Tackling Inequalities in a Fast Changing City: Health at the heart of the Belfast Agenda

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Belfast
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Preface

Belfast has made vast strides socially, culturally and economically in recent years, and this is an important moment to celebrate this shared achievement of everyone living and working in Belfast. However, it is clear that much more can and needs to be done to improve wellbeing for everyone and reduce the persistent inequalities that continue to widen and leave people behind. 'Leaving no one behind' is the strapline and core idea of the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is the guiding star of the work of Healthy Cities. The SDGs also offer a solid foundation 'World Health Organization (WHO)' on which to build a future which is relevant not only to Belfast itself, but will assist in fulfilling the city's ambition to become a global city. Leaving no one behind is also consistent with the Northern Ireland Programme for Government, which provides a key regional context and support for the Belfast Agenda.

A healthy population is a city's greatest asset, and reducing inequalities is the most sustainable and effective way to improve the health and wellbeing. In addition to supporting people and communities in the city, it also strengthens the health and prosperity of the city as a whole. This publication aims to provide an outline of how the Belfast Agenda can strengthen health and wellbeing and address inequalities, to create an inclusive city for everyone.

In 2018, Belfast celebrates its 30th anniversary as a WHO European Healthy City. One of the earliest cities to join the movement, Belfast remains at the heart of the Network. Membership of the Network has helped develop significant capacity on intersectoral collaboration across the city, and this publication aims to highlight how the city can utilise this experience in the implementation of the Belfast Agenda. It also provides examples from other WHO Healthy Cities to assist in identifying locally relevant solutions.

The long term vision of the Belfast Agenda is welcome, as an opportunity to explore the story of the current situation, identify recurring and overarching themes, and put in place collaborative, sustained approaches that effectively address complex issues. The success of such approaches is well documented and includes the sustained investment in cycling in the Netherlands and Denmark, in reducing inequalities in health in Slovenia[i] , and in education in Finland and Sweden. Key to their success is that these approaches have been sustained across administrations, in some cases over several decades. The long term approach offers this opportunity for Belfast, and this is an exciting time to work with agencies and communities across the city to develop the Belfast Agenda and build the city as a healthy, sustainable, equitable and safe place.

Leaving no one behind: a local and global agenda

Leaving no one behind is the core theme of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, of which Goal 11 focuses specifically on cities and communities[ii]. The same theme is re-emphasised in the UN New Urban Agenda, which commits member states to sustainable urban development following its adoption at the UN General Assembly in December 2016[iii]. Creating a city that can support everyone is also at the heart of the 100 Resilient Cities initiative, which Belfast joined in 2016[iv]. The Programme for Government provides an agenda to strengthen wellbeing for everyone across Northern Ireland, and also provides a concrete way to link the SDGs to regional and local initiatives.

There is, in other words, a strong and growing global movement focusing on inclusive, sustainable and resilient cities, where everyone is able to lead active and fulfilling lives. 'Leaving no one behind' is its ambitious and powerful call to action, which also stresses that reducing inequalities is a key element of an inclusive and successful 21st century city. For Belfast, the Belfast Agenda is an important opportunity to localise this global agenda, and set a direction that will begin to address the long standing, complex and persistent inequalities blighting the lives of too many people and communities.

Importantly, this will not only improve the wellbeing of local people, but also contribute to the city's ambition to become a key global city.

The original rationale of Belfast to join the WHO European Healthy Cities Network was that a wider understanding of health as a resource for individuals and communities would benefit the city as a whole and contribute to reducing inequalities, while collaboration and shared learning with other cities would help deal with the complex issues affecting health outcomes[v]. Since then, Belfast has changed dramatically, but a cross cutting, strategic focus on how healthy cities are achieved remains relevant to maximise the potential of the Belfast Agenda.

A vision for a healthy Belfast

In 2035, children born today will be coming of age. Children currently in nursery and primary school will also be beginning their adult lives, graduating from University and taking up jobs; some will have children of their own in the next generation. Today's young people will be the leaders of 2035; the innovators, implementers, developers and parents. They will be building on and benefitting from the experience and expertise of their parents, today's adults, who will remain in valuable roles as mentors, teachers, advisers and indeed implementers themselves.

