



Public Services Abroad

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THE OTHER contributors to this issue of *Library Trends* are each responsible for a certain branch of public services or for a review of individual aspects. This article considers the subject as a whole in a number of western European countries whose library systems are, in point of service, comparable both among themselves and with that of the United States. In the west and south of Europe are several countries with long cultural traditions and with extremely rich libraries which are of invaluable service to the researcher, yet it is impossible to speak of a certain standard of public services in their library systems. Consequently, the limitation to a small number of countries and to certain developments in those countries will need no further explanation.

Not so very long ago R. D. Leigh¹ said of the library system in his country, "In brief, the United States has a multitude of libraries, some of them magnificent institutions, but it has no library system." This applies not only to the public libraries that were the subject of Leigh's study, but equally to research libraries where there is a growing realization that it is impossible to continue in the old way. The growth of the university libraries and the ever greater demands made on these institutions confront their leaders with whole series of problems. It is not only the financial consequences of the ever increasing accessions figures and the resulting necessity to extend the buildings, but problems such as the upkeep of the subject catalog, maintenance of departmentalization, open shelves, and speed of service make librarians cast about for new ways and means.^{2, 3} These new ways and means are found in the field of cooperation, witness the Farmington Plan, Midwest Inter-Library Center, and various union catalogs.

If in the field of library cooperation—primarily on behalf of the public services—Europe can already report achievements, this is not particularly to the credit of European librarians. As a rule necessity has here accomplished what in the United States was not felt as a need.

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Moreover, the markedly different geographical situation made cooperation much easier in the smaller European countries. But merited or not, cooperation is a characteristic of the library system in a number of countries.

Perhaps Denmark is the most perfect example of this. "Co-operation is an outstanding feature of Danish library policy," is what the Danish librarian Knud Larsen⁴ declares in an article on the cooperation of the research libraries in Copenhagen. In it he demonstrates how by a rational division of tasks and a corresponding transfer of stock these libraries have made their holdings into a single rational collection which can be made available efficiently to researchers and to the country's libraries. The latter, especially the public libraries, have profited to the fullest measure by this reorganization.

The whole Danish public library system is based on a close cooperation regulated down to the smallest details. Most of the public libraries in the country are very small and operate in communities with populations between 500 and 2,000. There are over 1,200 such village libraries—very often a collection of books housed in a school where the teacher does the librarian's work as a sideline. These parish libraries are the basis of an organization of which the 88 city libraries form the next level. Of the latter, 33 are also county libraries acting as centers for the parish libraries in a certain district. When the parish libraries cannot meet a request for reading matter, they pass it on to the county library, which is generally able to help but sometimes has to call upon the research libraries. First among these is the State Library at Aarhus, which acts as the center for the public libraries and sends nonfiction without charge to any place in Denmark outside of Copenhagen. The library at Aarhus, founded in 1902, has developed very rapidly and is now also the library of the new university founded at Aarhus. Its holdings are not, of course, as extensive or as old as those of the Copenhagen libraries, so that these must often be called on for aid.⁵

Though there are important differences between the library systems in the Scandinavian countries, there is a great deal of similarity between the Danish public libraries and those of Sweden and Norway in their methods of operation. Both these latter countries, on account of their much larger territory and very scattered population, are faced at the outset with different problems than Denmark, yet one is struck by a basic design that is often strongly reminiscent of the Danish. New library laws in the three countries have strengthened the financial position of their public libraries and have greatly improved the or-

ganization of the whole. The system of central libraries, each assisting the smaller libraries in its area in the provision of reading matter, has gained considerable popularity in Sweden and in war-stricken Norway. The bookmobile service also has an important part to fill in these countries with their enormous distances. The cooperation of the research libraries in the interlibrary loans system is also found; to give only one example, Uppsala University Library alone sends out some 12,000 volumes each year to other libraries.⁶⁻¹⁰

