## Effectiveness of Career Counseling in Primary Schools

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#### Abstract

In Slovenia, challenges in career counseling are particularly evident when primary school students decide on further education. The lack of systematic counseling can lead to subjective decisions that do not reflect the individual's interests and potential. Talent Center Slovenia, with its inclusive approach and scientific testing of individual characteristics, could significantly improve this situation. Slovenia can draw on foreign examples, such as the Talent Center Graz in Austria. Empirical findings highlight the need for comprehensive career counseling sought by young people. The survey showed that 77% of respondents had difficulties choosing a secondary school, and the same percentage would welcome the existence of a counseling institution for high school selection. Additionally, 1331 (84%) respondents expressed interest in testing that would provide them with information about the most suitable career based on their personality traits, talents, and abilities. The research sample consisted of 1749 elementary school students. This indicates a great need for an individualized approach to professional development, which Talent Center Slovenia could provide. Recommendations for students, teaching staff, and management include active involvement in counseling, training on modern approaches, and support for the establishment of a Talent Center. Future research should focus on the impact of career counseling on career performance and satisfaction, and on improving the quality of counseling and its impact on society.

Keywords: Career Counseling, Talent Center Slovenia, Empirical Findings, Primary School Students, Individualized Approach

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#### Introduction

In Slovenia, approximately 20 000 primary school students per generation face the choice of further education and career paths, often making decisions without scientific testing and relying on recommendations from parents or peers, which typically reflect their own interests and desires. Consequently, these decisions are mostly influenced by subjective factors rather than objective feedback on individual abilities. Furthermore, Slovenia lacks a systematically organized career counseling system for primary school students, similar to what neighboring Austria offers.

Slovenia operates 142 public secondary schools and 6 private institutions. Enrollment statistics show that 35% of primary school graduates enter general secondary education, 47% opt for technical and vocational education, 16% choose vocational education, and 1% enroll in lower vocational education. Boys most commonly choose technical and computing fields, while girls prefer health and personal services. Slovenia offers 4003 different professions, leading primary school students to have numerous questions regarding their interests, talents, weaknesses, and desires for further studies. The proportion of young people (aged 18-24) engaged in education in Slovenia exceeds the EU average; in the 2017/18 academic year, it was approximately 46%. However, 35% of enrolled students do not complete their studies, highlighting the need for better support in making decisions about further education.

Our external partner (City Municipality of Murska Sobota - MO MS), involved in our research, aims to establish Talent Center Slovenia in their region, which would serve as an inclusive support system for comprehensive career guidance, focusing on individual traits, abilities, and interests. The center would provide neutral and objective feedback useful for making decisions about further education, incorporating scientific and revolutionary testing systems.

We conducted a survey among eighth and ninth graders to gauge their opinions on the establishment of such a talent center. The project addressed theoretical and practical issues related to models, tools, and methods for implementing such a center in Slovenia. The introduction of Talent Center Slovenia would contribute to improved career orientation not only for school youth but also for adults, as economic challenges (digitalization, green growth, sustainability, rapid changes, and lifelong learning) require planned efforts even with employed individuals.

### Comparison of Career Counseling Models in Slovenia and Abroad

Comparing career counseling models between Slovenia and abroad reveals numerous differences in approaches, structures, and accessibility of services available to individuals in planning their careers.

## Comparison of Career Counseling Systems in Slovenia

In Slovenia, career counseling is conducted through various institutions such as the Employment Service of Slovenia (ZZZS), the Career Center for Youth, and VKO point. ZZZS offers a range of free services at its career centers, including programs for self-managing careers, basic career counseling, employer meetings, and workshops for developing job search skills (ZZZS, 2024). The Career Center for Youth focuses on proactive planning of further education paths for young people, providing individual information,

career testing, career counseling, and educational workshops in schools (Talentcenter.at, 2024). VKO point operates as an online platform supporting career counseling professionals with programs, modules, and research works (VKO point, 2024).

Additionally, the handbook "New Approaches to Working with Youth in Career Guidance" (Gergorić & Založnik, 2020) offers practical guidelines for professional staff in primary schools involved in career counseling for young people.