The children of 2035 will have their own vision, shaped by the changes and initiatives put in place now and in the next 18 years. However, the vision of children in Belfast today is clear: they want a city that is inclusive, connected, green, clean and safe. They value equity, diversity and sustainability, and they prioritise people of all ages equally; *"I think we need to stop cars parking on pavements, so my granny can get safely to the shops, and my mum can push the pram on the path while we walk to school"*[vi].

The vision for a healthy Belfast is, then, a city that puts people first. It is a city where children can dream, grow and play. It is a city where they can make their future, pursuing their dreams into aspirations, ambitions and achievements, and where they are assured that everyone can do the same. It is a city where public space supports and encourages active living on living streets, and jobs and services enable active engagement in society. Ultimately, it is a city that values everyone as human beings.

People, place, process: strategic action to leave no one behind

The clear core message arising from the evidence base on determinants of health is echoed in the vision of children in Belfast today: Wellbeing equals supportive environments and sustainable living conditions for everyone[vii,viii]. Understanding what supportive conditions look like for all population groups is an essential starting point to change. Responding to that understanding with sustained action over time is vital to achieve sustainable change. All sectors therefore play a role in creating a healthy society, and need to work towards a common goal to achieve lasting results.[ix] The Belfast Agenda offers a new opportunity to create that shared goal, as a shared plan by a wide community planning partnership. Its direct link to the Local Development Plan further strengthens opportunities to develop a critical shared approach.

Crucial for success is, however, a systematic approach to action, along with a clear understanding of how different issues link together. The WHO Europe framework for

reducing inequalities focuses on three main domains for action: people, place and process[x]. The framework is based on analysis of evidence on the social determinants of health, which highlights that strategic level action must include action on all three domains. These domains, which are reflected in the SDGs, the Urban Agenda and the 100 Resilient Cities initiative, are also relevant for the Belfast Agenda.


1.   People: Understand the 'Belfast picture' fully and systematically

The interconnections between issues in a city are both dense and difficult to map[xi,xii]. Understanding them is nevertheless essential to identify and differentiate between root causes, symptoms and contributing factors. The key advantage of a comprehensive picture is that it offers a strong basis for identifying potential entry points for interventions, and in particular enables coordination of actions into a systematic network. This increases opportunities to capitalise on co benefits, and reduces the risk of gaps and missed opportunities.[xiii]

The Belfast Agenda provides an opportunity to fully understand the local assets and drivers of wellbeing, as well as factors behind the persistent inequalities limiting the city's potential. A cross sectoral analysis should be a core element underpinning all action plans developed as part of the Belfast Agenda. Experience and expertise in this field is available in the community and voluntary sector, as well as in the local universities.

Key elements of developing a 'Belfast picture' include :

- A commitment to develop and maintain a local evidence base
- Engaging local communities to understand local perspectives and narratives
- Systematic and sustained review of evidence throughout the plan period
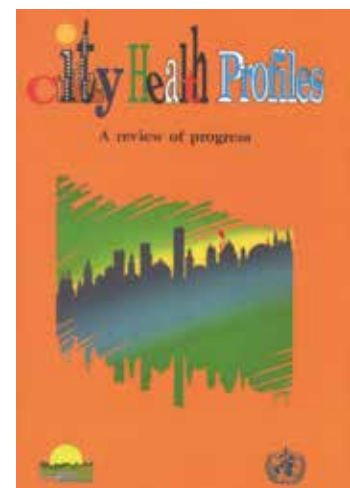
2.   Place: Delivering integrated planning

Community planning is based on the principle of collaboration, but joint public sector planning remains a challenge across Northern Ireland. The intricate network of issues and actions required to create good living conditions for everyone must be coordinated. It must also involve partners and stakeholders at a range of levels, to manage and support delivery. [xiv] Critically, local people and communities need to have a role and a voice, as stakeholders who can actively shape and take action in their localities and areas of interest.[xv]

Key elements to strengthen integrated planning include:

*   Building capacity amongst officers within public sector organisations to engage people across communities
*   Building capacity within communities to engage effectively in place based approaches.
*   Strengthening collaboration with the community and voluntary sector, linking local knowledge and skills to statutory sector evidence and resources

3.   Process: Developing a long term pathway to impact

Changing direction on issues as complex as reducing inequalities and improving wellbeing requires a steady, sustained commitment over years or even decades. A long term goal and indicators that help set a pathway to that goal are therefore essential to guide action over time.