It is well known that the public library system in the Scandinavian countries has been strongly influenced in its development by the American example. Attention will now be focused on a country where receptivity to the idea of the public library has indeed been fostered by what happened in America and, even more, in England, but where this idea was put into practice in a very different way, partly because of the influence of developments in Germany. In Holland the public library in the modern sense dates from the beginning of this century. In contrast to what was done in the Scandinavian countries, there was no attempt made here to integrate the small popular libraries scattered up and down the country in the new system. In the Netherlands a system in which a limited number of larger libraries would be established in towns of reasonable size was preferred. Perhaps the tradition of the existing popular libraries was still being felt, for 95 per cent of Holland's public libraries have been founded and are run by societies or foundations. Under a state subsidies scheme of 1921—repeatedly amended since—these libraries are subsidized by the state if the local authority first lends its financial support. By this scheme local authorities are obliged to help financially if they wish to qualify for a state subsidy for a public library within their boundaries.

There now exist in the Netherlands over a hundred public libraries which do not leave the rural areas quite so neglected as the above might suggest. Many of them send weekly selections of books to nearby localities where they are usually looked after by the schoolmaster. Very small and remote places obtain fair-sized collections of books for the winter months from the Central Society for Traveling Libraries at Amsterdam.

However, developments have not stopped here. Since the war there has been an increasing awareness that in comparison with other countries the public libraries were lagging behind and that a radical reorganization was demanded. This reorganization is making itself felt primarily in the library systems of the smaller towns and villages, which are more and more, and with ever mounting success, being

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serviced regionally from a central point. Libraries in the Netherlands are now experiencing a number of changes of great interest.¹¹

For works not represented in their holdings the public libraries and the library centers for rural areas can approach the research libraries. They will then turn first to the Royal Library at The Hague since it is there that the union catalogs of books and periodicals, which list the holdings of 53 and 166 libraries respectively, are maintained. Besides libraries individuals living anywhere in the country can apply to the Royal Library to borrow books, provided they have an introduction from a local official. All requests which the Royal Library cannot fill are passed on to those libraries which the union catalogs show as holding the works applied for, and these then send such works directly to the borrower. In this way the Royal Library receives some 90,000 requests by mail a year, while an average of 25,000 works are loaned outside The Hague. The other research libraries also take part in this lending scheme, though the university libraries show lower figures for works loaned out of town than the Royal Library. The function of the Royal Library in the Netherlands can to some extent be compared to that of both the State Library at Aarhus and the Royal Library at Copenhagen in Denmark.¹²

The library situation in Great Britain is too well known to need ample discussion. The centenary of the Public Libraries Act of 1850 was recently celebrated. The number of urban public libraries and branches is very large, and with few exceptions libraries are now operating in all English counties. From these, collections are regularly sent out to local library centers, of which there are now between 22,000 and 23,000 in Britain. All the country's libraries benefit from the cooperation organized by the National Central Library in London and from the regional library systems into which England has been divided. Each request that a library cannot fill is sent to the central regional bureau, which either finds a library in its region which can fill it or transmits the request to the National Central Library, where the regional union catalogs have been combined into a single national union catalog. Moreover, N.C.L. lists the holdings of 225 so-called "outlier libraries," mostly special libraries which have agreed to loan books when special requests reach N.C.L. The number of requests thus dealt with by N.C.L. exceeded 100,000 in 1952. There is room for improvement in this system, and its benefits could be greatly increased through the participation of the largest libraries in the country.¹³⁻¹⁵

Variations in the forms of cooperation are found in such countries

as Switzerland and Western Germany. Switzerland does not know the true public library; it has excellent research libraries, cantonal, and town libraries, but it tries to supply the want of a public library by the institution known as *la Bibliothèque pour Tous*. The activities of the latter are best compared with those of the traveling libraries in many of the countries dealt with above; boxes of books are sent to sundry neighboring places from local depots, while small existing libraries are provided with supplementary material. But once again it is the National Library at Berne, with its central catalog, and the university libraries which supply much of the reading matter.¹⁶ The need for cooperation in Western Germany, where the libraries suffered such enormous losses and where the postwar demand for literature was larger than ever, goes without saying. With union catalogs at Cologne, Frankfurt, and Hamburg, an information service and a corresponding interlibrary loans system have been created which, considering the difficult circumstances attending the work, are truly remarkable.^{17, 18}

