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ARC2014-1225

Space Making: The Concept of Re-interpreting + Re-shaping

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An Introduction to
ATINER's Conference Paper Series

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Abstract

Today's city can be described as a new type of agglomeration made up of expanding, diversified, heterogeneous, complex and discontinuous spaces and relationships. The discontinuity in urban spaces and the urban environment can be explained as an openness to continual transformation and change. Architects, urban designers and planners play important roles in this transformation process by reinterpreting the dynamic of the city and reforming urban space by means of new scenarios for the future of the city. By emphasizing the concept of "urban reinterpretation and reshaping" the aim of this study is to examine this space-making process in the port city of Naples where radical spatial transformations are being experienced. By focusing on architectural education, the study aims to evaluate the proposals made by architecture students for the city of Naples. The process demonstrates how hard the students worked to understand and explore from an innovative and creative perspective the problems of urban life that result from the disconnection between sea and city that occur in many coastal cities. The study records an important learning and discovery process that is also valuable for the transformation of acquired architectural knowledge and experience into practice in future scenarios.

Keywords: Space Making, Urban Space, Reinterpretation, Reshaping

Introduction

Daniel Libeskind sees cities as the greatest creations of humanity that are designed to meet our needs and aspirations (Donald, 2011). In our new era where human needs, technological and economical necessities are constantly changing, the city is a new type of agglomeration made up of expanding, diversified, heterogeneous, complex and discontinuous spaces and relationships. This means there is continual transformation and alteration of urban space. According to J. Nouvel (1993), today the city has to be developed in small touches: by iteration, alteration or revelation. Apart from static, permanent structures R. Koolhaas says that cities are worlds of extremeness that give the possibility of all kinds of experience (Williams and Sharro, 2011). The constant uncertainty and discontinuity of the city means a constant search for new possibilities and urban spaces that allow these to be realised. Urban space is therefore constantly reshaping and transforming in response to new scenarios. Here, how an architect deals with this process and what kind of approaches she or he develops in this exploration and the space making process are crucial factors.

In this space making process different approaches have been developed in architectural practice: historic continuity, careful urban renewal, critical reconstruction (Wolfrum et al., 2009), restoration, regeneration, renovation, reuse, re-functioning, rehabilitation, reevaluation, re-adaptation and recycling (Dursun and Ozsoy, 2008, Uckan, 2000). Using recent technological tools, architects and urban planners have been working to improve urban areas and historic buildings that were abandoned due to economic, social and technological developments and trying to integrate them into city life with new functions (Dursun and Ozsoy, 2008). From the 1990s on, with the start of the reshaping and regeneration of inner city areas that were vacated in the course of suburbanisation, the conversion and re-using of mines, industrial areas, port areas, and rundown neighbourhoods started to be examined. Renowned architectural firms have carried out remarkable interventions within the existing city structure and especially in world port cities, including the city of Naples, which is the subject of this study. Among such interventions are the IJ-Plein Scheme in Amsterdam by OMA, the New Metropolis Science and Technology Centre in Amsterdam by R. Piano, the Borneo-Sporenburg Housing in Amsterdam by West 8, the Master Plan for Kop Van Zuid in Rotterdam by A.Rossi and O.M. Ungers, Ponte Parodi in Genoa by UN Studio, the International Port Terminal, Yokohama, Japan by FOA, proposals for Canary Wharf and Greenwich Peninsula and Millennium Projects for London, the Olympic Village in Barcelona and projects for Expo '98 in Lisbon. These port cities all benefitted from these architectural engagements. These reinterpretations are meaningful in terms of visualizing how design can be a generator, not a decorator of urban life (Gastil, 2002, Trigueiros et al., 1997).

By emphasizing the concept of "urban reinterpretation and reshaping", the goal of this study is to explore this space making process in a port city, namely Naples, which is undergoing radical spatial transformation. By focusing on

architectural education, it is aimed to evaluate the proposals of architecture students for the city of Naples. Discussions take into account their designs for the port of Naples and the rundown area around Piazza Mercato, which is an important city square with its social, cultural and commercial background.