The SDGs and the New Urban Agenda offer a clear, evidence based direction for action, which is directly relevant to Belfast as a WHO Healthy City. Goals 3, 10 and 11 can offer a route map for the Belfast Agenda, particularly in relation to action designed to strengthen the economy while reducing inequalities. Importantly, the SDGs include validated indicators that can be used to monitor progress, and benchmark Belfast not only nationally but internationally.

Key elements of a pathway to ensure impact include:

*   Identifying data development needs, including new types of indicators and measurement methods[xvi],
*   Engaging local people and communities, to strengthen and deepen the Smart Cities agenda of Belfast City Council
*   Strengthening collaboration with the community and voluntary sector and universities to maximise capacity and build on capacity in data capture, mapping and visualisation

Barcelona Health in the Neighbourhoods initiative

Barcelona Health in the Neighbourhoods is a community development and health in all policies strategy initiated in 2007. It aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city, and reduce the gap between these neighbourhoods and more affluent areas. The focus of the programme, which has political commitment from the city council, has been on establishing assets and needs in each area, building institutional capacity to address needs, and leveraging in funding from central government and other sources to strengthen service provision. Communities have also been engaged directly in both identifying needs and in information and awareness campaigns. The project has built intersectoral capacity and relationships, which have been highlighted as a strength in evaluations. Initial results indicate improvements in health in areas that have participated in the programme, in particular in relation to self-perceived health and wellbeing.

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2. Growing wellbeing while growing the economy

The four initial priority areas can contribute to creating wellbeing and reducing inequalities. The priorities of growing the economy and working and learning have been considered together, as there is a clear link between the two outlined in the consultation document. Similarly, the themes of city development and living here have been joined up, as they both consider liveability as a key aim for the city. The rationale for this is that inequalities typically arise when each area or domain is considered in isolation, while a joined up approach assists in identifying solutions that tackle the causes, rather than merely the symptoms of inequalities.[xvii]

A focus on creating wellbeing for everyone can provide a catalyst for action. A focus on reducing inequalities, meanwhile, offers an evidence base to support action planning and prioritising to ensure consistent action across priorities.[xvii] It can also assist in identifying relevant roles for the community planning partners and the wide range of stakeholders in the Belfast Agenda.

Growing the economy - working and learning: Prioritising the life course

Investing in good living conditions for everyone is an effective way to strengthen the economy. In the short term, improving the public realm of the city creates jobs. Investing in early years, community development and social innovation and support mechanisms including community care also creates jobs, but more importantly, strengthens confidence within communities. In the medium to long term, this investment supports people to take control of their own lives, builds communities, and releases energy and talent from the widest possible population base.[xix] At the same time, it reduces expenditure required to deal with the impact of people and communities being left behind.

The SDGs and the New Urban Agenda prioritise investment in early years and in supportive environments as key mechanisms for strengthening local economies. This draws on evidence that prosperous cities are those that prioritise closing inequality gaps and support existing residents alongside seeking external investment. The benefits are particularly great for children and young people, whose life opportunities are shaped by the conditions they grow up in. Supportive environments also provide more opportunities for older people to stay active and when needed, be cared for at home.[xx]

The Belfast Agenda can maximise its impact on improving wellbeing and reducing inequalities through action in a number of key areas.

1. **People: Jobs need to be secure, offer a living wage and provide reasonable control over the job**

    Good jobs' are characterised by a living wage, a degree of job security and some control over the work. A living wage helps people find a sustainable route out of poverty. A degree of job security enables longer term planning, which helps people to take control of their lives. A level of control over the job within the workplace reduces stress and its harmful impacts on health and wellbeing, and can improve mental wellbeing as well as productivity. This contributes to wellbeing by reducing stress and incentivising work, with the positive impacts that meaningful activity brings. It also contributes to maximising returns on investment, by creating stability in the workforce and reducing expenditure on the benefit system.