Thus, for all national differences, the picture is largely the same everywhere: a system of closely cooperating libraries in which the research libraries gladly make their holdings available to the public libraries, while the intensive interlibrary loans traffic is nearly always facilitated by the presence of union catalogs. Where the latter are lacking in the form of large card catalogs—as in Denmark and Sweden—it is by yearly collective catalogs of foreign accessions, published in book form, that the desired information is made available. This cooperation does not stop at national frontiers. There is a very intensive loans traffic between the Scandinavian countries; Western Germany, England, and Switzerland are the countries that top the international loans list with imposing figures, and even the Netherlands, with their confined linguistic area, sent 498 volumes abroad in 1952 and borrowed 395.

All this should not, however, convey the impression that the library systems of the countries discussed are largely identical. As soon as the individual library types of these countries are studied somewhat more closely, it becomes apparent how important the differences are. Consequently, it is far from simple to compare public services in these libraries with what is done in the United States, and what follows cannot be more than an outline picture.

A library type mentioned repeatedly above is the national library, for which tradition still retains the name *Royal Library* in a number of countries. Along with the Library of Congress, the great majority of these libraries are the repositories of the national production of

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books and periodicals. Some of them also have in common the maintenance of their countries' union catalogs. But in most other respects the difference is large indeed. If these libraries are assigned a general character, it is Oslo that best fits the description, since there we have a university library acting as national library. The royal libraries at Stockholm, Copenhagen, and The Hague confine themselves to the humanities, and even in the British Museum this emphasis is found. These four libraries are distinguished by important early holdings, both of manuscripts and books, which are regularly added to. On the other hand the Swiss National Library is pre-eminently a collection of Helvetica, the importance of which lies primarily in its modern holdings.

It is clear that the service given by these national libraries must be of a strongly divergent character. They are research libraries, but they have to cater for a very heterogeneous public; the educated layman interested in science and learning will come as well as the seeker of antiquities and the university-trained researcher. If, however, the British Museum is placed alongside the National Library at Berne, we are faced with two extremes: on the one hand the mammoth library with its world-famed treasures, which allows access only for serious study, does not lend, and, in its traditional sphere of solid bibliographical and scholarly work, withdraws somewhat from the dynamic tempo of the present; on the other hand, the much smaller Swiss library, founded in 1895 and now housed in one of the most modern library buildings of Europe, with a preponderantly modern stock of Helvetica, lent out in liberal fashion, while thanks to the union catalog the other interlibrary loans traffic is also centralized there. Both libraries give service, but a service of a very different character, and one should not demand of either institution the type of service that naturally belongs to the other.

Occasionally it can be said that in some respects the national library does not differ very much in its function from that of the large public libraries in the United States, as in cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Cleveland, with their special collections and rare book rooms. There are no comparable libraries on the continent of Europe, though England has comparable public libraries in Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, and a few other cities. Scandinavia has similar libraries, such as the City Library of Stockholm and the Deichmanske Bibliotek at Oslo; but, generally speaking, in the Scandinavian countries, in England, and in the Netherlands, the public library holds, besides fiction, general educative literature and special literature for

those who want to obtain further qualifications for their career or their subject. Often the city libraries have additional collections in the field of local history.

Among the services given by the public library, the first that should be mentioned is reference. In this respect the States certainly are well ahead of European countries, perhaps less where the available material is concerned than in the information and guidance of the public in its use. Undoubtedly there are public libraries in England which do striking work in this respect, but in his 1942 report Lionel McColvin¹⁹ declared, "Reference library work is the outstanding failure of British librarianship." It is unlikely that the situation has been brought to a satisfactory level since the end of the war. But other countries may learn much from England in this field: thus the Netherlands have a number of public libraries with good reference rooms, but the use of these and especially of the information service could be greatly intensified. Moreover, the accommodations are often so poor that the installation of a real reference collection would be out of the question. In Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries the situation is definitely better. Denmark and Sweden are the happy possessors of numerous reference works; one is often astounded by the wealth of material which is awaiting use in the reference rooms of their public libraries. Good information and help, even extending to the preparation of reading lists, are assured. For the rest, it should be remembered in comparisons with the United States that the American library user is more inclined and better accustomed than his European counterpart to ask for information on matters for which the European libraries would direct him to other bodies.