## Comparison of Career Counseling Systems Abroad

Different countries have diverse approaches to career counseling, depending on their legislative frameworks, educational systems, and societal needs:

- Australia integrates career counseling into the school curriculum, though practices may vary between states.
- Canada has varied practices across provinces, where career counseling can be part of the curriculum or offered as a specialized course.
- Ireland and Luxembourg do not include career counseling in compulsory curricula, but some activities may be conducted as part of projects in certain classes.
- Spain mandates career counseling in all schools, with a specified number of hours for high school students (OECD, 2004).
- In Austria and Germany, career counseling is largely integrated into educational institutions. In Austria, for instance, career advisors collaborate with universities and schools, offering services such as career path counseling, educational fairs, and workshops (Cedefop, 2020). In Germany, school counselors play a key role in career counseling, working in collaboration with teachers and parents and focusing on vocational orientation (Schröder, 2013).

Training, qualifications, and roles of career counseling staff also vary. For example, in Australia, schools employ professional counselors, whereas in Canada, career counseling is often within the purview of teachers with additional licensing (OECD, 2004).

Additional research, such as OECD's study (2004) on career counseling and public policy, can further expand understanding of career counseling practices worldwide and highlight important aspects affecting the effectiveness and accessibility of these services.

## Additional Career Counseling Model in the USA

In the USA, career counseling is similarly diverse but more decentralized, often linked with educational institutions and private counseling agencies (Gergorić & Založnik, 2020). Additionally, career counseling in the USA is frequently conducted through online platforms and mobile applications, allowing individuals access to information, tests, mentoring, and other career resources on demand (OECD, 2004).

Career counseling in US schools is implemented both in elementary and secondary schools, with some schools having dedicated career counselors, while others integrate this role into the duties of existing school counseling staff (Gergorić & Založnik, 2020). There is also a focus on counseling programs at universities and colleges in the USA, which assist students in career planning, finding internship opportunities, and preparing for entry into the job market (OECD, 2004).

Unlike Slovenia and some other countries, the USA lacks a national standard or legal framework for career counseling in schools (Gergorić & Založnik, 2020). Instead, guidelines and practices depend on individual school districts, states, and university systems (OECD, 2004). This variability means that approaches and the quality of career counseling can vary widely depending on the region and financial resources available to each institution.

Furthermore, the USA offers a rich array of commercial career counseling services provided by private counseling agencies, employment firms, and non-profit organizations (Gergorić & Založnik, 2020). These services often include individual counseling, workshops, online courses, and mentoring, which may be accessible to individuals for a fee or subsidized by employers or public entities (OECD, 2004).

This illustrates that career counseling practices and services in the USA are more dispersed and reliant on the private sector, regional, and local policies compared to some other countries.

## **Benefits of Career Counseling Awareness for Individuals**

Knowledge of career counseling brings numerous advantages to individuals at all stages of education, from early childhood education to adult learning.

#### Preschool Education

Career counseling in the early stages of a child's life allows children to understand various career options and pathways early on. Research indicates that around 50% of an individual's cognitive abilities are developed by the age of 4, with the next 30% by age 8. This underscores the importance of starting career counseling in preschool. Children exposed to various career options can more easily choose a profession they wish to pursue in the future (Rahmat Hidayat & Ningrum, 2017).

Commencing career counseling in preschool enables children to develop skills and competencies in fields of interest, facilitating their decision-making regarding future career paths (Rahmat Hidayat & Ningrum, 2017).

#### Primary Education

Career counseling in primary school allows students to discover their interests, abilities, and values, aiding them in making decisions about further education. Students who receive career counseling show better school engagement, improve their academic achievements, and develop more personal and interpersonal skills (Yavuz, 2022).

# Secondary Education

Career counseling in high school helps students better recognize their talents, interests, and values, easing their decision-making regarding further studies. Students who receive career counseling are less confused and concerned about their future, which enhances their focus and motivation to achieve their career goals (Michael, 2024).

### Tertiary Education

Career counseling assists students in deciding on their future career path and successfully transitioning into the job market. It fosters greater self-awareness among students regarding their interests, values, abilities, and personalities, helping them to achieve their career goals (Akhter et al., 2021).

