

DOG PARKS: THE WASTED NEW URBAN COMMON IN REHAB CITY, EGYPT

Ahmed A. Shetawy, PhD

Associate Professor
Ain Shams University, Department of
Planning and Urban Design
1 El-Saray Street, Abbassia, Cairo 11517,
Egypt
e-mail: ashetawy@gmail.com

Dina M. Dief-Allah, PhD

Assistant Professor
Ain Shams University, Department of
Planning and Urban Design
1 El-Saray Street, Abbassia, Cairo 11517,
Egypt
e-mail: habbiba97@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Dog parks have been a growing phenomenon in Egypt for the past 4 years. Although it is increasing in numbers and size yet unofficially recognized and unmanaged by any institution and/or agency whether public or private as a common public resource (CPR). This has led to vivid ongoing conflicts between local communities surrounding the park and dogs owners' community. For dog parks to achieve effective and prosperous community relations, it has to be planned and designed on specific standards and regulations derived through the involvement of all concerned communities - not only dogs owners - and managing institutions.

This paper aims to document, explore and analyze the standards upon which dog parks shall be designed and managed. It also sheds light on the reasons behind the failure and/or success of dog parks in achieving effective and close community relations as a CPR in general and a new urban common inspecific. Finally, it explores, analyses and documents the community conflicts in the case of GUC Dog Park in Rehab City, new Cairo, Egypt from establishment till closure.

Keywords: Dog Parks, Community Relations, Common Pool Resources, New Urban Commons

1. INTRODUCTION

Dogs are valued and treated differently around the world depending on culture and environment. On the one end of the spectrum, endless amount of information and documented practical evidence show the extravagant pampering of dogs in the USA society. In 2006, statistics show that one third of total families in the USA own one or more dogs (Stecchi, 2006). Furthermore, of the 50 million owners having 73 million dogs in the USA, approximately 60% of owners own one dog, 25% own two dogs, 15% own three or more (The Humane Society, 2017). As a result of the luxurious care of their beloved canines, the USA dog owners spend around \$38.4 billion/year on regular and surgical Vet visits, food, medicine, grooming, boarding, treats and toys (American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, 2005-2006).

Yet Europeans can generally be considered a moderate model in comparison to the USA society with regards to the value of dogs as well as expenditures. Nevertheless, Europeans have tougher law and regulations in regards to breeding, raising, and controlling dogs to ensure better and sustainable quality of life for dogs. The city of Rome, for an example, enforces rules for better treatment of dogs through targeting careless or abusive pet owners. Fines reach \$65 for owners that fail to take their dogs on regular walks or show any abusive treatment (BBC news, 2005). Cities like Helsinki, Finland, dog owners are overwhelmed with more than 80 dog parks to choose from around the city. Millan *et al* (2006) concludes that:

“In most of the world, dogs are not cherished in the same way they are in North America and Western Europe”
(*ibid* 2006: 12)

The Japanese model is rather an interesting yet amazing example. The city of Mt Fuji offers dog enthusiasts and owners a unique experience of dog amusement parks, where dog owners enjoy rides and activities with their dogs. Dog enthusiasts may also rent a dog of their favourite breed to enjoy the park (Allen, 2007).

On the other end of the spectrum, China and its neighboring countries like South Korea, offer extreme example of dog cruelty. Their cultures perceive dogs as a commodity for providing meat and fur. Annual meat-eating festivals in China are still taking place despite the international and national animal rights protests to be banned. Dog hunters earn around 10 Yuan (\$1.30) per kilo; hence a medium-sized dog could be sold for around 70-80 Yuan (\$9-10.4) (The Economist, 2017). Extracting dogs' fur also presents horrific scenes of cruelty. Dogs are packed and squeezed into small wire cages, transported by trucks to the slaughter houses, thrown onto concrete floors, then believed to be still alive as their skins are peeled off (Allen, 2007). Addison (2005) estimates that over two million dogs and cats are killed for their fur in China only every year. Ironically, the Far East dog fur is illegally produced for the American and European fashion market. However the extreme example of animal abuse in China, the increasing number of dog-ownership is unprecedented ¹ (The Economist, 2017).