An attractive branch of public library work is the work with children. In Denmark in particular this has been ably and minutely organized. School libraries are found in many schools, and these form an administrative whole with the junior library which is accommodated in a school or at the local public library. In many cases the junior library is an independent institution. It is the junior library which looks after the school libraries, while in rural areas where the parish library is also accommodated in the school, this is often done by the county library. The latter also sends class sets (one book in a large number of copies) to the schools for use in class. School reading rooms may be attached to the schools, and where there is no other public accommodation available locally for children they are open to all school children. Here the children can do their homework, but, in some places at least, they are also instructed in the use of the

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library and this instruction is part of the curriculum. They learn the difference between polite literature and subject reading, learn to handle the decimal classification, and are even trained in the use of catalogs. Also they are made conversant with encyclopedias and works of reference. The result is that afterwards, when visiting the public library, they have hardly any difficulties, so that librarians are less and less asked to supply purely technical assistance and have more time left for other matters.^{20, 21} It is superfluous in this context to expatiate on conditions in England and the other Scandinavian countries. It is sufficiently known that there, too, a great deal has been and is being achieved in the field of junior and school libraries. What is less well known is that since the war an evident increase of interest in this field can be perceived in the Netherlands. In Amsterdam in particular a number of charming, separately housed junior libraries have been founded. There are children's libraries in other cities, and in numerous public libraries a special room has been installed as a junior department. There is a special course of studies for children's librarians; a standing committee to study problems in the supply of children's literature has been in existence for several years; and in 1951 a congress on Books and Youth was held which resulted in the setting up of a bureau to deal with these matters.

We can only make a random selection of the other activities of public libraries. Extension work in Europe has not reached the proportions found in the United States, yet work in hospitals (including mental), prisons, barracks, and on ships has become a normal task of public libraries in England and Scandinavia. In Denmark the supply of reading matter to the inmates of old-age homes has become a typically national phenomenon, and in the other countries we find similar activities. For example, we might point to the library for the blind in the public library at Amsterdam. We might also include here the cooperation found in some of the smaller towns of the Netherlands between the public library and local industry in forming a works extension. The business branch which in numerous American public libraries is a normal department—often separated from the main library—is found in a slightly different form in Europe. Here it is necessary only to refer to the commercial libraries attached to a public library in Manchester and Leeds and to the Library for Commercial Economics attached to the Amsterdam Public Library.

Finally there is the adult education. England has had a long tradition in this field, but it is only in the last twenty-five years that the public library has participated therein. Here the public library found

an opportunity to become a center of local cultural activity by providing accommodations for groups or by arranging the meetings (discussion groups, lectures, gramophone recitals, concerts, etc.). That this opportunity was fully realized appears from the fact that now some 150 libraries in England possess halls for lectures, meeting rooms, and occasionally even theaters.²² In Denmark, the classical country of the Folk High Schools, where there are also many other group movements for popular education, the study group has become a normal feature in the public library. From one to more than six rooms in the public library building are often reserved for these. Numerous textbooks for the work of these groups have been published, and it is the task of the public library to provide supplementary literature. To the end that public libraries may perform this work adequately, they are assisted by a Study Group Center at the State Library at Aarhus.²³

As was remarked above, adult education has a long tradition in England, the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and London having given it a start in the period between 1873 and 1876. Besides the Extension lectures aimed at a public with general interests there are the Tutorial classes, generally for a maximum of three years, and the Sessional classes, for one year, which involve regular studies during the winter months. The university libraries play an active part in that they make available traveling libraries for the students in these several courses.

This function of some English universities is not found on the Continent, but on the other hand it is characteristic of a European university library that its doors are easily opened to those outside the university. It is also not uncommon for a university library to serve also as a city library or as (in Switzerland) a cantonal library. And the strictly university library is often more accessible than its American sister. To give one instance, there is no fee for extramural readers in the Netherlands and the regular period of loan is one month for them as well as for the students.