#### Adult Education

Career counseling for adults fosters adaptability in the job market, aids in upgrading qualifications, finding suitable employment, and advancing within companies (Andragogical Center of the Republic of Slovenia, 2021). Adults engaging in career counseling gain increased self-confidence, self-assurance, and new skills, making it easier for them to overcome obstacles on their path to career success (OECD, 2021).

Knowledge of career counseling thus enables individuals to gain better direction, self-awareness, and motivation in choosing and developing their careers throughout life.

# Talent Center Graz (Austria) - A Case Study of Good Practice

The Talent Center Graz in Austria is a renowned career counseling center for youth aged 13 to 15, recognized nationally and internationally for its excellence, including winning the Best Education and Training Project award at the 2019 International Chamber of Commerce Congress (Talentcenter.at, 2024).

With a mission to identify, develop, and support young talent, the center fosters confidence, motivation, and innovation through 48 testing stations that explore individual interests, talents, and potential. Their holistic approach is grounded in cutting-edge insights from psychology, pedagogy, and career development (Talentcenter.at, 2024).

Funded by the City of Graz, the Austrian Ministry of Education, EU projects, and private sponsors, the center collaborates with the University of Graz, schools, businesses, and NGOs to deliver tailored programs. It plays a vital role in local social and economic development, empowering youth to make informed career decisions and enhancing the quality of career counseling in Austria (Talentcenter.at, 2024).

### Talent Center Slovenia: A Vision for Youth Career Development

Talent Center Slovenia will create an innovative environment to advance scientifically supported career guidance for youth. Operating as a research organization, it will collaborate with domestic and international partners to develop methods for career planning based on individuals' characteristics, competencies, and interests. The center aims to provide an inclusive platform for the professional and personal growth of youth, offering impartial assessments and guidance to foster their unique talents.

Founded by the Municipality of Murska Sobota (MO MS), the center will pioneer scientifically grounded testing systems to evaluate talents objectively, enabling youth to better understand their abilities and make informed decisions about education and careers. Located in Murska Sobota, it will be architecturally integrated with the natural setting of

Lake Sobosko and the Expano Pavilion, emphasizing sustainable, eco-friendly materials and aligning with the region's green vision.

To achieve its mission, Talent Center Slovenia will analyze labor market needs, monitor talent development trends, and engage experts from psychology, education, and entrepreneurship (Stoeger et al., 2018). A holistic approach will address technical knowledge, soft skills, and personality development, ensuring programs meet individual needs and interests (Caplan, 2013; Storey & Wright, 2023).

Youth visiting the center will explore key questions about their future, such as:

- What interests me? Discovering passions through scientifically supported testing.
- Where do I see myself? Gaining clarity on future career and education options.
- What am I good at? Identifying and nurturing talents with innovative assessment methods.
- What are my weaknesses? Receiving objective feedback for personal growth.
- Which direction should I pursue? Making informed decisions on education and career paths.

The center will be funded through a mix of public funds, private donations, sponsorships, and revenue from services, with support from European and national education and entrepreneurship projects.

Talent Center Slovenia will serve as a creative space where youth can explore their potential, contributing to personal growth and regional economic development.

### Presentation of Services

Talent Center Slovenia will offer a range of services, including educational programs, workshops, mentoring, career counseling, and support for entrepreneurial development. Ensuring accessibility and flexibility will be key to maximizing participation and the benefits of talent development opportunities (Groenewald et al., 2024).

# Written Testing

A variety of tests and questionnaires will assess individuals' knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests, helping youth better understand themselves and their career options.

# Systematic and Organized Guidance

The center's team of experienced professionals in psychology, career counseling, and vocational guidance will provide structured support throughout the career development process.

## **Practical Testing**

In addition to written assessments, youth will engage in practical tasks that simulate real-world work situations to further evaluate their skills.

## **Expert Analysis of Results**

Experts will analyze test results to create a comprehensive profile of each individual's competencies and traits.

## Report Compilation

Each testing phase will conclude with a detailed report offering insights and guidance to support informed decisions about education and career paths.

### Macro-Level Monitoring and Analysis

Data will be analyzed at a macro level to inform strategic decisions, helping to understand trends and youth needs in education and career development.

## Comprehensive Concluding Report for Individuals

Each visitor will receive a comprehensive report summarizing their results, offering valuable insights into their skills, abilities, and potential for future growth.

