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Urban Planning (ISSN: 2183–7635)
2022, Volume 7, Issue 4, Pages 245–252
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v7i4.5624

Article

Young Families and High-Rise: Towards Inclusive Vertical Family Housing

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Submitted: 19 April 2022 | Accepted: 14 July 2022 | Published: 22 November 2022

Abstract
In the near future, the vertical dimension of housing will become increasingly important. But high-rise housing is still being seen as not only inconvenient but also as inappropriate for young family households. This article aims to contribute to the vertical turn in the urbanism debate from a family point of view. The focus is on large western-industrialized cities. This literature-based article consists of two parts. The first part starts with the deconstructing of families' position in urban high-rises. It is argued that young families have an "uneasy" relationship with urban high-rises due to the neglected presence of children. The dichotomous ways in which we define children and cities ultimately define city children and vertical living families as out-of-place. The second part of the article searches for ways to reconstruct families' relationships with high-rises. Based on an analysis of the literature, problems of vertical family living are identified, and possible solutions are discussed on both the geographical scale level of the apartment and the building. The summarized conclusion from the literature is that vertical apartment living and happy family life are not necessarily at odds. The building of family-inclusive high-rises is both in the benefit of urban-oriented families *and* cities.

Keywords
city children; high-rise housing; vertical family living; young families

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Vertical Cities: The Development of High-Rise Neighbourhoods" edited by Brian Webb (Cardiff University) and James T. White (University of Glasgow).

1. Introduction

In western-industrialized countries, high-rise housing already has a long history with two periods of sharp growth. The first period with growing numbers was during the decades after the Second World War (Costello, 2005; Gifford, 2007; Wassenberg, 2013). From the 1950s till the early 1970s, high-rise housing was part of modernistic architecture meant to solve the postwar need for housing (De Vos, 2015). Within the CIAM tradition of functionalistic building, high-rise was meant to attract broad categories of the middle classes. It turned out to be different, however. Part of the new flat buildings was constructed in central urban neighbourhoods, but a great many were located in peripheral neighbourhoods and attracted predominantly the urban poor. It did not take long before those postwar apartment towers knew a concentration of problems (Kearns et al., 2012). High-rise became associated with criminality, poor safety, pollution, over-population, and, particularly for children, an unhealthy environment to grow up (Brownlee & McDonald, 1993; Stevenson et al., 1967; Whitzman & Mizrachi, 2012). Analysis of the literature, however, reveals that many of the problems with raising children in high-rises had more to do with the disadvantaged social position of the families than with the high-rise as such (Van Vliet, 1983). Nevertheless, many high-rise housing estates have been demolished and replaced by low-rise buildings or single-family homes (Wassenberg, 2013).

Today we are again in a period of massive housing need. Worldwide, we see ongoing pressure on cities to build for constantly growing populations. The need for more housing goes along with an increase in sustainability demands. Latest compact city policies meant to prevent urban sprawl have created a second period of sharp growth in the building of high-rise housing. But compared to the early postwar period, the recent high-rise is more often located in inner-city areas, is more often

owner-occupied, and has more often a luxurious appeal (Costello, 2005). The penthouse has become the ultimate representation of new modern ways of living high. Even in countries like Australia and the Netherlands that have hardly any tradition with high-rise housing, it is becoming more widespread. It is predicted that in a city like Sydney, in the near future, family households will also increasingly live in (high-rise) apartments (Andrews & Warner, 2020; Krysiak, 2019). Amsterdam has been characterized by a strong taboo on high-rises, partly due to the negative experiences in the southeast part of the city, but Amsterdam is now building a whole new island with only high-rises (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). In many western cities, high-rise housing has become part of the re-vitalization policies of the (inner) city by providing owner-occupied apartments for the (upper) middle classes. The change of character of today's high-rises has ultimately resulted in a change of appreciation. High-rise has become more popular than in the past and is more often associated with luxurious lifestyles (Costello, 2005; Graham, 2014).