Urban Hub Naples

In the 2011-12 spring semester, one of the graduation projects given at Istanbul Technical University Faculty of Architecture was on the Italian city of Naples, and was carried out in collaboration with The University of Naples Federico II, Italy. The title of the graduation project was "Urban Hub Naples", this being an urban design project that focuses on the area around Piazza Mercato and Port of Naples (Saglamer et al., 2013). The main themes of the Urban Hub Naples project were reinterpretation of the relationship between water and the city, reintegration back into contemporary urban life of valuable land that deteriorated as it lost its function and its users by creating new architectural scenarios, and explanation of urban transformation issues that are dynamic, flexible, multi-faceted. The main expectation was to create a holistic process through qualitative values (Dursun et al., 2014). Rather than considering the architect as only an object designer, the students were encouraged to develop a design strategy in an urban context.

It was also emphasized that the brief of the project should not be interpreted as a text that is simply related to functionality, it should be interpreted as an open-ended hypertext, which is related to the concept of "event", variability and bodily experience.
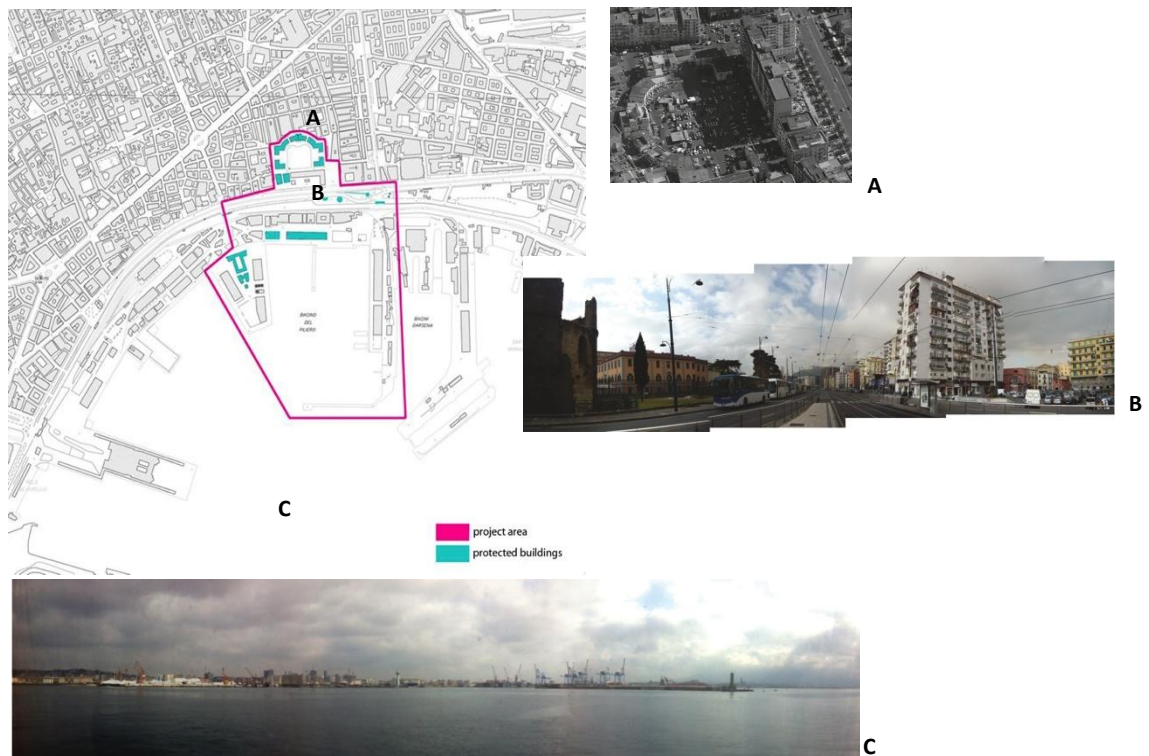
Figure 1. *City of Naples*

The city of Naples is a great urban laboratory with its social, cultural and economic importance as a harbour and commercial and touristic city, its architectural features and dynamic everyday life (Dursun et al., 2014). The city has been an important harbour and commercial city in the Mediterranean basin since its establishment in the 6th century BC as a Greek colony. The harbour played a significant role in the city's economic, social and cultural development and enabled different cultures and social groups to live together. These were also reflected in the city's physical entity, and with its churches, museums, squares and narrow streets the urban fabric gained a unique

character. The historical center of the city is under protection by UNESCO (CTUR, 2011) (Figure 1).