    Areas for action relevant to the Belfast Agenda include:
    *   Providing leadership in the statutory sector by ensuring jobs and apprenticeships in or funded by the sector are 'good jobs'
    *   Setting standards for jobs supported by public funding.
    *   Prioritising workplace health and wellbeing at work

2. **Place: Jobs need to be created across skill levels in a variety of sectors**

    Progression options and opportunities are important to motivate people to take up employment and develop new skills. Creating new jobs in the middle skill levels and sectors offers a way to do this, while also driving movement in the job market. It also helps avert the economic risks and widening inequalities associated with a job market divided between low skilled, low paid jobs at one end, and highly paid expert jobs at the other.

    Areas for action relevant to the Belfast Agenda include:
    *   Identifying the local employment gaps, alongside skills gaps
    *   Prioritising the types of investment and jobs attracted to the city
    *   Utilising business development support to promote diverse job creation

3. **Process: New approaches to education and training are needed to engage people**

    A diverse economy requires a diverse skills base. Belfast has a strong third level education sector, but as recognised in the Belfast Agenda, in many parts of the city young people do not progress to this level.

    SDG 1, which focuses on ending poverty, highlights that social and practical support is essential to enable people and families to take up work in a sustainable way that reduces poverty and inequality. For adults, practical support such as childcare and transport increase their ability to participate in training and sustain employment. Access to appropriate support and care is also an element of enabling employment, and is particularly important to enable people with disabilities, mental health issues and long term conditions to find sustainable and meaningful jobs.

Areas for action relevant to the Belfast Agenda include:

*   Introducing the full range of education and training as sustainable options for young people from primary school onwards

- Providing practical support to help people take up training, work placements and jobs
- Developing public transport routes to increase the accessibility of jobs
- Piloting apprenticeship schemes, including opportunities for adults to engage in this type of work based learning.
- Exploring options to make provision of staff training a requirement of publicly funded investment support

4. People, place and process: Investment in early years

SDG 4 states that improving educational attainment is one of the most effective ways to improve the life opportunities and long term health outcomes of children and young people. Children's life opportunities are, however, largely determined in the early years of life. Educational attainment is also strongly linked to family support, which can most effectively be addressed in the early years. Therefore, investment in early years' provision, including family support and early intervention, is a key mechanism for sustainable improvement in the life chances of children in Belfast, and through them the city as a whole.

Areas for action relevant to the Belfast Agenda include:

- Investing in early years initiatives
- Coordinating initiatives supporting families with young children, building on and enhancing the SureStart network.
- Building on existing activities within community centres
- Examples of 'best buys' that could be considered include:
    - Low threshold/pre intervention parenting support
    - Facilities and programmes supporting play and social contacts
    - After school provision, with access to homework support for all primary school ages

Jig-So: supporting early years in Swansea

Swansea adopted an Early Years Strategy in 2014, which highlights among other things a lack of services preparing parents for birth. The Jig-So project is a multidisciplinary team of midwives, nursery nurses, family support workers and early language workers, which were established to support first time parents aged 16-24 to help their families thrive and stay healthy. The service has a range of aims, including building knowledge and confidence, supporting bonding between parents and child, and improving mental health and wellbeing of parents. The overarching aim is to provide a holistic support service, which can identify any problems and intervene at an early stage. The service was established in 2014-15, and has to date worked with 300 young families. Early evidence indicates that the intersectoral approach and support provided, along with early response to any problems, has prevented a number of children being registered for child protection, while a number of families no longer require intervention from social services.

Under the strategy, Swansea is also piloting a Primary Care Early Years Worker approach, which is intended to support families with young children, who are not meeting developmental milestones at the age of 3, or present with challenging behaviour making it difficult for them to eg. cope with school. The service is based on referrals from GPs, and has been designed to both improve outcomes for children and reduce pressure on GPs, who do not have the time or expertise to tackle the family issues underlying the developmental gap. The approach is in its early stages, but initial evidence highlights improvements in child behaviour and in parents' mental and emotional wellbeing following intervention from the worker, which can include setting routines and boundaries. Parents also report a greater willingness to engage with this worker than a GP.

