New Identity of Post-Socialist Cities: Case Study of Sarajevo-Marijin Dvor

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Abstract

Urban identity refers to a collection of traits that distinguish a given city or community, both in terms of its architectural and geographical features as well as in relation to social, cultural, and historical elements. Therefore, it is the general impression and experience of the city as perceived by its citizens, based on its unique traits, traditions, social customs, and daily existence. The paper analyses how architectural heritage, urban infrastructure and socio-political dynamics influence evolving identity of post-socialist cities. The processes that shape the identity of the cities are multilayered and dependent on complex inherited historical, cultural, socio-political elements. Through case studies from various geographic contexts, focusing on Sarajevo's area of Marijin Dvor as well as other cities in the region, paper analyses how architectural heritage, urban infrastructure, and socio-political dynamics influence the evolving identity of these cities under the neo-liberal influences. Ultimately the paper underlines the understanding of the post-socialist city identities under the influences of the global trends. Based on literature research as an essential first step the paper gives various perspectives and ideas regarding the identity of space and place using analysis and valuation techniques. Understanding the area's history and context is facilitated by analyzing spatial forms, typologies, and identities from the past and present. Comparative studies of two additional post-socialist cities from the region provide a clearer understanding of the motivations and strategies by which they create new identities. The outcome of this research suggests that the identity of the post-socialist cities will continue to evolve detached from the context, influenced by the ongoing global socio-economic trends that will reflect themselves spatially and redefine the urban landscape.

Keywords: *Urban identity, Post-socialist cities, Sarajevo, Marijin Dvor, Neo-liberal influence*

1. Introduction

The term identity is layered as it refers and consist of number of explanations. Urban identity refers to a set of features that distinguish a given city or community, both in terms of its architectural and geographical features, and in relation to social, cultural and historical elements. Therefore, it is the general impression and experience of the city as perceived by its citizens, based on its unique features, social customs and everyday existence. Through these different viewpoints, the identity of the city is examined as a multifaceted, intricate entity that defies easy definition as it includes a wide range of elements that influence its social, cultural and physical appearance.

The post-socialist period brought significant changes in modern society, which directly reflected on the development of urban-architectural features of cities and on the spatial-architectural characteristics of parts of the cities and in some cases functions (zones). Unfavorable economic and development policies, along with a complex socio-economic situation, led to worrying consequences that manifested themselves in the urban environment. Mumford [1] emphasizes that the ideal city is one that achieves a balance between ecology, society and the individual and exists in an organic relationship with each other. Such cities, he emphasizes, manage to preserve the environment, achieve security and stability, enhance cooperation within the community and support individual development. The modern, post-socialist city, on the contrary, represents a rapid transition from a socialist to a capitalist system, which in a short period of time led to radical transformations and thus created significant socio-spatial challenges. Urban and economic geographer Thierry Theurillat, together with Nelson Vera-Buchel and Olivier Crevoisier, write about the processes of "urban financial capital" and outline the peculiarities of a "financialized" city, one in which "the value of the city corresponds to trading on the financial market" [2]. In this process, immovable assets such as buildings are transformed into liquid financial assets, without any consideration of their architectural and urban functions. Theurillat et al. further argue that, in the case of a financialized city, investors are enabled to "almost instantly extract monetary value in order to reinvest it elsewhere", whereby such projects become "non-functional and quickly lose monetary value" [2].

Post-socialist city development is facing complex challenges arising from profound socio-economic, spatial planning and cultural transformations following the fall of socialism. The period of urban development in Sarajevo after that turning point is characterized by a break in continuity in development, fragmentation of identity, degradation of social and spatial values, and tensions between contemporary (global) aspirations and the preservation of local heritage.

On the one hand, the socialist concept of urban development brought a vision of collective well-being through planned urban and architectural design, which was reflected in the creation of functional and inclusive spaces. This concept of development today faces the challenges of reinterpretation and integration into the contemporary context, often under the influence of privatization and market-oriented development. The spatial transformations that followed the collapse of the socialist system led to the loss of spatial

functionality, fragmentation of urban fabric and the breakdown of socio-spatial identities of cities (due to the influence of global practices and the influx of neo-liberal capital). In line with this, the post-socialist legacy represents a complex and multi-layered phenomenon that simultaneously carries significant cultural, social and spatial potential, but also challenges and controversies.

