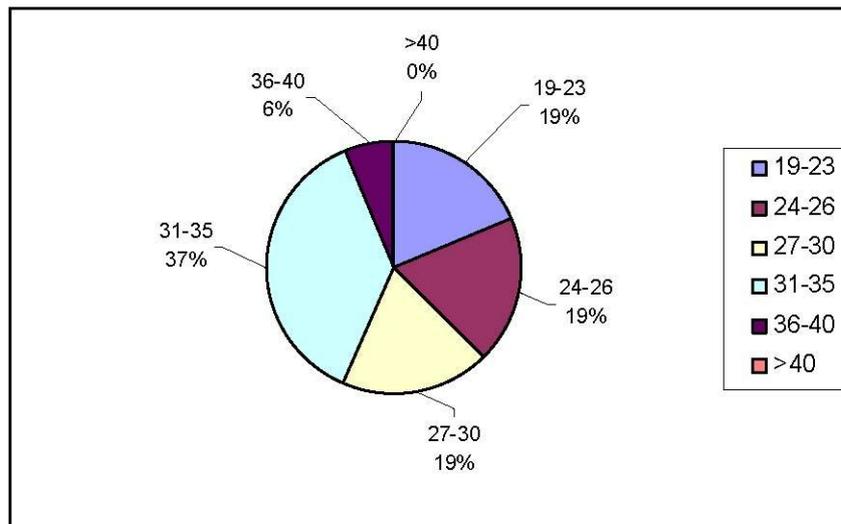


Table 6 – ISS in Territorial Development 2009 edition: Typologies of students (absolute numbers)

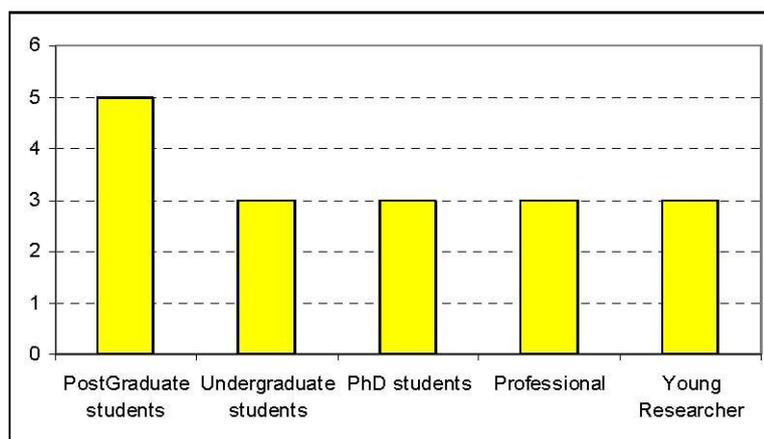
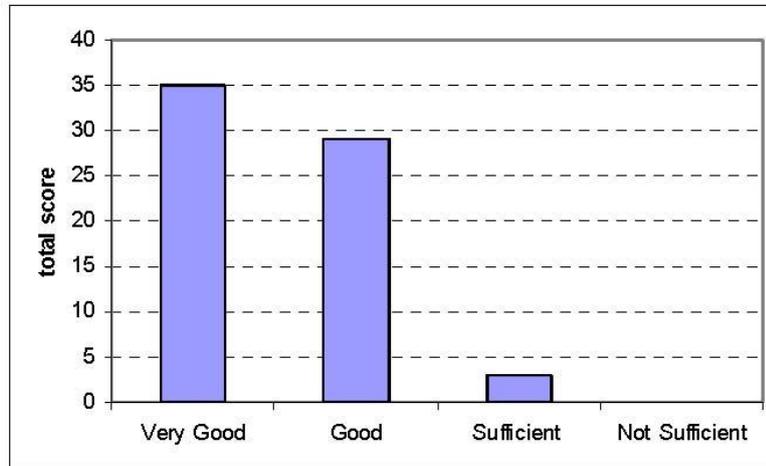


Table 7 – ISS in Territorial Development 2009 edition: overall satisfaction expressed



Finally, it is interesting to note that the main motivation leading most of the participants of the ISS in TD was always an “In-depth study of a specific subject”. Moreover 60% claimed that they were interested in participating to an international and multi-cultural experience; 12.5% into ECTS credits; 18.8% in collecting information for their thesis and 0.1% in visiting Italy.

No one chose to participate to one of the University of Bologna’s Summer Schools because of willing to attend a Study-holiday, to know better the University of Bologna in view of a future enrolment or to attend a course in the oldest university of the world.

5. Conclusions and further development

The investigation of the International Summer School (ISS) experiences provided an insight of this form of education and the proposal of a typology classification based on the level and objective of the courses called FARP Classification.

Furthermore, this research, despite the authors believe that it is to a level of a preliminary screening, showed that the provision of ISS is not largely diffuse in the field of tourism, even if there is a potential close connection between the educational experience, the territorial marketing and the leisure one.

Furthermore this research showed the uniqueness of the ISS in Geography of Tourism and a good path of learning in the development, practice and promotion of this form of intensive education.

This four-year experience have lead to identify the main following strengths: high satisfaction of participants; high involvement of international and local actors via partnership or involvement in field visits; good student – professor rate; easy to understand application procedures, the university facilities and the location.

However, weaknesses lies on the difficult to involve a significant number of international students due mainly to cost (scholarship are limited and do not cover travel costs) and still a low visibility of the Summer School programme of the University of Bologna as well as the ISS in geography of tourism. The main threats are the economic sustainability that is still

significantly linked to the co-financing contribution of DIRI, UNIRIMINI and in king contribution of the partners or some lecturers that are lecturing for free.

To conclude, the ISS experience Geography of Tourism is considered very satisfactory and an important integration in higher education. The growth path shows very comfortable results, therefore in 2010 the ISS programme in Geography of Tourism is planned to continue and to be held at the beginning of September as in the previous years. Organisational learning is growing therefore, most likely, to promote an higher networking opportunity and to reduce the organisation burden of promotion, tutoring and social events both schools will be organised in the same week.

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