Growing numbers of more expensive high-rise apartments have changed its formerly negative image. However, the negative connotation of high-rise housing regarding the raising of children has not changed, at least not in western industrialized countries. Although families with young children have always lived in high-density urban settings, high-rise housing is still being seen as not only an inconvenient but also an undesirable housing solution for young families. The negative discourse around high-rises and raising children is found among policymakers, urban designers, and real estate agents (Fincher, 2004) but also among families themselves (Bugera, 2020; Kerr et al., 2021). Newly built high-rise estates are predominantly marketed as design-led fashionable dwellings that respond to the luxurious taste of rich young childless households. There seems to be a serious tension between the present discourse of urban revitalization and the discourse on raising children. Families are not among the target group, and that is surprising given that we see a growing interest of young families wanting to live in urban areas (Karsten, 2007; Lilius, 2017). Thus, on the one hand, we observe an increase in urban apartment buildings and a growing interest of families in urban living, and, on the other hand, we notice a neglect in urban policies to accommodate vertical family living.

Within the context of urban densification, the vertical dimension of housing will become increasingly important. That makes it only more urgent to discuss families' position in high-rises. With this article, we aim to contribute to the vertical turn in the urbanism debate (Hadi et al., 2018; Harris, 2015) from a family point of view. It is based on an analysis of the literature. The literature review presented has two limitations. First, there is a geographical limitation—The focus of this article is mainly based on studies in western-industrialized capital cities. Research has made clear that within the geographical context of Asia, family housing in high-rises is broadly accepted as appropriate (Appold & Yuen, 2007; Karsten, 2015). This knowledge underlines the project of this article: Discourses on urban high-rises and young children are socially constructed and vary across space. A second limitation of this literature review is related to definitions of high-rise that are often vague and/or vary considerably. High-rise, apartment buildings, high-density housing, and flat building are used interchangeably (see also Van Vliet, 1983, p. 222). In addition, what is defined as "high" is very much context-dependent. In cities dominated by low- and medium-rise apartment buildings, a residential building of six floors is "high." All studies referred to in this article have in common that they focus in different terminology on vertical living families who do not live on ground level, do not have direct access to the outdoors, and experience the world from above.

This article consists of two parts. It starts with the deconstruction of families' "uneasy" relationship with high-rises (Section 2). It will become clear that this "uneasiness" is related to the dichotomous way in which we define children and cities and ultimately results in defining city children and urban family life as out of place. Nevertheless, many children grow up in cities and in high-rise apartments. How are they doing, what problems do they encounter, and what solutions have been found to reconstruct vertical family living in more harmonious ways? With the answering of these questions starts the second part of this article. This will be done on two geographical scale levels: that of the apartment (Section 3) and that of the building (Section 4). The concluding section of this article (Section 5) summarizes the results of this literature-based article by reconstructing family-inclusive high-rise housing, both for the benefit of families *and* cities. It will become clear that through changes in urban policy and architectural design, much can be achieved to better accommodate vertical family living.

2. Cities and Children

What makes families' relationship with high-rises specific? The answer is children. Families are different from other types of households because they have children that must be taken care of. And as most of the high-rise housing is being built in (big) cities, it can be argued that to understand families' relationship with high-rises, it is necessary to first reflect on the relationship between cities and children. What layered definition of cities and children exists? What defining elements constitute the two concepts (Table 1)?

Cities are defined as big entities where many people live and work. In addition, cities are the heart of the public domain with their political debates, cultural activities, and a wide variety of shops and services. Urban environments consist primarily of apartment buildings of varying heights lined along multi-functional streets and squares with many different facilities and services.

Table 1. Defining elements of cities and children.

Cities	Children
Big	Small
Work	Play
Public domain	Private domain
Multifunctional environment	Monofunctional environment
Apartment building	Single-family house
Stones and asphalt	Green and nature
High-density	Low-density
Anonymous and diverse	Familiar and homogeneous
Urban jungle	Rural idyll

Urban environments are densely built and made up of stones, concrete, and asphalt. Residents have diverse backgrounds and live close together but often do not know each other very well.

Children are primarily defined as small, not big, and vulnerable. They are supposed to play, not to work. And they have to be taken care of first and foremost in the private domain of the family. The single-family house is traditionally seen as the optimal housing condition for raising children. Low-rise green neighbourhoods with a limited number of (potentially disturbing) facilities are seen as attractive environments for children. Most important is the social context of familiar others (Kerr et al., 2021). The sum total of these layered definitions is that children would thrive in countryside-like environments summarized as rural idylls, while cities are described as urban jungles that may be attractive for some people but difficult to survive in for others, particularly so for children.