Urban identity represents a set of characteristics that make a particular city or settlement unique, both in terms of its physical appearance (spatial, architectural), and in the context of social, cultural and historical aspects. It is, therefore, the overall experience and perception of the city, as experienced by its users, based on its specific characteristics, traditions, social practices and everyday life. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the research of urban identities is multidisciplinary, as it encompasses a wide range of disciplines, including spatial phenomena, architecture, urbanism, sociology, economics and politics. Through these different perspectives, the identity of a city is analyzed as a complex, multidimensional entity that cannot be simply defined, as it holds a multitude of factors that shape its social, cultural and physical reality. In this regard, many theories and definitions testify; urban identity can be defined as "a socially constructed relationship between people and their environment, the environment and its elements, and elements with other elements – in other words, a set of multiple and reciprocal relationships between context and content" [3] or in the context of "evolving in a dual mode". Duality provides a kind of mutual feeding because physical characteristics shape the relationship of citizens to the urban environment and vice versa, while at the same time reflecting the needs and meanings of citizens in the urban milieu [4].

Urban identity and character are complex phenomena that arise from the interaction of physical form, social life and symbolic meanings in cities. Urban identity denotes specific characteristics that make one urban space recognizable and distinguish it from others, while urban character can be defined as a set of tangible and intangible features that give coherence and significance to space [5]. Thus, identity emphasizes the unique characteristics of a place, while character reflects the collective effect of its aesthetic, experiential, and cultural dimensions. Researchers have approached the study of urban identity and character from different perspectives, considering the importance of historical context, cultural diversity, power relations, and global-local interactions [6,7]. Within this broader framework, a useful analytical approach can be a three-part conceptual model that distinguishes spatial, social, and symbolic dimensions. Each of these dimensions contributes to the way in which residents, visitors, and observers perceive and use urban space, and each dimension can be operationalized through specific indicators and criteria of analysis.

2. Historical genesis

As we have already mentioned, urban planning of city development is essentially an interdisciplinary field that deals with analysis, regulation and planning. It encompasses various elements of development from the aspect of physical or spatial expansion of the urban environment, socio-social policies that largely influence development and are driven by economic factors. As this paper, among other things, deals with factors and principles that influence the development of a modern city and settlement, it is important to create a kind of spatial genesis and look back at the historical overview of urbanization, principles and ideologies that have influenced the formation of the city through certain time periods, considering the morphology and existing characteristics of built and unbuilt space.

Historically, Sarajevo, as the easternmost point of the west and the westernmost point of the east cultures, bears the characteristics of the cultures that ruled it. To the east of the longitudinal dimensions of the city, the remains of the Ottoman Empire remind us that the city was once an important center of the empire. The architecture that has remained bears witness to the centuries-old rule of that culture. Expanding westward, towards the Sarajevo Plain, one architecture replaces another depending on the general expression of the period, culture and economic possibilities. Ottoman Sarajevo and its architecture are replaced by the Austrian period with neo-Renaissance and classicism, and downstream, the Miljacka flows through the settlements of the New Sarajevo that emerged as part of the post-war urban plan of 1963 in the spirit of social construction.

Today's Sarajevo was mainly built during three main eras of expansion: the first 140 years of Ottoman rule (until 1600), in the peaceful years of Austro-Hungarian rule (from 1883 to 1914), and in the formative period of socialist rule, from 1945 to the 1984 Olympic Games [8]. To this should be added the period after the last aggression (1992-1995) until today, in which the principles of construction and urban development of the city are being lost, and neo-liberal capital and global trends are giving way.

The principles of Ottoman urbanism were formed under the influence of religion (Islam) and artistic influences from the east. Spatial identity (and characteristics) of this part of town is very strongly connected to the principles rooted in the eastern cultures. In this regard, Bejtić states that "it is necessary to form a space for the life of man and community according to the canons of the Ottoman building school as a synthesis of Persian, Arab and Byzantine art" [9]. These influences were the backbone of the creation of two main spatial units in the Ottoman cities, the public commercial area, so-called čaršija with shopping units –bazaars, and the surrounding residential areas - mahallas. Both parts had clearly defined functions and rules, which firmly demarcated their division and spatial organization. Spatially, the bazaar was always located in the middle of the city, often with a public open space into which the network of roads flowed, while the mahallas were always outside this public zone in a separate, less busy area. As Bejtić (Ibid.) [9] states, this separation of functions is a characteristic feature not only of the cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also of all the others in the Muslim Orient. This division of functions by zones, from the 16th century, will become the doctrine of contemporary urbanism.