The Edinburgh Guarantee

The Edinburgh Guarantee is an initiative led by the City of Edinburgh Council intended to ensure that all school leavers in the city have a positive destination to go to. The initiative engages organisations across sectors in 'shaping and recruiting youth talent in the city' and aims to increase access to jobs, apprenticeships and training. A number of programmes also run in schools to increase young people's aspirations, understanding of options and awareness of opportunities.

Over 90% of school leavers in Edinburgh today have a positive destination, an increase of 10% since 2011 when the Edinburgh Guarantee was established in response to falling youth employment rates. This includes over 2,200 young people who have been matched with opportunities that over 550 employers have contributed to.[xxi]

Living here and city development: Supporting community development

The city environment sets the scene for people's lives, and therefore is a critical factor that can either strengthen or constrain people's life opportunities and health outcomes. Placemaking that recognises its role in wellbeing is an effective way to create healthy and sustainable cities, and can also contribute to strengthened collaboration across city sectors. Learning from places that are prioritising wellbeing and equity highlights a number of central elements for success.

SDG 11 highlights that an accessible, supportive and welcoming city environment for everyone is a starting point for a healthy, sustainable and prosperous city community and economy. Younger and older people reap particular benefits in places that take account of them, which typically also provide attractive environments for all population groups. A city that engages young people as valued residents with a role to play in their city and community can also encourage higher levels of ownership and engagement in the long term. This inspires community led regeneration and contribute to breaking negative cycles of disengagement and disadvantage.

1. **People: Communities need to be core partners in city development**

   Cities are built on their people and communities. This is a cornerstone of SDG 11, which stresses that flourishing cities prioritise and value their people, as the cornerstones living, working, playing and loving within the city. People living in such cities feel part of the city, and are willing to invest in it by making long term plans, establishing families and participating in the social and civic life of the city. Conversely, cities that involve and listen to residents have access to the widest and richest data and evidence on what works in their particular circumstances. As a result, these cities are able to be flexible and efficient in their resource use, while also being responsive to local needs. They are typically also innovative and attract high value residents, businesses and investors.

   Areas for action relevant to the Belfast Agenda include:

   - Establishing engagement mechanisms for the most vulnerable groups; for example councils of children, older people and people with disabilities
   - Strengthening capacity on co production approaches both within communities and agencies
   - Utilising local evidence and narratives to support decision making

2. Place: Physical and social regeneration need to be integrated at strategic and local level

SDG 11 emphasises that physical regeneration offers an important sign to communities that they are valued and can spark a renewal process, particularly when communities are involved in a co-production process. Social regeneration, including investment in education and training, community development and enterprise, strengthens that message and helps build the capacity needed to sustain a healthy community.

Areas for action relevant to the Belfast Agenda include:

• Establishing a platform for communities to engage in regeneration
• Strengthening collaborative working across all levels of government and between agencies and communities to maximise the potential of investment

3. Process: Investment needs to be distributed across the city

The city centre is the economic driver for cities across Europe. The public realm and infrastructure are important catalysts for action. A number of cities have, however, taken a wider approach linking city centre investment with neighbourhood development, seeking to create attractive places that new residents will want to move to. Evidence indicates that such a twin track approach increases residents' satisfaction with their living conditions, while also boosting the economy and attracting additional investment.

Areas for action relevant to the Belfast Agenda include:

• Utilising the statutory link between the Belfast Agenda and the Local Development Plan to take a strategic focus linking city centre and neighbourhood development
• Combining physical regeneration with investment in social regeneration
• Utilising monitoring data to assist in setting regeneration priorities and plans across the city

Kuopio, Finland - building the city through investing in liveability

Kuopio, a small city in eastern Finland, has over the last 20 years developed a model for city development and regeneration that is now providing a guiding star throughout the country. This city model emphasises easy access to the city centre by all transport modes – a 1,300 space underground car park was recently built under the central market square - but prioritises walking and cycling within a two kilometre radius from the city centre. The model also centres on a 'transit city' surrounding the city centre, and the city development plan has prioritised residential development on corridors well served by public transport; there has also been investment in public transport including a bus only bridge connecting an outlying neighbourhood to the city centre. One specific investment has been the development of a bus priority road connecting a suburb to the city, reducing travel distance from 12 to four kilometres.