These dominant discourses on cities and children very much originated in the middle classes but have an influence on the lower classes as well (Jarvis, 2013; Raynor, 2018). Cities are not considered to be suitable places to grow up, and subsequently, urban high-rise apartments are not seen as appropriate housing for family households (Easthope & Tice, 2011; Kerr et al., 2021). Urban high-rise environments are even considered to be unhealthy and dangerous (Van Vliet, 1983). The sum total is that discourses on raising children are spatially related to the rural idyll (Valentine, 1997), which is defined as the absolute opposite of the urban jungle (Emmelkamp, 2004). Cities and children turn out to be two mutually excluding concepts.

The dichotomous conceptualization of cities and children defines city children and vertical living families as out-of-place. And, indeed, since the suburbanization from the 1960s onwards, urban family living is increasingly considered to be problematic and many families, particularly the ones who could afford to do so, left the city for the suburb. Families started to buy themselves a single-family home in the suburbs with easy access to ample green outdoor space. Suburban mothers were made the first responsible for the upbringing of the children, while their husbands made long working hours in central cities' labour market. The gendered character of the suburbanization process was conceptualized by Saegert (1980) as a dichotomy: masculine cities versus feminine suburbs. Suburbs became the child-rearing factory of society (Ward, 1978). Family households became a minority in large cities.

Over the last decades, however, families have started to re-claim the city (Karsten, 2007). Today, we see a new development of middle-class families opting for the city as a family place to live. This is a trend of families that can afford to buy themselves a suburban home, but who decide not to do it and to remain living urban. The number of urban families started to increase again, and the same applies to the number of children growing up in specific neighbourhoods of large cities. This reclaiming of the city as a family place to live is visible in many European capital cities (Authier & Lehman-Frisch, 2013; Boterman et al., 2010; Butler, 2003; Hjorthol & Bjornskau, 2005; Lilius, 2017). Families reclaiming the city: What does that mean for the families' supposed uneasy relationship with high-rises?

To answer this question, it is good to realize that housing aspirations constitute two dimensions: site and situation (Paleo, 2006). Site is the set of properties or conditions in a certain location and its immediate environment. Site refers to the lowest geographical scale level of dwelling, building, and estate. Situation is the set of conditions of a place derived from its relationships with distant, imprecise areas or places. Another word for situation is location. With families' reclaiming the city, changing aspirations in terms of locational preference have become manifest. This changing locational preference towards urban environments has much to do with (the growth of) working parenthood. Families consist of working parents who have to combine care and career daily. For working families, an urban central location has locational advantages with shorter distances to work, school, and a broad range of facilities and services. The re-claiming of urban environments by families can be considered a historical change away from the traditional gender division of tasks and its related suburban housing *situation*. But does this new trend also include new preferences in *site* qualities?

Urban families' site preferences can be summarized as a big-enough dwelling in a physical and social

environment that is called "urban haven" (Karsten, 2009). Physically, urban families look for a place to live in quiet, low-traffic streets with broad sidewalks and green elements. Socially, families like an environment where residents are closely connected with neighbouring family households within an overall diverse and lively urban context (Thomas, 2021; Tucker et al., 2021). The central question is thus whether high-rise housing estates can become an urban haven setting and meet the site qualities families prefer. To answer this question, I will first pay attention to the geographical scale level of the apartment and second to that of the building.

3. The Apartment

Decisions to buy or to rent depend in the first place on the qualities of the dwelling (Aner, 2016; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999). Literature shows that families living in high-rise apartments report three categories of problems. As a family, they have complaints about living too cramped, missing a good-to-use private outdoor space, and about feelings of being isolated.