# Empirical Verification: What Is the Opinion of 8th and 9th Grade Elementary School Students Regarding the Establishment of the Talent Center?

Based on identified challenges and needs among young people facing decisions about further education and career paths in Slovenia, we decided to conduct an empirical study among eighth and ninth grade students (sample of 1749 units).

The primary goal of the research is to thoroughly examine and understand aspects related to the establishment of Talent Center Slovenia and its potential impact on young people's decisions regarding career paths and education, using a survey questionnaire. The research process outlined below is based on theoretical foundations detailed in the theoretical part of the report, providing the substantive basis for designing the survey questionnaire.

The empirical research was conducted over a specific time interval (from March 27, 2024, to May 6, 2024) and represents a cross-sectional study based on this period. Using the 1KA platform, we collected data from the defined sample, which were processed using Excel. Subsequently, students participating in the project were asked to provide their opinions based on the results obtained by the survey questionnaire.

We also confirmed the content validity of the measurement instrument by utilizing a theoretical framework and comparing it with established measurement instruments. Content validity refers to the properties that measurement units and instruments must possess to ensure that the measurement outcome is a true reflection of what the researcher intends to measure (Aaker et al., 2008).

#### Quantitative Analysis of Survey Questionnaires

**Demographic Questions.** In response to this question, 1740 respondents answered in the survey, comprising 53% girls and 43% boys, with 3% of respondents choosing not to disclose their gender, as also depicted in the graph below.

The next question in the survey pertained to the grade level of the respondents. 922 (53%) respondents are in the 8th grade of elementary school, while 817 (47%) are in the 9th grade.

The final question in the demographic section focused on the distribution of respondents according to regions, highlighting the geographical diversity of the sample. From the results, it can be observed that the largest proportion of elementary schools is located in the Pomurska region of Slovenia (22%). Following closely is the Savinjska region of Slovenia (17%), which also contributes significantly to the sample. Conversely, regions such as Koroška, Posavska, Zasavska and Southeast Slovenia have a smaller share of elementary schools in the sample, each accounting for less than 5%.

Information About Secondary Schools. The majority of respondents, 1664 (63%), obtained information about secondary schools during the school's open house day. Similarly, a large proportion of respondents (64%) received information from friends, acquaintances, or parents. About a third of the respondents got informed through official websites of secondary schools (28%) and via official social media channels (23%). A smaller portion of respondents obtained information from informative meetings organized by their elementary school (14%), through the school social worker (20%), and from their elementary school teachers (14%). Only a small percentage of respondents (3%) did not seek any information before enrolling in secondary school, while a slightly larger percentage (8%) obtained information at a career fair

This indicates that respondents gathered information about secondary schools from a variety of sources, including open house days, social media, websites, friends, acquaintances, parents, school staff and career fairs. This highlights the importance of diverse information sources in making decisions about further education and career paths.

**Decision-Making About Secondary School.** The analysis of the following two questions provides insight into the decision-making process of students regarding the choice of secondary school and the potential impact of counseling on this decision.

Question Q7 focused on the difficulty of choosing a secondary school. 40% of respondents reported that the choice was difficult, indicating that selecting a secondary school was quite challenging for 697 respondents.

Furthermore, question Q8 explored whether the existence of an institution offering guidance on selecting a secondary school would ease the decision-making process. The majority of respondents, 533 (77%), believed that they would find it easier to choose a secondary school if such a counseling institution existed. The average rating for this question was 1.2, indicating a positive attitude of the respondents towards the idea of a counseling institution for secondary school selection, with a standard deviation of 0.4, showing relatively low variability in responses.

Based on the survey data on secondary school selection, it is clear that for 40% of 8th and 9th-grade students, this decision remains a challenge. Therefore, the opinion of the majority of respondents is that the establishment of a Talent Center for counseling on secondary school selection would be very welcome. Such a center could provide additional support, information, and professional counseling, helping students make more informed and confident decisions. This could also increase the success rate in the secondary school selection process, leading to greater satisfaction and success for students in their further education. Thus, the establishment of a Talent Center could bring significant benefits to the entire education system and to individual students.