¹ Under the control of the Communist Party, dog ownership in the People's Republic of China was condemned as it was considered a 'symbol of decadence' and stray dogs were shot immediately since 1949. Owing dogs was banned until 1994 and strictly licensed until 2003. By the year 2006, with the relaxation of laws and rules, ownership of dogs increased by an average 25% a year, reaching around 2 million registered dogs. While only 50-60% of the dogs

Less developed and developing countries, such as the Middle East countries, present a vivid wide spectrum of contrasting attitudes towards dogs, especially in the context of unenforced or absence of laws protecting animal rights, in addition to the weak role of the animal rights groups and NGOs. Stray homeless dogs on the roads of the Middle-East, are commonly shooed away, kicked, and regularly gunned down by government agencies where stray dogs are considered as a nuisance. In contrast, pet dogs are taken care of by owners following the westernized model of dog treatment. Walking healthy well-treated pet-dogs in neighboring areas, or even on the same roads, where thin, starving, often injured and/or ill dogs are sniffing around searching for edible garbage is a common scene. While dogs are used for guarding land and people, yet they are considered the main source of nuisance in urban areas that may end up being poisoned or killed by neighbors.

From what has been presented above, it is evident that every country has its own unique culture in perceiving dogs as a pet, a commodity, and or as just a nuisance and source of diseases. Yet different perceptions towards dogs can be present not only within regions of the same country but also within district neighborhoods and streets of the very same city. Nevertheless, pet dogs as well as guarding dogs ownership has multiplied greatly in many countries all over the World since the start of the Millennia especially in urban areas (The Economist, 2017). Consequently, the pressure on localities and city management to assign spaces specially designed to accommodate dogs and dog owners outside activities have not been greater. Dog parks have recently become one of the new common pool resources (CPR)² helping to achieve smarter, friendly, happier, communicative, and more enjoyable cities (Hess, 2008; Matisoff and Noonan, 2012).

2. DOG PARKS AS A NEW URBAN COMMON

“In a perfect world, dog parks would not exist. Well-behaved dogs would have the privilege of being off leash in many areas” (King and Long, 2004: 1)

As cities aim to achieve smarter growth through safer environments, walkable neighborhoods, and better open spaces, dog owners and animal-rights activists began pushing for designated off-leash areas for their owned pets. Dog parks and consequent activities started to become an emerging new urban common. In western and developed societies, where animal rights is considered at its peak, smarter growth is achieved through creating healthier environments not only for human beings but also for animals and pets. It encourages them to live, interact and play freely and hence dog parks have entered the mainstream planning process (Hess, 2008).

are registered, statics show that the city of Beijing alone accommodated around 4 to 6 million dogs, more than five times the number in London or New York. As a result, Chinese cities adopted a one-dog policy to reduce dog numbers (The Economist, 2017).

² Commons have been broken down into subcategories; Cultural Commons, Medical and Health Commons, Global Commons, Infrastructure Commons, Market as Commons, Traditional Commons and Neighborhood Commons.

The increasing demand for dog parks reflects a clear fragmentation within societies where pets, specifically dogs are often treated as a main member of the owners' family, yet cultural and religious beliefs, and sometimes municipal laws and rules, tend to push dogs further away from acceptance in societies. This had noticeable effect on neighborhoods and community relations where neighbors prefer to spend time and interact with their dogs rather than socializing and enriching community relations Matisoff and Noonan (2012). In less- developed societies, and in particular middle-eastern islamic societies, the demand of specific open areas for dog activities is wrongly perceived as a social class issue. Although owning a dog is perceived as a luxury, dogs are commonly owned by all socio-economic classes. Consequently, dog parks often disappear from the main planning process.

Academic research on understanding dog parks and its relation with community development is yet rare, yet academics have attempted to analyze the emergence, management and governance of dog parks in relation to the Common Pool Resources (CPR) theory that could be helpful in understanding the challenges that face these new urban common areas, and continuing to exist Matisoff and Noonan (2012). The new commons is generally defined as:

“the shared resources (...) without pre-existing rules or clear institutional arrangements (...) a resource shared by a group where the resource is vulnerable to enclosure, overuse and social dilemmas” (Hess, 2008: 8)

On the one hand, parks, playgrounds, community gardens, brown-fields, sidewalks, streets, parking and public spaces come under the umbrella of neighborhood commons and consequently the CPR. Dog parks fit within the CPR due to the shared nature, management, and the vulnerability towards degradation due to congestion, overuse, and even the difficulties it faces in sustaining the basic needs for its users.