The *size*, *lay-out*, and *flexibility* of the apartment are very much complained about by families *(*Bugera, 2020; De Ceuster, 2017; Marreel et al., 2019; Nethercote & Horne, 2016; Tucker et al., 2021). Generally, apartments are smaller than single-family houses, and family households need more rooms than childless households. Providing each child with a room of its own is vital for reasons of privacy for both the children and the parents (Marreel et al., 2019). The number of rooms is more important that the total number of square meters. Designers should therefore focus on the design of intelligent layouts without spoiling too many square meters in luxurious halls and second bathrooms. A functional focus will also help to solve another problem that is often complained about: the lack of storage. Apartments have no attics, garages, or gardens. Space to store needs to be found elsewhere. Storage may be provided for in the private apartment but can also be accommodated in specific parts of the building (see Section 4). Nethercote and Horne (2016) show that cramped-sized apartments force parents to re-order constantly the available space. That is very energy demanding. Like all families, apartment families struggle with "the colonization of the living room by children" (Nethercote & Horne, 2016, p. 1592). Negotiations about what activity is where and when allowed (time zoning) can only be successful when there is an alternative available. Flexible floorplans are seen as supportive to manage with limited square meters.

Private outdoor space is very often signaled as a problem by families living in apartments. Balconies are not always positively experienced. Complaints are related to the size, that often does not accommodate more than two people, and the climate in terms of being too windy or the absence of sun. In addition, children's safety on the balcony is very much worried about. Parents are afraid of their child falling from the balcony. To prevent childhood injury, balcony rails should be spaced less than 10 cm apart (Istre et al., 2003). But it is exactly the balcony that also can reduce the resistance against vertical living. A well-sized balcony with a nice view is the most positive experience of high-living. In his study on verticality as practice, Baxter (2017) shows that people who live high are inclined to position furniture in a way that they can optimally enjoy the view. Families are proud of their unlimited view that also gives them lots of privacy, or as one vertical living Amsterdam mother explains: "When I bike through the city and I see all those small streets, you need curtains to prevent that the neighbours are looking into your house. That feels so claustrophobic. We hardly have any curtains!" (Bugera, 2020, p. 30).

Feelings of isolation are reported by many residents in high-rises, or, as Graham (2014, p. 257) writes, "Vertical living can quickly turn into vertical isolation." For families, however, there is an extra risk due to their being a small minority (Warner & Andrews, 2019). That makes the building of social relations difficult, particularly for the children involved (Bugera, 2020). The underrepresentation of family households is a result of the total neglect of families as one of the purpose-groups to rent or to sell apartments. Only very few developers are consciously marketing to families. They do not see it as a viable option (Costello, 2005; Fincher, 2004). Kerr et al. (2020) reveal that parents in high-rise face negative judgements and have the feeling that they have to legitimate their "choice" for apartment living. The discourse on vertical family living is fairly negative. This negative discourse, however, changes when more families are grouped together in one building, as the case of Vancouver illustrates. Part of the family household in high-rise Vancouver could be labeled as "won over": They are "seduced" by the presence of neighbouring families and the high level of shared amenities in the building that support parenting (Thomas, 2021). If more families are attracted to new high-rise developments, vertical family living has the advantage of smaller distances to acquainted households. It becomes rewarding for children that have playmates nearby. And, as one Vancouver mother explains, "parenting can be very isolated and this housing helped 'to preserve sanity'" (Thomas, 2021, p. 24).

To reach the goal of a minimal number of families, the advertisement should mention the apartment as a suitable or even attractive type of family housing. It would help when the apartments are inclusively meant for families with children. They should be represented in texts and photos on the website of the real estate agency. Specific advantages of apartment living for families should be explained, such as the aforementioned short distances to facilities and friends. Some cities, among them Toronto (City of Toronto, 2020) and Vancouver (Beasly, 2006), have already started to explicitly market to families in newly developed high-rise estates. The grouping together of purposely designed family apartments can help to establish a nearby network

of like-minded households. Instead of feelings of isolation, a group of nearby living families can add to mutual understanding for children being sometimes noisy or badly behaving. That helps reduce feelings of guilt, shame, and stress (Kerr et al., 2021; Warner & Andrews, 2019).

4. The Building

It is not only the apartment itself that determines whether high-rise housing suits family life, but also the apartment building and the immediate environment of the housing estate. Literature shows that on this geographical scale level, families' inconvenient relationship with high-rises is related to children's problematic outdoor play, the lack of social connectedness, and the missing of shared facilities.