*Importance of Advice in Deciding on Further Education.* In analyzing question Q9 ("Whose advice do you consider most important when deciding on further education? Rank by importance (1 - most important, 2 - important, 3 - less important, 4 - least important)"), we used descriptive statistics to understand and describe patterns in the data. The results are as follows:

- Parental advice was rated the most important, with 1041 respondents (63%) marking it as the most important, 379 (23%) as important, 145 (9%) as less important and 75 (5%) as the least important.
- Peer advice was rated as the second most important, with 178 respondents (11%) marking it as the most important, 362 (22%) as important, 568 (35%) as less important, and 521 (32%) as the least important.
- Advice from relatives and acquaintances and advice from the school counseling service were rated equally. Advice from relatives and acquaintances was rated most important by 130 respondents (8%), important by 515 (32%), less important by 584 (36%), and least important by 398 (24%). Advice from the school counseling service was rated most important by 282 respondents (17%), important by 375 (23%), less important by 334 (21%), and least important by 633 (39%).

The results indicate that parental advice has the greatest weight in deciding on further education, while peer advice is also important but less than parental advice. Advice from relatives, acquaintances, and the school counseling service is also important but has a somewhat smaller impact compared to parental and peer advice.

In the next question, we aimed to determine who had the most significant influence on the respondents' decision regarding the secondary school they wish to enroll in. Based on their answers, we found the following:

- 69% of respondents (1205 out of 1650) replied that they themselves had the most significant influence on their secondary school decision.
- 14% of respondents (242 out of 1650) stated that parents or guardians had the most significant influence.
- 5% of respondents (81 out of 1650) mentioned that siblings had the most significant influence.
- 4% of respondents (74 out of 1650) stated that friends had the most significant influence.
- 1% of respondents (16 out of 1650) mentioned that classmates had the most significant influence.
- 1% of respondents (13 out of 1650) stated that teachers had the most significant influence.

• 1% of respondents (19 out of 1650) mentioned that media or social networks had the most significant influence.

Table 1: Impact on High School Decision

010	Who had the biggest influence on your decision for the high school you want to						
Q10	go to? Choose one answer		Percentage	Valid	Cumulative		
	Responses	Frequency					
	1 (I'm)	1205	69%	73%	73%		
	2 (Parents/foster parents)	242	14%	15%	88%		
	3 (brother(s)/sister(s))	81	5%	5%	93%		
	4 (Friends)	74	4%	4%	97%		
	5 (Classmates)	16	1%	1%	98%		
	6 (Teachers)	13	1%	1%	99%		
	7 (Media or social networks)	19	1%	1%	100%		
Valid	Together	1650	94%	100%			
		Average	1,5	Std. deviation	1,1		

Source: own

The results show that most respondents attribute the most significant influence on their decisions to themselves, indicating independence and confidence in making important life decisions. However, it would be interesting to explore how this dynamic changes based on various factors such as socioeconomic background, parents' educational level, geographical location and similar aspects.

Further research could reveal potential differences in the influence of various factors on young people's decisions in different circumstances. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to consider additional factors that could influence decisions, such as interests, hobbies, ambitions and individual goals, and how these affect the perception of the role of various information sources. These additional studies could expand our understanding of the decision-making process among youth and contribute to more targeted support measures in the educational system.

The establishment of the Talent Center Slovenia could be beneficial in the choice of secondary school, as such an institution could provide additional professional support and information to young people when deciding on their future educational path. The results indicate that most respondents would appreciate such support, suggesting a need for additional information sources and counseling. This could enable young people to make more thoughtful and informed decisions that better align with their interests, abilities, and goals. Moreover, the Talent Center Slovenia could offer individual counseling that considers the specific needs of each person and organize events and activities to explore further education options. This could enhance students' emotional well-being and reduce feelings of uncertainty and stress in the process of choosing a secondary school.

*Influence of Various Factors on the Decision for Secondary School.* In the analysis of questions Q12, Q13, Q14 and Q15, we arrived at the following results:

- Q12: Do you think that information days and secondary school websites alone are sufficient for you to imagine whether the chosen profession would suit you (considering your personality traits and desires)?
  - 54% of respondents (940 out of 1637) believe that information days and secondary school websites alone are sufficient to give them an idea of whether the chosen profession would suit them.
  - 40% of respondents (697 out of 1637) believe that these are not enough and that they need additional sources of information.