A key driver for the Kuopio model was the growth of out of town retail, which was reducing the viability of the city centre. This trend has now reversed, while city centre property has risen in value as a result of a renewed demand for city centre living. The population of the city is growing at least in part due to the city's reputation for high quality living environments, and active travel is accounting for a growing proportion of travel.

Engaging the community in Carlisle – the 'Big Green City'

Life expectancy in Carlisle is lower than the England average, which is one of the reasons why health and wellbeing is a key priority for Carlisle City Council. Green infrastructure has been identified as a key driver of physical, mental and social wellbeing, and the city has developed the 'Big Green City' strategy to strengthen residents' access to and engagement with green space. Community engagement is a key element of this strategy, and approaches have included engaging school children in designing a new garden in the city centre, as well as engaging schools in local green space maintenance and visiting schools and after school clubs to hear children's views and ideas. A major approach has been engaging volunteers and Friends groups to support park maintenance, which has contributed to building community spirit and cohesion, while also strengthening a local sense of ownership of spaces. One specific approach has been supporting residents' groups to build capacity to take over and maintain local green space, which is proving successful in increasing investment as well as usage of local green space.

Building on the experience of Belfast as a WHO European Healthy City

Belfast has been a WHO European Healthy City since 1988. Throughout its membership of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, Healthy City partners in the city have developed experience and expertise that can support the implementation of the Belfast Agenda.

Internationally, membership of the Network provides a wide ranging network of contacts across WHO Europe and European cities, which can be drawn on to provide both examples of good practice and potential partnering arrangements. The WHO European Healthy Cities Network is also a platform for showcasing the city and sharing learning internationally. Belfast is a key contributor to Network conferences and publications, and the Network also offers growing opportunities to share learning through WHO Europe more widely. Through WHO Europe, expertise and capacity on the SDGs can also be levered into the city.

Locally, Belfast Healthy Cities provides a platform for intersectoral collaboration involving the academic and voluntary sector as well as the public sector. Membership of the Healthy Cities partnership includes Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Department of Health, Department of Infrastructure, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Public Health Agency, Queen's University Belfast, Urban Villages and Ulster University.

Examples of the expertise and experience developed in the city include:

- **Capacity building:** The annual capacity building programmes on healthy urban environments as well as health equity share learning from local experts as well as leading European cities, and also create opportunities for Belfast to connect directly with leading experts on these topics.

- **Tools:** Belfast has developed a number of tools that can be used to reduce inequalities through policy and decision making processes

  o **Community engagement and co-production:**

    - The Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods and KidsSpace models are particularly geared towards engaging children and young people in decision making affecting local neighbourhoods[xxii]

    - Walkability Assessment for Health Ageing tool[xxiii] offers a way to engage with older people on both the quality of the environment and the living experience in a given neighbourhood.

    - All models also provide a systematic approach to gathering evidence and local narratives from typically less heard groups

  o **Assessment tools:**

    - The Health Equity tool assists in consideration of inequalities at proposal development stage

    - Healthy Cities also pioneered the use of Health Impact

Assessment (HIA) and has capacity both in undertaking HIAs and adapting this approach in ways that utilise its principles of engagement and focus on inequalities

- The Good for Regeneration, Good for Health, Good for Belfast regeneration indicators provide an indicator set to monitor how regeneration impacts on health and inequalities. The set was developed by a partnership of organisations including the five Belfast Area Partnerships, Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Public Health Agency. This set builds on existing routinely available data, while highlighting areas for data development that would support more detailed understanding of how regeneration investment contributes to reducing inequalities and improving wellbeing.

- Causal pathway mapping offers a systematic approach to identifying cross linkages between issues. This tool has additional potential in that communities can be directly engaged in identifying linkages, and therefore it can contribute to strengthening co production initiatives.[xxiv]

o **Health profiles:** Through Healthy Cities the development of intersectoral health profiles was pioneered and a number have been developed, which provide a model for bringing together and mapping data in a way designed to focus on reducing inequalities. The profiles also provide a historical overview of change in health and inequalities since 1998.

The tools and outlines of capacity building programmes are available online at www.belfasthealthycities.com.

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