Families have children who want to play. It is often argued that it is primarily the lack of possibilities for *outdoor play* that results in a negative evaluation of high-rises by families. Several studies indeed indicate that children growing up in high-rises play outdoors less than children growing up in low-rise housing (Agha et al., 2019; Kearns et al., 2012; Whitzman & Mizrachi, 2012). The frequency of children's outdoor play is very much influenced by two components: the availability of playmates and the availability of space. The number of playmates living in the same building is crucial for apartment children's outdoor play. Theoretically, the higher the density, the higher the probability of easily meeting other children. There are stories told by children that precisely indicate the advantages of growing up in high-rise or high-density settings with many children living nearby (Krysiak, 2019). There is hardly anything more favourable for children than friends to play with who are easily accessible in the same building. But this all depends on the policies to attract a sufficient number of families to high-rises (see Section 3) *and* the supply of space to play.

In many housing estates, children's need for play space is only recognized after the finishing of the construction, as families are not supposed to live in high-rises (Carroll et al., 2011). Focusing inclusively on family households is needed to secure enough play space for the children. That can take many forms both inside and outside the building: the entrance, the gallery, communal rooms, inner court gardens, and "real" playgrounds. For reasons of safety and supervision, space to play should be near the home, because children are more easily allowed to play outdoors when within sight of the parents (Marreel et al., 2019). This may be a reason to group families together on the lowest floors of the high-rise. Outdoor play space that cannot be supervised from the apartment feels as unsafe for parents with the result that children are kept inside (Brownlee & McDonald, 1993; De Ceuster, 2017). Concrete high-rise buildings can best be compensated for by green environments that also offer a great opportunity for play. Andrews and Warner (2020) found that the location of the building in green nature-like settings was most appreciated by families. An Australian mother quoted in their article noted: "I love living next to the river, I think that's perhaps the best part about living where we do" (Andrews & Robson, 2020, p. 271). Design should further take care of possibilities for children to go out of the building on their own. That means that lift doors cannot be too heavy nor lift buttons too high. Creating good possibilities for children's play can be further stimulated by creating attractive places for parents to sit and meet near places where children play. In a Turkish study, Gur (2019, p. 749) reveals that relocated families who are new in a high-rise particularly missed the shared space in front of their former houses where everyone used to meet: "We always used to look after each other's children….Now we do not even know each other or what others do." Play spaces function to build new social networks for both the children and the parents.

Creating good opportunities to play in high-rise housing estates is not an easy task. There are many failures when it comes to accommodating children's play in high-rises. When it is not clear where the children are allowed to play, conflicts between groups of residents may arise. Bugera (2020, p. 41) quotes an Amsterdam mother: "In our inner court it is almost forbidden to play. The older residents have the opinion that it is a beauty garden not a play garden." In some estates, the banning of play is officially regulated (Easthope & Tice, 2011). Fear of noise, vandalism, and other annoyances is mentioned as a legitimate reason. Possible disturbance is something to think of already in the first steps of the designing process. When this is not done properly, children's play may be banned entirely with explicit texts on placards like "this courtyard is not for ball games."

A lack of social connectedness stems from the lack of overlapping time-spatial routines among residents of the same building. Everyday routines have a great influence on who you get to know and who you will never meet. In many high-rise buildings, big numbers of residents live together without knowing each other. Living anonymously may sometimes feed criminality (Gifford, 2007) and is often detrimental to a sense of home. When an Amsterdam apartment family compares their actual apartment with their former living place, they regretfully remark: "It is more anonymous here, that corridor with all doors. You don't hang around, it is all functional….That is how an apartment works I think (Bugera, 2020, p. 48). Overlapping time-spatial routines of a limited number of households is essential to create a first level (superficial) of social connectedness (Forrest et al., 2002; Huang, 2006). To build on public familiarity among neighbours (Blokland, 2003), it is best to provide spaces in the building where only a limited number of residents meet. Instead of one big parking plot, separate parking spaces for the residents of specific floors should be created to help construct a recognizable—not too big—group of neighbours. Clustering residents that feel familiar with each other may also help to reduce fear of crime

that often outstrips actual crime rates (Gifford, 2007). Instead of one entrance with lifts for all, it may be better to link specific lifts to specific floors. That makes it easier to learn to know the neighbours. For families with children, the lift is particularly important. They should feel secure that their children are not being locked up in the cabin or being harmed by unknown people. Badly functioning lifts are one of the reasons why children are prohibited to play outdoors (Carroll et al., 2011; Churchman & Ginsberg, 1984).