Table 2: Need for Additional Information

Q12	Do you think that information days and high school websites are enough in themselves to imagine whether the acquired profession would suit you (given your personality traits and preferences)?						
	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Valid	Cumulative		
	1 (yes)	940	54%	57%	57%		
	2 (no)	697	40%	43%	100%		
Valid	Together	1637	94%	100%			
		Average	1,4	Std. deviation	0,5		

Source: own

Q13: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I have more than enough information about the secondary school I will enroll in, and I have no doubt about my decision" (where 1 - strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree)?

- The average rating among respondents is 3.4, indicating moderate confidence in the information they have about the secondary school they will enroll in.
- The standard deviation is 1.3, indicating a wide range of responses, with some respondents feeling very confident and others less so.

Q14: Would you like more information about further education options (regarding different secondary schools and their programs)?

- 69% of respondents (1200 out of 1635) would like more information about further education options.
- 25% of respondents (435 out of 1635) feel they have enough information.

Table 3: Desire for More Information on Further Education

014	Would you like more information about the possibilities of further education (regarding the different secondary schools and their majors)?						
Q14	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Valid	Cumulative		
	1 (yes)	1200	69 %	73 %	73 %		
	2 (no)	435	25 %	27 %	100 %		
Valid	Together	1635	93 %	100 %			
		Average	1,3	Std. deviation	0,4		

Source: own

# Q15: Do you know the difference between a secondary school, vocational school, and gymnasium?

- 70% of respondents (1220 out of 1635) know the difference between a secondary school, vocational school and gymnasium.
- 24% of respondents (415 out of 1635) do not know the difference between these types of secondary schools, indicating a need for additional explanation or a refresher on this topic.

The analysis of these questions provides insight into respondents' perceptions of their level of information, the need for additional information and their understanding of the differences between various types of secondary schools. Overall, we can conclude that there is a diversity in the level of information among respondents regarding the choice of secondary school and further education options. Additional sources of information, educational and informational campaigns and the Talent Center Slovenia could help bridge the knowledge gaps and improve the information available to future students.

Acceptance and Willingness for Potential Talent Testing. The results show that 76% of respondents are willing to participate in testing that, through an interactive game, would identify five professions matching their personality, talents, knowledge and abilities.

This high level of interest suggests that young people are eager for interactive approaches to career exploration, which could help them make more informed decisions about education and career paths. The positive response is particularly strong among those uncertain about their high school choice, indicating a desire for additional guidance in understanding career possibilities.

These findings highlight the importance of offering young people tools to explore career options. Interactive testing could play a key role in supporting career planning, especially for those who feel uncertain about their educational direction, ultimately leading to more informed and satisfying career choices.

#### Conclusion

In Slovenia, career counseling faces significant challenges, particularly for primary school students making decisions about further education and career paths. The lack of systematic guidance often leads to decisions based on subjective factors, not necessarily aligning with individual interests and potential. Establishing Talent Center Slovenia could address this issue by offering an inclusive, scientifically based approach to career counseling, providing objective information for better decision-making. It could also support adults navigating the rapidly changing job market by offering career development and skill acquisition. Slovenia could learn from international examples like the Austrian Talent Center Graz to improve its own system. A more comprehensive and effective career counseling framework is crucial to support individuals at different life stages, helping them achieve personal and professional fulfillment.

Data analysis highlights a strong emotional involvement among students regarding their education and career choices. Most students expressed interest in additional information on educational options, with high school open days and parental advice being common sources. However, over a third of students struggled with high school selection and most would appreciate a dedicated counseling institution. Parental advice was also seen as encouraging

for decision-making. Additionally, students showed high interest in tests that could guide them towards suitable careers based on their personality and abilities. The Talent Center Slovenia concept is positively received by 8th and 9th-grade students, indicating its potential to aid in education and career decisions.

Future research should explore key areas to improve career counseling. This includes studying how student involvement in counseling impacts career success, examining the role of teaching staff competence and comparing different career counseling models across institutions. Research should also focus on best practices in various countries and analyze the impact of career counseling on employability, productivity and innovation.

Scientific research in these areas will enhance understanding of career counseling's complexities, leading to effective guidelines and practices that promote individual success and broader societal development.

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