On the other hand, dog parks as a new urban common might not align with the CPR in three main points. First, dog parks may be considered excludable from surrounding public spaces. Providing fences mainly to keep dogs contained within the area and to provide safe conditions for other users of the park, to a certain extent excludes others for assessing and benefiting from it. This comes in the contrary with main economic attribute of CPR stressing that it is costly to exclude individuals from using the common resource, and the benefits consumed by one individual subtract from the benefits available to others. Nevertheless, dog parks are usually visited and enjoyed by non-dog-owners and their families for fun, new experience, information, and awareness. Second, dog parks turn to be, although rarely in majority of cases, non-competitive or rival if number of users and dog owners are low and responsible. Third, yet not often, dog parks are more likely to have pre- existing rules and/or institutional arrangements where rules and regulations are case specific (Ostrom *et al*, 1994).

For the dog parks to be an effective urban common under the umbrella of the city CPR and consequently community relations and the built environment, the design, establishment and management of dog parks have to follow certain standards and regulations. Such standards and regulations may be divided into two distinctive groups that are relative to management and design that are discussed over the coming section.

3. DOG PARKS: MANAGEMENT APPROACHES AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Scholars, such as Elinor Ostrom (1990) introduced a set of design principles to sustain the management of dog parks as a Common Pool Resource. These design principles aims to cover issues of rules of owners and dogs, resolution of conflicts, monitoring and most important of all the legal recognition of these parks.

3.1 Dog Parks Management Approaches

Matisoff and Noonan (2012) argues that the success and continuity of this common resource to overcome the collective problems of maintenance, depends highly on establishing a ‘sense of community’. Users’ volunteering contributions, either through money or time or labor, and participation in monitoring, rulemaking, and sanctioning, believe to guarantee successful operation of the commons. The sense of community is achieved though the cooperation and coordination between users, locality, and surrounding community. The neglect and/or conflict between them would result in not only the failure of dog park to achieve sound community relations but but also become a source of ongoing conflicts and waste of resources that may affect the whole neighborhood physically, safety and socially.

Various management approaches for governing dog parks have been observed and documented, ranging from private, public, and quasi-public management styles. While research mainly focuses on the formal dog parks, that are ruled, maintained by the city local authority, Matisoff and Noonan (2012) categories parks into five main categories as follows: first, *municipal dog parks with open access*; are mainly fenced and frequently divided for dogs of different sizes. Rules are clearly posted for park users guiding dogs and owners behavior but with no formal enforcement. No monitoring exists to restrict entry and no fees. Funding in this case is mainly provided by the city’s authorities, dog associations, CBO’s, and/ or individual donors. Second, *municipal dog parks with toll good*; run and organized by a city agency with clear enforced rules. Restricted rules for entry may include membership fees. management in most cases are assigned to dog associations assuring the restricted entry of licensed, vaccinated dogs and owners familiar with the behavioral rules posted.

Third, *residential association dog parks*; this type could be frequently be spotted on a much lower scale within neighborhood clusters. Small, contained but public open spaces between residential complexes present a clear example of a community-based management model. Fourth, *open access ‘unofficial’ dog parks*; as variable open spaces or even ‘no man’s land’, where dog owners allow their dogs to run free off- leash. In most cases, these spaces are not fenced, with no specific list of rules, and likely with less facilities than the official dog parks. Consequently, dog owners in this case, follow their social norms and practices to sustain order. Finally, *privately owned dog parks* are owned and managed by private owners that require restricted permit. Higher levels of facilities are often provided through, highly maintained courses, running trails, swimming areas, and wash areas are provided, often associated with related pet- services such as grooming, training and boarding.

Ostrom (1990) stresses that whatever the management approach of the dog park, there are management responsibilities that should be taken care of by the managing body. First, Congruence between benefits and costs. Second, users of the park have flexibility through continuous use of the park to modify, suggest, and/or make own rules (e.g. separating larger dogs). Third, regular monitoring of users and park resources conditions, either by the owners and/or official monitors. Fourth, sanctions applied in the cases of rule(s) violation. Fifth, conflicts resolution mechanism offers clear procedures for users in case of disputes. Finally, in case of minimal recognition of rights by government or the agency the park affiliated to, user's norms and rules overcome the parks officials.