Figure 2. *The Project Area, the Port of Naples and Piazza Mercato*

Figure 3. *The Project Area*

Naples plays a significant role in sea tourism not only in Italy but also in the Mediterranean basin as an important harbour that cruise ships favour for docking. As Naples grows through tourism, it is very important to provide transportation both within the city and to the nearby tourist destinations like Pompei, Pozitano, Amalfi, Capri, etc. On the other hand, the barrier-like character of the harbour area between the city and the sea is considered a big problem in terms of integration for the city's universities, municipality and port authorities (Dursun et al., 2014).

The main objective of the graduation project was to reinterpret the dynamics of the city and rethink, re-function and revitalise the harbour area that is defined by two main axes – Via Duomo and Corso Garibaldi – and includes Piazza Mercato (Figure 2, 3). It was also part of the project to design a terminal building for cruise ships with surrounding shopping, retail, recreation and cultural areas. Piazza Mercato is located just behind an important transportation corridor and was one of the significant gates of the old city which was historically the home mostly of the textile and jewellery trades. With the relocation of these commercial activities to the outskirts of Naples, this area became abandoned and detached from city life. The critical aspects of the project are as follows: how to evaluate the potential of the square, how to bring it back into city life, how to emphasize its relationship to the sea and how to re-function it. Within this project, it was also expected that the existing housing block – the Ottieri building – that defines the seaside edge of Piazza Mercato re-functioned and redesigned (Figure 3-B) (Dursun et al., 2014).

It was anticipated that the project proposals would revitalize social aspects as well as the physical built environment. The designed urban flow would let both visitors and locals experience the city of Naples as a coastal city through social and cultural events that enrich their lives. In this context, the students were asked to examine contemporary urban life scenarios and their various aspects and develop detailed architectural interventions that would functionally suit the dynamics of the area and of these scenarios.

The main focus of the project was to design dynamic, multi-layered building(s)/structure(s) that can be adapted according to the urban flow and contemporary functions and expectations. The design proposals were also expected to support and relate the spaces and functions which have appeared spontaneously through the tension between order and disorder at the Port of Naples and its environs and as such the proposed designs should act as a "hub" which would facilitate the urban flow.

The product, which should be appropriate to the program outline, environmental conditions and projections, would be improved by the student and should be the result of the student's own design process and intellectual activities. Thereby, the student, as well as producing an objective solution, should also discuss the conceptual framework and its relationship to contemporary architectural discourse during the design process (Dursun et al., 2013).

In the design process, first the students were asked to make a master plan for the whole area and then were expected to produce the detailed constructive

design of a volume of 60.000 m3 [±%10]. The flexibility and variability of the configuration is open to interpretation providing that all of the proposed program components were included and total volumetric limitations obtained. The proposed program components can be listed as: temporary and permanent accommodation, cultural, recreation, information, production, working units, nodes for transportation network, services, open spaces that can be used for different uses/experiences.

Figure 4. *The Field Trip to Naples and Mid-Reviews*

Figure 5. *Students' Sketches of Naples-1*

The process of the graduation project consists of three mid-reviews and a final review. This fourteen week period was enriched by a field trip to Naples and seminars by the faculty of ITU and University of Naples Federico II (Figure 4). Figure 5 and 6 illustrate the experience of the students, their readings and comprehension of the city through sketches during their stay in Naples. The process ended with an exhibition in Naples where Turkish and Italian architecture students exhibited their design ideas related to the project area (Figure 7).

Figure 6. *Students' Sketches of Naples-2*

Figure 7. *Project Exhibition in Naples, 2014*

Design Ideas for Reshaping Urban Space in the City of Naples

The students demonstrated that they had gone to great lengths to understand both the project area and the city as a whole by looking at the existing dynamics of life and tried to find various solutions on different scales (Table 1, 2, 3). When the students' proposals are analyzed, the following tendencies can be observed:

The students prefer to create urban landscapes and artificial topographies by folding surfaces or repeating spatial units in order to shape a large area. These pattern-like spatial systems enable them both to create buildings between the levels and to generate new urban spaces for different activities that connect the city and the sea (students D, G, I, M).
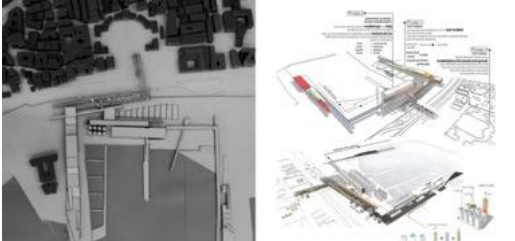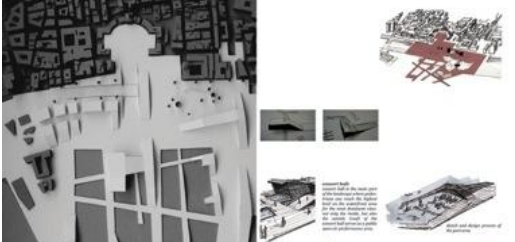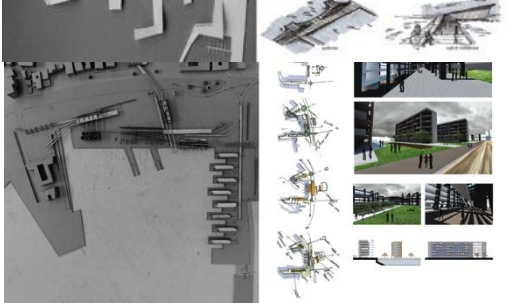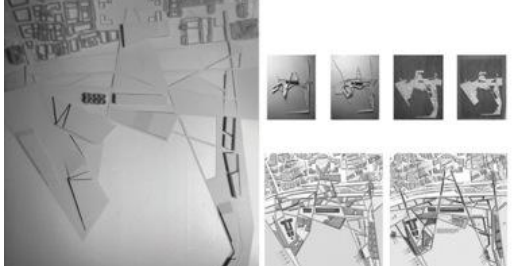
Some students take advantage of the characteristics of the existing urban structure and enhance the routes of urban axes both vertically and horizontally. The buildings or activity zones are developed around these axes, which are parallel or perpendicular to the coastal line. The ground levels of these line-like structures are left empty for performing public activities and keeping clear routes of access to the water (students E, F, H).

The proposals vary in the ways they reconstruct the spatial relations of the city and the sea and in how they reorganize pedestrian and vehicular movement flows. Some students configure the flow according to existing urban routes, axes and different levels and direct people through these routes (students B, F, G, I), others locate vehicular traffic underground in order to create civic spaces above (Student D, J). Some of the proposals construct over the road, creating bridge-like buildings with various functions, thus dividing the urban fabric into two between Piazza Mercato and the port area (students C, E, H, I, L). Some try to change the seafront line either by removing segments of land to let the sea enter the city or by creating public spaces over the sea (students B, D, G, I, L).
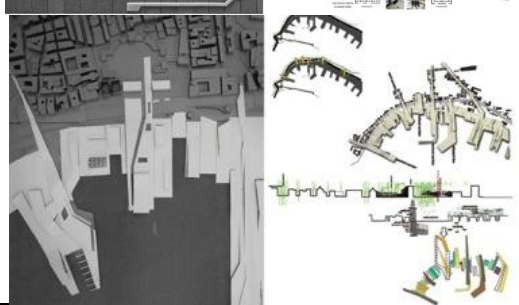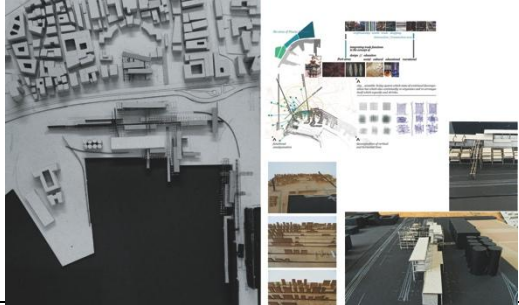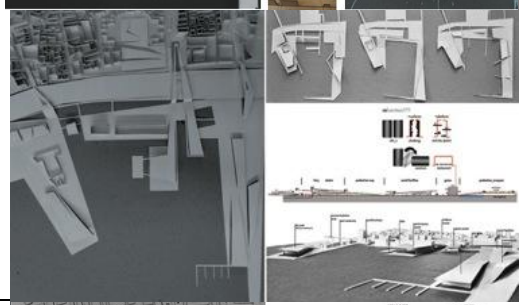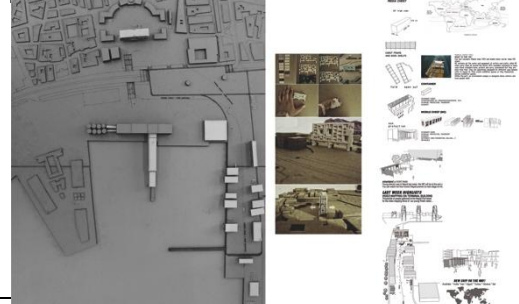
The ideas developed vary also in terms of the conservation of the existing buildings on the port area and the Ottieri building, the housing block that creates the edge of Piazza Mercato. Most of the proposals remove the large and small buildings in the port area and offer new ones (students B, F, M). In some proposals the silo buildings are conserved and re-functioned for various purposes: workshop areas, manufacturing areas, recreational areas, exhibition areas, a library, a museum, an art center, offices (students A, C, D, G, H, I, J, K, L). The proposals for the square and its edges also differ: almost all of the designs offer a new building for the Ottieri building with additional functions such as socio-cultural spaces (restaurants, cafes, exhibition halls, etc) and commercial activities. There are also some proposals which intend to protect the Ottieri Building by proposing some alterations such as opening up the ground floor, inserting public spaces throughout the building, changing the shape of the façade, inserting youth accommodation facilities (students F, K). Student J proposes a new Ottieri Building occupying a new position, set slightly back from its present location. This new building is a permeable structure between Piazza Mercato and the main street and has gaps in its walls