As we all know, there is a considerable difference between the American and the European university in that the latter does not have undergraduates. The European student comes to the university at the age of eighteen after a secondary schooling of six years. He is then better prepared for university work than is the American student beginning his studies at a liberal arts college. And the problems which the European student presents to his university library to solve are simpler than those with which the American library is confronted.

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What service does the university library in Europe give to professors, students, and outsiders? In his 1951 Philadelphia disquisition on the financial difficulties threatening the university library, K. D. Metcalf mentions as one possible way out the reduction of the service to what might be called the European university library level. The service is less important than the books, and in any case the scholar will find his way. The handicap of having to wait twenty-four hours for one's book and refusal of access to the bookstack would have to be taken into the bargain.² Metcalf's words make clear what is the American opinion of the service in European university libraries. And it cannot be denied here that America leads Europe in several respects. But all the same some marginal notes can be made to this dictum. In the first place the waiting period of twenty-four hours is certainly an exception. The German university library does not have a very good name in this respect, and it is regrettably often that one has to reckon with a few hours' delay. But there are numerous university libraries (and also national libraries) where conditions are considerably more favorable and where the waiting time is not more than fifteen minutes. Naturally departmentalization is an adverse factor here, but this is true in America as well as in Europe. The numerous departmental libraries common to the American university are also found in Europe, and one gets the impression that this development has not yet reached a standstill.

As to open shelves, this is indeed a privilege which the European library does not and cannot give its visitors. The German university libraries used to have systematic arrangements in the stacks which are, of course, essential if free access to the shelves is to have any meaning. Georg Leyh's famous dissertation on the drawbacks of systematic arrangement caused all the leading major libraries in Germany with the exception of the Prussian State Library to change during the interwar period to the *numerus currens* system. Even after the second World War not a single research library which had to make a fresh start chose the systematic arrangement. To be quite honest it should, however, be admitted that there are some libraries in Europe, mainly in England and Scandinavia, which allow free access to the stacks or to a systematically arranged part of their holdings,²⁴⁻²⁶ yet it is perhaps no accident that such libraries are housed in relatively new buildings. Many libraries in Europe are still handicapped by old or, at least, small buildings and would be unable, if only for this reason, to adopt a systematic arrangement. If we remember, moreover, that in many American libraries all works published before 1700 are

placed in the rare book rooms, it is clear that in the large research libraries of Europe this system is hardly practicable.

Considering the difference between the American and the European bookstack, it is not so surprising that libraries in the United States swear by the dictionary catalog, while the research library in Europe uses the alphabetical author catalog and the classed catalog. Some tens of years ago a heated battle was fought in Germany between the supporters of the classed catalog and those of the alphabetical subject catalog, a battle which resulted in particular from the sorry state of the systematic catalog in the German university library. This battle was finally left undecided; but the fact that so many libraries were giving up their classed arrangement in the bookstacks undoubtedly contributed to the retention of the classed catalog. On the whole the classed catalog—always accompanied by an alphabetical author catalog, of course—preponderates in the European research libraries.

Here and there we also find an alphabetical subject catalog, sometimes even by the side of a classed catalog. In view of the often divergent systems underlying the latter, an alphabetical index of subject headings to this catalog is indeed necessary. If it can be said that the combination of alphabetical author catalog and classed catalog with index of subject headings forms a satisfactory apparatus, it must on the other hand be recognized that the libraries in the United States show a much greater unity in this respect. Moreover, the condition of the catalogs in many European research libraries leaves much to be desired, as the classed catalog is out of date or sometimes absent altogether. America also has its difficulties with the dictionary catalog when this becomes too unwieldy, yet possession of this catalog makes for better equipment than is found in many a European research library. For the public libraries equipped with an alphabetical author catalog and an alphabetical subject catalog the difference is not particularly great.

The typical general reference department of the American university library is entirely wanting in Europe, but information service is given at the catalog and in the general reading room, while members of the research staff, whether or not on duty in seminar reading rooms, can answer questions. The specialist knowledge of these staff members, who have usually completed a prolonged university training in their respective fields of study, makes it possible to give to even highly specialized questions the attention which they deserve.