During the Austro-Hungarian period the city became the subject of great variations in economic, social and cultural terms, and with them architecture and urbanism received new guidelines and experienced radical changes. The urban fabric of the city was now developing under direct European influences and new architectural styles of construction became dominant, and new legal urban regulations were established as the basis for the development of the city. With this development of the city, a new scientific discipline was also developing – "modern urbanism, which followed the development of a new social, political and economic system. Housing was in the first place in the development of modern urbanism [10]. In this regard, Kurto [11] states that "with intensive construction activity, which surpassed everything created by previous centuries in terms of quantity and speed of construction, and by adopting new stylistic concepts, Sarajevo was built very quickly and transformed its architectural character in a short time."

The socialist period saw the beginning of one of the most intensive periods in the development of cities in Yugoslavia, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, when many of them experienced expansion that was reflected in their absolute growth.

The development of the city of Sarajevo in the years after the WWII was not much different from other urban centers of Yugoslavia. Development activities, although planned, were relatively sparse, incomplete and untimely [12]. The city experienced its greatest urban development during this post-war period and the city authorities were faced, primarily, with the problem of housing. Although a comprehensive urban plan was formed in 1965, residential parts of the city were developed according to the model of residential units of other socialist cities. As Donia states [8], following the model of the Soviet Union, the leadership of the Communist

Party of Serbia implemented its own socialist vision of the city "by combining the exploitation of spontaneous enthusiasm and the implementation of the Five-Year Plan" and built Sarajevo's residential settlements and other necessary supporting infrastructure. The best indicator of urban development in Sarajevo, but also in the territory of BiH, is the statistics from 1948, which state that 72% of the population lived in rural communities, while in 1979 this number dropped to 36.6% [12]. Such statistics essentially resulted in a rapid transformation of the city at all levels, including the visual and identity characteristics of the city, and were reflected in the widespread complexes of variety of buildings.

3. Marijin Dvor

Sarajevo underwent Western urbanization after the Austro-Hungarians arrived in 1878. This was done using urban planning matrices, which cast character of contemporary European urban centres into Sarajevo, going west form Baščaršija to the area of Marijin Dvor, which at the time was, in a way, the end of the urbanised city. Following the geometric street grid system and creating unique block construction with inner courtyards to make the most use of the building plot, the town was built westward along the river. Living and business activities were now combined creating multifunction buildings (Fig.1.). With pedestrian walkways on both sides, streets grew broader. Public schools, hospitals, factories, theatres, and museums were among the new public structures that were constructed. Along with the first tram being put into service, the city also received its first public park, railway station, communal infrastructure, water supply, sewerage, gas pipeline, and electrical installations [13].

Fig. 1. Hotel Royal, Marijn Dvor, Sarajevo, 1919, reproduced with permission from [27]

After the period of capitalism went away with the Austro-Hungarians, new order was established with socialist ideologies and egalitarian approach to development. This greatly reflected onto the spatial characteristic of the city, particularly the area of Marijn Dvor. This specific political and social period in Yugoslavia and its cities displayed its ideological elements into the development of the new commercial city centre with great enthusiasm. As Grabrian and Neidhardt in their book *Arhitektura Bosne i put u savremeno* [14] write it was the time to draw upon "inherited architectural concepts we tried in our architectural and urban layout steer clear of the false emotionalism that would bring a harsh note into the ambiance as it has done during the Austrian colonial era". Their plans for the Marijin Dvor area were largely based on the detachment of the Austrian principles of the city development and return to historical continuity, attempts to revive autochthonous values and modernise them in accordance with the new beliefs, maintain the "landscaped city, human scale, right to unobstructed views", returning to the *reinterpreted* qualities of the Ottoman era maintain the re-explained identity (Fig. 2.).