that are public corridors. Even though possible life scenarios are developed for the Ottieri Building and Piazza Mercato, the main concern is usually the detailed spatial organization of the port area.
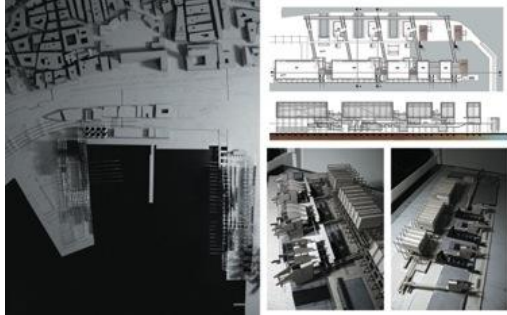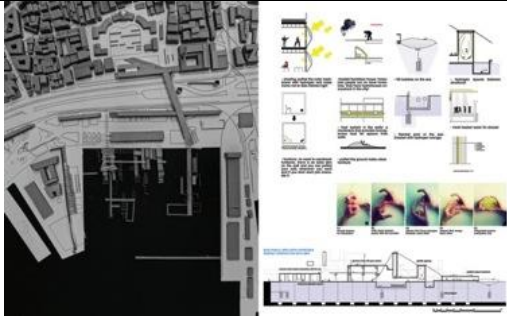
Table 1. *Student Proposals, A-E*

Student	Project Themes / Design Concepts	Design Proposals
A	Market Lab exploring future of the port, searching for a centre of international trade, shaping a place for production and marketplace, enhancing cultural, touristic and recreational activities e.sila bora	
B	Floating Platforms / City expanding the public area, moving the urban life from inner city to the water front area, designing huge platforms on the sea, creating new urban life, setting up the integration landscape and the port mert bozkurt	
C	Hub-Production in Naples removing Ottieri Building, designing new housing units on the east side of the area, protecting silo buildings as production areas, designing multi-purpose, structure like terminal building connecting other buildings in the area adem burca	
D	Pattern Topography designing pattern like system including filled areas and spaces, converting filled areas into buildings and spaces into water pools, taking the vehicle traffic underground, creating artificial topography gizem çakır	
E	Borders removing Ottieri Building, creating a new life by a powerful axis between Piazza Mercato and the port area, designing different activity spaces and an urban park around this main axis mehmet gören	