3.2 Dog Parks Design Principles

Research based on the analysis of dogs' behavior, training experts in this field have pointed out the basic physical design and environmental guidelines and principles to create a successful dog park. The proposal of two or three entrances with double wide gates is always ideal for safety, also visually shielded from the dogs that are already in the park, as entrances and exits are the gathering points where incidents can easily occur. Areas not less than one acre (~ 4047 m²) is preferred, with non-geometrical shapes and boundaries of the park and activities have to be clear and well defined via fences. Ponds or lakes are recommended to increase the playing elements for dogs. The topography of the land, contours and trees could be functionally used as visual barriers to block dogs from racing towards each other. However, man-made structures may be an ideal substitute for view-blocking in case hills and trees are not available (King and Long, 2004). Furthermore, Stecchi (2006) stress on the need to plant specific plants (i.e. trees and shrubs) that can tolerate dogs' urine and heavy traffic³. Furthermore, landscapers need to totally avoid planting a clear list of plants that are toxic for dogs⁴, if eaten. Recommended lists of appropriate finishing surfaces for pathways (i.e. decomposed granite) and structures are also stated to achieve a sustainable dog park.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As a first step in the exploring, analyzing and documenting the case of GUC dog park in Rehab City till closure, Cairo, the authors divided the study into five distinct groups: 1. Dog Owners; 2. Park users; 3. Residents surrounding the park; 4. Vets; 5. City management. The fieldwork was carried during August 2016 and May 2017. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary qualitative data from a sample selected through different sampling techniques (see Table 1). Semi-structured interviews, direct observation and group discussions techniques were judged more appropriate than structured interviews due to security and other resource limitations (i.e. time, funding, safety and security context), as well as the type of data required.

³ For further information please visit: www.treesny.com

⁴ For further information please visit: www.dogpack.com ; <https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants>

Table 1: Study population, methods and sampling techniques

Study Population		Methods	Sampling technique
Dog Owners	-	Semi-structured interviews Group discussions	Purposeful then snow-balling
Park Users	Non-Dog Owners Families Couples Individuals	Semi-structured interviews Direct observation Group discussions	Purposeful Stratified random sampling then snow-balling
Residents surrounding the park	GUC Dorms Residents GUC Dorms Management Private Villas	Semi-structured interviews Direct observation Group discussions	Stratified random sampling then snow-balling
Veterinaries	Clinics surrounding the park	Semi-structured interviews	Purposeful then snowballing
City Management	Administration City Police/ Park Security Designers/Engineers	Semi-structured interviews	Purposeful then snowballing

Briefly, a total of 39 interviewees of all groups were interviewed. This was in addition to direct observation and group discussions over a total period of 2 months (1 month before closure and 1 month after closure). The researchers have also made use of several secondary data sources, mainly documentation, archival records, and online articles and websites while seeking the triangulation of data to confirm the validity and reliability of both primary and secondary data collected.

Over the coming section, this paper documents and analyzes the GUC dog park in Rehab City, Cairo. It tends to analyze the current physical as well as community settings against the guidelines provided above.

5. THE GUC DOGS PARK, REHAB CITY, CAIRO

Rehab City is a large scale private gated community located in the East of Cairo at the intersection of the Eastern Ring Road with the Cairo/Suez Road; ten to fifteen minutes from Heliopolis and Nasr City, 30 minutes from downtown Cairo, and roughly 1 hour from the city of Suez as seen in figure (1). It is planned to cover an area of 10 million m² (~ 2400 feddans) to accommodate 200,000 high and upper middle income residents in villas and apartments respectively. It includes services as educational, medical, commercial, sports club, recreational and maintenance facilities that are accessible to the New Cairo residents. The GUC Dog Park (GUCDP) is next to the Rehab Sports Club and overlooked by the GUC Dorms – 5 residential buildings rented by the GUC as a hostel – and 9 private villas as seen in figure (1) (Safey Eldeen, 2014).