Although the beginnings of modernization came under Austro-Hungarian influence, the process continued after World War II, and Marijin Dvor became a place of the city's contemporary identity, a crossroads between the past and the future. The first prize for the architectural urban design of Marijn Dvor was awarded to Juraj Neidhardt and Džemal Čelić in 1955. In the mid-1970s, a skyscraper complex was built on Marijin Dvor, which houses the republican functions, the seat of the Government and the National Assembly building. For the design of this building, the authors found inspiration in the medieval symbols of Bosnian identity, the *stećak* tombstones, as an indigenous monument of Bosnia and the guardian of the medieval Bosnian borders.

Fig. 2. Sketches of analytical elements of the Urban solution of Marijin Dvor by Grabrijan and Neidhardt, 1957 [14]

The former Austro-Hungarian "edge of the city" was envisaged as the new administrative and cultural centre of the city during the socialist period. The 1963 General Urban Plan saw Marijin Dvor as a new city centre that would contain several educational facilities, galleries and museums, a health centre, a hotel, a radio and TV station, etc. [15]. Until 1992, only a small number of these facilities have been allocated to Marijin Dvor, namely the Faculty of Philosophy in 1959, Museum of History of BiH in 1963, Parliament building in 1978, hotel Holiday Inn in 1984, two UNITIC business towers in 1986 and several residential buildings. All of the mentioned public buildings have been designed by renowned Bosnian architects from the Socialist period, were perceived as landmarks of Marijin Dvor by Sarajevans and were heavily damaged during the 1992-1995 aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

After the end of the war in Bosnia in 1995, post-socialist Sarajevo was being rebuilt and reconstructed from its ruins. Although fundamentally correct and situationally unavoidable, new construction brings in new challenges; ideological, political, sociological and economic. Property, that until then belonged to the people, is now privatized and commercialized. These privatizations include public areas such as parks and open spaces (parking lots or children's playgrounds) that are often turned into construction sites causing the change of spatial function and volumetric congestion. New structures consist exclusively of tall buildings and bulky volumes not relating to the context creating a generic identity based on global trends.

The post-socialist period is largely characterized by the reconstruction of the economy, the growth of GDP, but also the collapse or total disappearance of industry and exports. Under the influence of local authorities, and in the spirit of the 21st century, consumerism is promoted, which results in changing the visual identity of the city and specifically the Marijin Dvor area. Numerous shopping centres as well as risky activities in the real estate sector have created the illusion of a better life [16]. Marijin Dvor experiences mostly unplanned architectural and urban interventions that are dictated exclusively by the private sector with strong political pressure.

Fig. 3. Marijin Dvor ca. 2000 and ca. 2021, reproduced with permission from [28]

The period of transformation of society, which seems to exist as a constant, from a socialist to a capitalist society, brings with it the transformation of the public into the private. As we mentioned earlier in the text, one of the main characteristics of the socialist system was the development of community awareness, which was largely manifested through the spatial identity of the neighbourhoods created during this period. Settlements were developed and planned, optimizing the needs of users, in contrast to the contemporary lack of planning and the absolute absence of optimization of the needs and space of current users. In this context, Čakarić and Zgonić [17] state that "the neglect of adequate development plans and public opinion has resulted in a general, but also specific, urban crisis of architectural identity today."

The new social and collective frameworks in which society develops, after the fall of socialism, create new social demands, and former public spaces are put at the service of individuals. In this way, the development of the city becomes fragile under the pressures of capital and privatization, and the city develops under the impressions of neoliberal capitalism. In this regard, Kristianova [18] writes about the abuse of public spaces in residential areas in Slovakia, and states that the new socio-economic conditions after the fall of the communist regime create new demands of society towards open public spaces in residential areas, and exploit them for further construction, thereby causing irreversible damage to the urban matrix of the settlement. Examples of such exploitation can be found in Marijin Dvor with the construction of the Alta shopping Center and SCC (Fig. 3.) and the Multiplex Cinema (Fig. 4.).