To support neighboring among vertical living households, the availability of *shared spaces* is important. Neighbouring is beyond knowing by face: It is about socializing, doing things together, and helping each other. These community activities can be stimulated by offering shared spaces of different types. Shared functional spaces like extra storage, collective guest rooms, and common places to park buggies or bikes require residents' engagement in setting the rules, complying with the rules, and addressing eventual misuse. Shared social spaces to play, cook, and eat together are purposely meant to build community. Many apartments are too small to invite big groups. Communal kitchens and playrooms help to accommodate the social gatherings of neighbours, both parents and children (Warner & Andrews, 2019). Communal gardens to play and grow vegetables and plants are another successful example of shared social space in high-density contexts (Krysiak, 2019). Sharing not only stimulates the building of social networks but, as Nethercote and Horne (2016) show, shared spaces also save money, time, and worries (see also Jarvis, 2011).

Providing good functioning communal spaces in high-rise housing is not easy. There are many problematic examples often related to the size of the group of residents involved (too big) and the diversity of the residents (too diverse) engaged (Wassenberg, 2013). Smaller groups of like-minded people work best to create a sense of ownership that makes residents feel responsible for "their" shared space (Marreel et al., 2019).

5. Concluding Reflections: Towards a Reconstruction

Sustainable policies are such that many major cities are no longer "allowed" to only expand outwards. Building in higher densities, including high-rises, will dominate the urban agenda in the near future. With this future in mind, it is needed to pay attention to families and children's position in high-rises. In this article, it is highlighted that they have only a marginal position in the development of high-rises. It is argued that the dichotomous way in which we define children and cities ultimately defines city children and vertical living families as out-of-place. Present exclusionary policies and practices are detrimental to both cities and families. Diversity is at the heart of the urban. Good cities are diverse places in terms of class and ethnicity but also in terms of age and type of household. Young children and family households should have access to cities like childless couples and singles. And, as Easthope and Tice (2011) argue, narrow planning assumptions about high rises as not for families have already too often resulted in limited facilities for families and children growing up in high-rise residences. In today's urban planning, family and high-rises need to be reconciled.

Families themselves already started to do so. The number of families choosing to live in urban settings has increased. This trend can be considered an important locational change in families' housing preferences. Among young families, there is a group that is seriously interested in urban housing locations. Besides locational preferences, it is the qualities of the site that determine whether families are attracted by centrally located high-rise developments. In this article, it is identified what site qualities should be taken into account to really address families' housing needs.

Both in the design of the apartment and the building, several improvements can be made to better accommodate urban family life. The apartment should be designed with children in mind. It is clear that families need more space than childless households. Each child needs a room of its own. The layout of the apartment should support flexible use and contain space to store family equipment. Big enough and safe private outdoor space is an additional basic requirement for family households. Also, the building and the housing estate can be better designed in ways that support family life. Limited space within the apartment can, to a certain extent, be replaced by facilities in the building and the immediate environment of the housing estate. Play spaces for children are of the utmost importance, particularly outdoor green play space that compensates for the concrete high-rise buildings. Parental supervision from the lowest floors should be made possible. Challenging low levels of social connectedness among the residents of high-rises overlapping time-spatial routines is essential. Attention is needed for the maximum number of people that are supposed to use entrances, lifts, and corridors. Those numbers should not become too high in order to make it possible for residents to at least have a superficial knowledge of each other and can recognize each other as neighbours. Social connections can be further intensified by building various shared spaces, from communal gardens to communal kitchens. These recommendations all contribute to creating family-friendly high-rises and, in so doing, reconstructing families' relationships with high-rises in positive ways.

Positive changes will require big efforts to better suit the design of the apartment and the building for families. In addition, families should be explicitly marketed as one of the purpose groups of the newly developed housing estates. These efforts will not win over every family, but they will help to further support families' diversifying housing aspirations. Not every family is attracted by suburban or rural environments. The summarized conclusion from the literature is that vertical apartment living and happy family life are not necessarily at odds.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Isaac de Ceuster and Sara Bugera for their participation in the family and high-rise project.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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