Figure (1) the Location of Rehab City and the GUCDP



From the fieldwork evidence it has been confirmed that the number of dogs' ownership has been increased dramatically for security as well as pleasure since the 25th January 2011 revolution. Such increase in owned dogs - the majority live in apartments - resulted in an increasing pressure to find some open spaces assigned for dogs to play and interact with other dogs. The choice of such open space came naturally and paradoxically uncoordinated and unplanned as explained by one of dogs owners as follows:

“ ... I cannot tell when exactly the story started yet I can confirm it was around one year after the January Revolution when safety and security started to get a bit better (...) we just wanted a space for the dogs to play and we can meet other people and talk about dogs instead of talking about politics and what was happening (...) we wanted an accessible, safe, and secure place with manageable size and we found the GUC park meets such natural criteria (...) we did not have meetings and/or core group to manage the park it just sprung out of nowhere”

One by one, dogs owners started to discover the space, meet each other, exchange contacts, and group themselves in small homogeneous groups with respect to dog breeds, dog size, residence, and/or social background. In 6 month time, there was unwritten unofficial meeting hours or precisely hours where the park is full of dogs and owners. Dog owners from all over New Cairo and as far as Heliopolis, Nasr City, and Maadi flocks to the park on Fridays after the Friday pray till sunset time during winter time; and after *Asr* time – around 4:00 pm – till very late at night during summer time.

It has been also evident that the security issue was a major element in the choice of the concerned park. The GUC Dorms security as well as the city security and the mobile security care formed a secure environment for families and individuals to use the park. Moreover, the park was maintained by the city management and always lit at night as the rest of the city. Furthermore, parking spaces are available all the time around the four sides of the park as well as being separated from the main street by a service lane as car speed at its lowest.

Although the park has the very basic important safety and security issue that could help in establishing a successful dog park, it had many shortcoming with respect to management and design explained below.

5.1 Management Approach

From the fieldwork evidence, it can be freely said that the park follows the open access unofficial dog management approach. Although the park is affiliated to the city management in terms of maintenance and management, the newly founded dog park activities seems, unseen, neglected and/or ignored by the city management. The city management turned a blind eye on the concerned activities. It is evident that everyone was happy as long as no conflicts with the surrounding community exist and no demands from the dog owners' community are demanded from the city management. Moreover, no collective governing body and/or group from dog owners and park users was formed to regulate activities and set rules and sanctions, negotiate needs with the city management, monitoring the users and resources of the park, and to set a clear procedures to sort out conflicts.

Everyone followed his own norms and all sort of conflicts happened as would have been expected from any outsider. Conflicts as small as aggressive dogs and as big as parking, noise, drugs and sex happened over a period of four years. During this period conflicts resolution followed no procedures and/or rules rather than nice chat and meetings with surrounding residents and city security. This has been evident in the words of security personals as follows:

“we had seen all sort of problems till we reached the point we had to report the need to ban the dog activities from the park (...) conflicts between dog owners themselves made us call the police in many cases where events escalate rapidly as cars and in some cases villas fences are damaged (...) the noise was unbearable where young boys and girls park their cars and play very loud music and dance on the street not to mention the continuous dog barks (...) at night we had sex and drugs problems (...) we know it was not the dog activities that made the conflicts all the time but it helped in amplifying them by unconsciously encourages unwanted groups round”

Nevertheless, park users and dog loving surrounding residents although confirming the above incidents, they claims that the dog activities was banned because the city mayor villa is one of the surrounding villas on the opposite side of the GUC norms. According to them he started the whole big confrontation and steered up conflicts to have the perfect excuse to ban dog activities. This was explained by many interviewees in group discussions as follows:

“we do not deny the conflicts and mistakes done but things could have been sorted out if the city management wanted to keep a very social and fun activity (...) the year before the closure witnessed the worst conflicts since the start of dog activities. One day we came to the park on Friday and found rocks and traffic cones all along the eastern side of the park that has the mayor villa and a security personnel told us no parking is allowed on this side from now on (...) the next week we came and the Eastern side was soaking wet by the irrigation sprinklers (...) events were getting worst and worst till it reached the point where irrigation sprinklers were set off on us and dogs while being in the park (...) lights were not on at night for the last 6 months. Poisoned meat was thrown in and around the park, and planned regular conflicts happened between city security and dog owners (...) finally, we arrived at the park one day to find all the outer sides of the park were dug and within the next week the park was fenced and locked all around”