There is one other group of libraries which is continually increasing in importance and which has not yet been discussed so far, viz.,

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the special libraries. This is a group of the most varied kinds of libraries, and it is impossible to give an idea of their service. Among them are very active libraries aiming at detailed documentation in their own fields but restricting their services largely to the institution or the business to which they belong. It is through cooperation with other libraries that the holdings of such special libraries can be made useful to a wider circle. Thus it is especially this type of library which contributes to the Netherlands Union Catalog of Periodicals, by which very important holdings of special journals are made available to research work in general.

From what precedes, it may be concluded that in principle there is not much divergence in the ideas of what service should be given, but that practical realization in America is in many respects in advance of European practice. Better accommodations, larger staffs, and ampler funds—at least for the larger libraries—are of course quite important, but what matters equally is the use that has been made of all this. We find this especially in the speed of delivery of materials, their accessibility, and the systematic arrangement of the bookstack, the excellent organization of the catalogs—advantages which are often, and notably in the university libraries, missed in Europe. The public library, too, has not reached anything like the level of its American counterpart, not even in the countries of western Europe which have made the greatest advances in this field.

On the other hand, the effort toward cooperation, which is manifesting itself more and more in American library circles, is often behind Europe in this very field of public services. Europe has a much more strongly developed interlibrary loans activity, and public libraries here are much more vigorously supported in their work by the holdings of the research libraries than they are in the United States. Even in a country like Germany, where the gulf between the research and the public library (the latter being considered as a popular library) has not quite disappeared, we can speak of cooperation between the two kinds of libraries.

Another remarkable feature is that the apparently vast differences between the American and the European libraries turn out, on closer inspection, to be less important than was anticipated, and they show a tendency through changes in both camps to diminish. The catalog of the American library, on which so much pains and ingenuity have been lavished, probably cannot be maintained in the same fashion in the future in the face of the ever mounting costs. Moreover, the dictionary catalog has already increased to such an unwieldy size that

certain libraries have introduced a division into author and subject catalog. One prominent librarian has already advocated a simple author-finding list for the large mass of holdings.²⁷

The space problem in American libraries has become so acute and the financial objections to extensions or new buildings have become so large that solutions are sought along European lines. In 1902 President Eliot of Harvard defended the view that books were still accessible if delivered within twenty-four hours, and that for reasons of economy shelving in double rows according to size would be necessary. At the time, Eliot raised a storm of indignation, but he would certainly feel some satisfaction if he could see the present developments. The New England Deposit Library and the Midwest Inter-Library Center are the first instances of an evolution in which works of small demand are put into storage by libraries and are thus accessible only after considerable delay. But even in the bookstacks of the libraries themselves we now see all manner of compact storage systems which clearly indicate the direction of developments. In the new library of the University of Wisconsin at Madison the books are stored in the stacks in three groups of volumes of different sizes, while in a separate section of the stack compact storage has been introduced for the more rarely used works.^{28, 29}

The interlibrary loan, which has never been very popular in the United States, is certain to develop more strongly under the new General Interlibrary Loan Code of 1952, and the Farmington Plan, appointing numerous libraries as repositories for literature on a certain subject, inevitably results in an extension of interlibrary loans.

If we see here an evolution toward European norms, at the same time the American example, especially since the war, has not failed to make its influence felt in Europe. Notably in Germany this is clearly perceptible. If in 1932, in his book on the Scandinavian Public Library, Erwin Ackerknecht could still measure out at large his objections against open shelves, in 1952 we see Hans Hugelmann, in his work on the Volksbücherei, declare himself against the open shelves on pedagogic grounds, only to state in his preface that he has meanwhile changed his opinion.³⁰ The development in Western Germany is proceeding clearly in the direction of free access to the books, and we need only look into the journal of the Verein Deutscher Volksbibliothekare, *Bücherei und Bildung*, to discover how enthusiastically the new system is supported. The loss of books in Germany has also resulted in a stronger tendency than before to amalgamate the older holdings of local research libraries with the Volksbücherei into an

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Einheitsbücherei, thus reducing the distinction between research and popular libraries and drawing nearer to the pattern of the American public library.³¹ Developments of a kind similar to those seen in Germany are also in evidence in the Netherlands where open access to materials has been introduced in many public libraries.

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