Table 2. *Student Proposals, F-J*

Student	Project Themes / Design Concepts	Design Proposals
F	Urban Spatulas focusing on substantial investment rather than incremental efforts, clearing up the way to the water like a spatula, bringing life to waterfronts by providing easy access for pedestrians to and from the shore bengisu ilksoy	
G	Urban Passage developing direct connections from the city to the waterfront through the use of landscape, creating recreational passages which each one has different type of usage, changing sections according to the functions of passage around fulya menderes	
H	Architectural Amalgamation decomposing vertical and horizontal axes, creating productive and dynamic habitat, integrating commercial functions with cultural, educational and recreational activities seda sultansu	
I	Port of Culture creating urban platforms and a new topography, shaping buildings by moving surfaces between different levels, re-functioning silos as parts of cultural park, taking off city land for letting the sea to enter into the city ayşegül taşkın	
J	Naples Triology considering a new residential proposal for Ottieri, creating new program for the port, developing ideas on the city memory, focusing on mobile architecture, the idea of mobile chest (MC) çiğdem nur turhan	

Table 3. *Student Proposals, K-M*

Student	Project Themes / Design Concepts	Design Proposals
K	Cinecitta Napoli reinforcing ship repair industry, integrating cinema industry into the existing function of the port, linking two industries by the production line, conserving interior silo spaces by using them urban interiors that reach to the sea deniz üstem	
L	New Energy, New Public Life: Hydrogen creating new public area with hydrogen energy, focusing the idea of distinctiveness, competitiveness and reversibility, introducing an architectural school program into existing fabric of the city ayça yazıcı	
M	Culturespace designing an experiment on self-organising urban space, creating voronoi plan schema that will guide the design in planar organisation, shaping an artificial topography idil seren yücel	

Some of the students propose specific functions and activities so as to transform the port area and create new attraction points through new life scenarios for the future of the city: film studios together with ship building and repairing workshops (student K), a market space at the harbour for civic uses and with experimental workshop spaces (student A), a hybrid scenario that takes advantage of being close to water by using hydrogen energy to create a new public area which is integrated with a school of architecture and design (student L).

The concepts of flexibility, sustainability and mobility are taken into account in the proposals with different approaches. Some students propose flexible spatial structures, which are formed of units that can be dismantled allowing different combinations of functions in order to cater for different needs (student A). Others create container-like mobile units - mobile chests - that accommodate all the work and equipment of artists and craftspeople. In

this proposal it is also suggested that MC ships will carry these units all around the world (student H). Designing spaces to allow for alterations and functional changes over time, in other words thinking of the spaces not just for a single use but as multi-functional spaces is another remarkable approach that is called 'functional reversibility' by the designer (student H)

Sustainability issues are also considered in the proposals and students exhibit different approaches such as using recycled building materials (student A), obtaining energy from the sea for new buildings, creating urban furniture and sea-structures (student L), enhancing the existing port functions for future scenarios (student K) or re-functioning the existing silo buildings with different activities (student I).

Conclusion

The main aim of the Urban Hub Naples project was to sustain and ameliorate the existing dynamics and functions of the city, to provide a multi-layered and flexible spatial configuration that will fulfill the urban potential. It was expected that students create alternative solutions that will relate the city and the port in the region as defined by the main axis at the Port of Naples. The process demonstrates the efforts made by students to understand the problems of urban life that result from the disconnection between sea and the city that is experienced in many coastal cities. The proposals' re-interpretations of the existing dynamics of the city exhibit innovative and creative perspectives for re-designing urban life and urban spaces for the future of the city. The process has been stimulating, encouraging and illuminating.

The proposals have created an important debate on the limits of architectural implementations in historic cities like Naples. Rather than overprotective architectural approaches that highlight historical continuity in urban space, the proposals here reveal radical interventions that are large scaled, bold and creative. Instead of small and static interventions, the students have used the advantages of being next to the sea and presented decisive, powerful approaches to reforming the urban fabric of the city. Accessibility, permeability, interactivity, flexibility, diversity, reversibility, adaptability, mobility, sustainability and livability have been shaped as some of the key concepts for reformation of the city.

In the design process architects transform their spatial knowledge of contextual characteristics and existing living patterns into meaningful spatial formations. It is believed that in the process of reinterpreting and reshaping the existing urban fabric, independent environments that are free from preconceptions and overly conservative approaches enrich the architect's own design knowledge and enhance his/her design experience. The end product of this kind of design process would be a regenerator of urban life in that particular space.

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