5.2 Design Principles

The newly formed dog community at the time started to have certain needs such as access to clean water, seating areas, benches and shaded areas. However, it has been evident that no solid organized attempts was made to communicate with city management but rather they tried to provide such needs by themselves in an uncoordinated collective manner on individual and/or small group basis. This was explained by dog owners as follows:

“the park has no clean water source but rather an irrigation water source that is not edible for both humans and dogs and hence every dog owner brings a bottle of clean water and a bowel for his/her dog (...) no shaded seating area(s) exist in the park and consequently we bring our own sheets and in some cases big brollies (...) n one contacted the city management to provide our needs as we were afraid to getting them know our activities so they would ban us from using the park”

Although the park area is nearly 5 feddans with good contours that suits design guidelines, it had no fences, no gates, no ponds and/or lake, no litter boxes, no signage, no trees apart from 4 palm trees in the middle of the park, and no services of any sort for dogs, dog owners, visitors and users as seen from pics (1). Dogs were not separated according to breed and/or size. It was like a funfair with no rules yet it could be working if given the chance as stated by dog owners as follows:

“all summer I used to wait till sunset to go out with milo to the park and meet many friends. It was always the case on Fridays after the prayer during winter (...) we had a very nice community. Park visitors were interacting with the dogs and piled up loads of information about dogs from all of us (...) the GUC students and villas residents surrounding the park were all fine and smooth till exam season starts and school time beginس (...) the park has potentials but it was not given any chance to succeed”



Pics (1) The GUCDP before closure

Neglecting design principles is not an option for dog parks. It usually results in serious health and safety issues. This was evident during the interviews with the vets as well as the park visitors. It was also confirmed by city management and dog owners as follows:

“dog owners tend not to pick up their dogs waste because there were no waste disposal boxes (...) the park was full of ticks and flees and we treated many dogs of them in addition to treating dog bites for dogs and humans (...) the dog viruses were spreading rapidly specially among small and young dogs due to the lack of health check procedures at gates (...) we used to be stung like mad whenever we sat on the grass and we finally knew it was the dog flees (...) by the end of the day, the park looks like a war zone where garbage is everywhere, the grass is full of dog waste and urine, and some of the grass goes patchy where some dogs used to dig the ground”

6. CONCLUSION

Dog parks have become one of the new urban commons and CPRs that city management uses to guarantee smart growth, community interaction, healthy community relations and hence better quality of life. The paper discussed the management approaches and design guidelines for dog parks that should be followed to achieve its goals. Management approaches of dog parks vary from extreme full control over entry, activities, and behavior for both dogs and owners to the far end extreme looseness that users' norms and cultural background set common unwritten rules. Design guidelines are set to guarantee the safety and security of dogs, do owners, and surrounding communities. Guidelines including double gates and fences; health, vaccination, and registration checks at gates; and vets, ponds, shaded areas and seating areas are of extreme importance to guarantee the continuous day-to-day activities of the park.

Applying the theoretical background underpinning the establishment of dog parks, the fieldwork evidence confirms the vivid shortcomings of the GUCDP since its establishment till closure. It has been confirmed that there was no coordination, negotiation, and/or cooperation between dog owners' community, city management, and surrounding residents regarding the establishment of the concerned park. Consequently, there has been no facilities and/or services provided for dogs and dog owners. None of design guidelines was in place from gates and fences to access to clean drinking water. This led to a severe deterioration of the park resources, spread of insects, ticks and flees, increase in injury incidents, ongoing conflicts between dog owners community and surrounding residents that extended to city management. Fieldwork evidence confirms that such ongoing conflicts resulted in some negative decisions by city management that helped and encourages some illegal activities (i.e. sex, alcohol, and drugs) to appear in the park during night time. Consequently, the dog activities had to be banned and the park was fenced, closed, and blocked from any access for the city community after 4 years since establishment. Nevertheless, all study population – apart from city management – confirms that the dog activities within the park serviced as a magnet to vivid community interaction and active community relations. It was the mecca of dog owners, dog lovers, families, and dog services marketing. Yet the lack of coordination and cooperation and lack of city management awareness of the importance of the park as a new urban common resulted in missing the chance to achieve better quality of life in Rehab City.

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