Fig. 4. Multiplex Cinema disfiguring the iconic landmark of the 1980s Marijin Dvor, reproduced with permission from [28]

The three shopping centres with their additional functions (offices, residential, hotel) and the cinema complex have significantly changed the identity of Marijin Dvor. It is far away from the envisioned cultural, educational, governmental center with lot of green space and free vistas proposed in the 1960s by Grabrian and Neidhardt. Today, it is the main shopping/leisure area of town with new constructions that have decreased the public green space, blocked the vistas of the surrounding residential buildings and created visual and traffic congestion and most importantly lost the spatial identity that was to enhance the original principles used in spatial organisation.

4. Case studies from the region

This chapter presents two different examples of the creation of new urban identity in the post-socialist cities. Both examples represent capitals of the former Yugoslav Federal republics, investigating and comparing the reasons behind the urban projects, the design/realization approach and the final solutions of these two case studies.

Belgrade is the city that has been influenced by various architectural styles during the centuries of its turbulent history. After gaining the freedom from the Ottoman Empire and establishing the Kingdom of Serbia the cut with the Ottoman architectural style has to be made. Romanticism was a new style chosen for the construction of public buildings and royal residences mimicking the architectural but also urban achievements of Western imperial cities such as Vienna or Paris. After a period of Byzantine Revival and Modernism in the period between two World wars, the biggest impact on citiy's development and its identity creation happened during the 40 years of the socialist Yugoslav period starting with intense construction of the New Belgrade settlement in the 1950s. After the dissolvement of Yugoslavia in 1989, Serbia which did not experience the 1990s war on their ground, found itself searching for the neo-national identity. According to van der Huven & Ivković [19] the post-socialist Serbia found itself in the vacuum where suddenly everything was (aesthetically) possible because of the collapse of the city planning authority and widespread corruption. Since then, it is impossible to undervalue the impact of the political and economic forces on the creation of new Belgrade's identity.

The megalomanic project *Beograd na vodi* / 'Belgrade Waterfront' is a mixed-use development with almost 2 million meters square of office space, apartments, hotels, commercial and leisure spaces. It covers the area of 116ha of the right riverbank of Sava and 27ha of the New Belgrade area on the opposite left side of the river [20]. Introduced to the public in 2012, the realization of the project is foreseen as a public-private-partnership (PPP) between the Government of Serbia and the private investor from UAE aiming to stimulate economic growth of the country and improves its international image. This project is "the largest urban intervention in Belgrade since the WWII and the biggest foreign investment in the real-estate sector the city ever witnessed." [19]

For this controversial project, the Spatial Plan of Belgrade has been changed, the height limits and the environmental consequences ignored [21] and all of this for the aim of creating a new district of business, technology and design [20] that should boost tourism and economy and foremost place Belgrade on the map of modern European metropole. In sense of nation-building narrative, this project represents a "symbolic expression for modernity, resistance, openness and democracy" [22] and a (visual) attempt to break with the violent and nationalism-colored past of the 1990s. There is no doubt that the right shore of Sava River has now an urban identity created by the 'Belgrade Waterfront' project (Fig.5) that is independent of the surrounding tissue of the city. As Krsmanovic writes, "a new global identity has been created which in that sense is no-identity or rather a multy-identity shared and seen in the numerous cities around the world." [20]

Fig. 5. 'Belgrade Waterfront' project, reproduced with permission from [29]

Skopje, as the capital of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has experienced very different approach of changing the city's identity in its very center. Like other cities in the region, the national identity of Macedonia was largely influenced and shaped during two major periods, the Ottoman and the Yugoslav. After being part of the Ottoman Empire, then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and finally as one of the socialist republics of the Yugoslavian Federation, Macedonia gained independence in 1991.

Torn between the neighbors (Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs) who claim the affiliation of the Macedonian name (dispute with Greece) and nationality (Who are the real Macedonians?), the Macedonian national party implemented the project 'Skopje 2014' changing the image of the city with the aim to promote that a Macedonian nationality has a direct link to antiquity and the Alexander the Great. The project "disrupts past narratives and proposes a new allegedly linear evolution of Macedonian identity going back to antiquity." [23] This storytelling is achieved by placing over 50 statues in the center of Skopje. The main square is dominated by the 22m tall sculpture *Warrior on the horse* which represents the key historic figure of Alexander the Great. The project also includes new bridges, churches and museums for which the chosen architectural language has been either neo-baroque or neo-classical (Fig.6), both by then unusual and

unfamiliar architectural styles for this region. The main investor of the project was the Government of Republic of Macedonia or to be more precise, the ruling nationalist party that was reelected in 2014. The interesting fact is also that there has been an international competition for this project, but the winners were chosen among local architects and artists [21].

Even Skopje can be proud of its Ottoman and socialist architectural heritage, in particular on the modernist buildings built by Kenzo Tange and other intentional architects after the great earthquake in 1963, according to Koteska [24], the intention of the 'Skopje 2014' project was to disrupt both the socialist and the Ottoman heritage achieved through the introduction of new architectural styles (neo-baroque and neo-classicism).

Of course, from the perspective of the investor the project should boost the growth of the local economy, increase tourism and make Skopje more visible on the European capital map.

According to Piacentini [25] this project aims to "make visible, above all to Greece, who's the real descendent of ancient Macedonianas." The second purpose is to "answer the psychological need of being internationally recognized as a distinct and unique nation-a great nation coming from great ancestors."

Fig. 6. 'Skopje 2014' project with numerous statues and neo-classical architecture, Fig. source: Anida Krečo

5. Conclusion

The city as a living and dynamic organism is constantly undergoing certain spatial changes. If such changes are profound, they often lead to the change of the city's spatial identity. These changes are particularly visible in societies in which the economic or political order has shifted such as it has happened in former Yugoslavia. The newly formed republics switched from the social economic system into not regulated capitalism with strong neo-liberal influences. The economic factor is not the only reason for changing cities identities. The new-born political ideologies with the aim of strong detachment from the previous socialist order are often a strong force for big changes in the city including large investments.

Such cases are present in many cities of the former Yugoslavian Republic, particularly in the non-EU countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia. As Čamprag [26] is stating "neoliberal global economy and growing intercity competition turned the values of urban identity into important economic assets" with a top-down and non-transparent approach when it comes to decision making. This is very well visible on the example of Marijin Dvor in Sarajevo and even more on the 'Belgrade Waterfront' development project that was created from scratch with as little as possible regards for the previous city-building efforts aiming to refund the invested money through the real-estate market. 'Belgrade Waterfront' is disconnected from previously inherited architectural styles and building traditions hence creating a new image of the city of Belgrade like "a patchwork of contrasts rather than a harmonized urban landscape with no peaceful co-existence of styles." [19]

Unfortunately, this is not only the destiny of Belgrade, although it is much more noticeable due to the size of the urban intervention, but of majority of the post-socialist cities. As seen on examples of Skopje and Sarajevo as well, all three cities strive to re-invent themselves by following global architectural design trends only on different urban scales. However, most of the newly created urban identities are disconnected from the existing socio-cultural, architectural and/or urban context. Global trend of neo-liberalism with investments that are expected to generate high amounts of money can lead to gentrification of the area and make exclusive neighborhoods for nouveau rich elite which is in total disconnection of the socialist doctrine of living.

An extraordinary example of profound change of identity is Skopje, the capital of Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, through the implementation the project 'Skopje 2014'. Unlike 'Belgrade Waterfront', mainly financed by foreign investors and driven by the financial gain through the real-estate market, the 'Skopje 2014' was financed by the ruling party with its roots into the ideological and identity change that was represented spatially. Its main goal is to re-assure the Macedonian nationality and to show the world (but mostly the Greek neighbors) that Macedonians have genuine descendants from the glorious antique historical figures such as Alexander the Great.

The driving forces behind the process of transition from socialist to post-socialist cities are manifested in their spatial sense through the absolute fragmentation of land, accompanied by an increased inflow of investments by domestic and foreign investors. This is indicated by the changed roles of traditional institutional authorities and their relations towards planned development of space in cities and the selective and uncontrolled development of space by private investors. In this way, the urban matrix is destroyed and in the case of Marijin Dvor in Sarajevo this imbalance between private and public essentially leads to the abolition of spatial diversity, with the economic dimension coming to the fore and the social, cultural and political dimension disappearing.

Regardless of the reasons, creation of new identities of post socialist cities is heavily influenced by universal trends and most importantly, in complete disconnection to the context and inherited values (tangible and intangible) giving them detached, more contemporary global identity.

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