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The Ways of Participation The Volunteers in the Community Radio Stations of Grenoble (France)

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Abstract:

The French community radio stations have for main mission to create and to maintain social links as well as to serve as means of expression for various sensibilities (cultural, community) which are not still represented by the leading broadcasting media.

These non-profit radio stations, having limited resources, work thanks to the contribution of numerous volunteers. This contribution turns out precious also, and maybe especially, beyond the economic interest which it presents for the concerned structures.

Indeed, the first results of our study led within the community radio stations from Grenoble show that if the promise of the broadcasting communication' democratization, at the root of the creation of this type of radios, was not really kept, the voluntary commitment, which can be grasped from the point of view of the anthropological problem of gift, contributes to the creation and/or the preservation of the social links and makes sense with regard to civic participation.

Finally, the examination of the volunteers career paths and of the "*manières de faire*" allowed to notice that it does not exist a clear dichotomy between these *pro-ams* and professionals, the only real difference were their status, the volunteers not being paid for their contribution.

Keywords: community radio stations, volunteers, Grenoble, France

" So, throughout the human evolution, there are two wisdoms. That we thus adopt as principle of our life what was always a principle and will always be it: go out of one, give, freely and necessarily; we do not risk making a mistake. A beautiful Maori proverb says it:

Ko Maru kai atu

Ko Maru kai mai

Ka ngohe ngohe.

« Give as well as take and all will be well. »

Marcel Mauss, Essai sur le don

Introduction

At the time of the internet, the researchers in information and communication sciences focus their attention only on "new" media, those carried by global electronic networks. Media called participatory, social networks, are supposed to create social links, to contribute to the individuals' emancipation of the various guardianships, to contribute to the democratization of society, etc.

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However, fascinated by new technological devices with their real or imaginary potentialities, they neglect, even they often forget, that certain existing media have, since a certain time already, the same role of facilitators of links and commitment. It is in particular the function of community radio stations. Real synergies' aggregators at the hyperlocal level, they do not seem to interest a lot different analysts and academics today.

Indeed, contrary to the media on the Internet, these radio stations, representing no significant economic stakes, not disrupting any economic model, living with limited resources, hamper nobody and, at the same time, they do not arouse enough interest in scientific laboratories. Made by enthusiasts often volunteers, they are hardly taken seriously as the media landscape's agents, even if, thanks to the internet, the practices called amateur are put back with current tastes (Flichy, 2010).

It is advisable to remind the French community radio stations' specificities because, seen their number² and their variety, they form a unique system in Europe. French community radios are the direct heirs of the independent radio stations' movement of the end of the 70s fighting for freedom and variety of expression within broadcast media. This movement largely contributed to end the French State's monopoly on-broadcasting when the socialists came to power in 1981.

This type of radios belongs to the category A defined by the CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel - French broadcasting authority).³ If their commercial resources do not exceed 20% of their turnover, they are eligible for the FSER (Fonds de soutien à l'expression radiophonique), a special public fund that goes to non-profit community radios (for installation, functioning, equipment).

The main function of these non-profit radio stations consists in creating and maintaining social links and providing a mean of expression for various communities who are still not represented by the big audiovisual commercial media or even by the public sector media. The social communication mission of these radio stations to be close to the population (communication sociale de proximité) is defined by law⁴. They have to broadcast at least four hours of locally produced programmes between 6 am and 10 pm. (Holubowicz, 2011)

The community radio stations, "[thanks to which] groups of people silent or deprived can re-appropriate the space of the public expression, a small part of this space" to resume the words of the French philosopher and historian Michel de Certeau (de Certeau, Giard, 1983: 16) constitute a space of expression par excellence to the people representing various sensibilities and border situations, because "situated between two ages, between different styles of behaviour, between two cultures" (Ibidem).

But contrary to the commercial media, the community radio stations put in contribution the non-professionals not only to make them testify, because the participation of these non-professionals is at the root of the functioning of these radio stations. Indeed, having limited resources, they could not survive without the contribution of numerous volunteers. However, this contribution has a sense beyond the economic interest which it presents for the concerned structures as far as it also embodies civic participation.

Research questions, methodology

Consequently, we wanted to know a little more about those who run French community radio stations. The main questions that we arose on their subject are the following ones:

- Who are they? (Their sociological profile)
- Why did they decide to make a commitment in an associative radio? (Their motivations.)

² At the end of 2010, the sector of the associative radios counted in France 575 operators (that is 66 % of all the radio operators) who shared 1047 available frequencies (that is 22 %). (Source: CSA (French Broadcasting Authority))

³ Four remaining categories are: the category B, including the commercial independent local radio stations that participate in the animation of their economic zone and contribute to the social expression at the local level, the category C which groups together the local or regional stations affiliated or subscribed to thematic networks with national vocation, the category D, that of thematic networks with national vocation and the category E grouping together the non-specialized radios with national vocation.

⁴ Cf. Art N 29 of the Law n°2000-719 of August 1st, 2000 modifying the law N 86-1067 of September 30th, 1986 relative to the freedom of communication.

- What symbolic profits do they make thanks to their voluntary commitment in a radio?

The study led within the community radio stations of the city of Grenoble (France) in July and September-October, 2011 allowed us to formulate the first answers to these questions.

This study was essentially realized via a questionnaire with open-ended questions sent to the concerned radio stations' volunteers and the people in charge of these radios and completed with some individual interviews. Regrettably, in spite of relaunchings, we received few answers and only from 3 among 7 contacted radios: the Christian radio *RCF*, the student radio *Radio Campus* and the *Radio Grésivaudan*, with the anti-globalization sensibility followed up our request.

However, the coherence of the obtained answers allows us to formulate the first hypotheses about the voluntary participation's modalities and objectives within the community radio stations.

The issue of the voluntary work can join wider issues, namely:

1. The issue of audiovisual communication's democratization
2. The anthropological issue of gift
3. The issue of social link
4. The issue of professionalization
5. The issue of civic engagement

Before seeing how these issues articulate with that of the voluntary work, we are going to make a brief presentation of the voluntary workers' sector in France.

Voluntary condition

Voluntary work: definition, inventory of fixtures in France

The volunteers are everywhere: they create and run associations, they work in the interest of various causes, they constitute the majority of political parties' troops, they are present in a whole variety of domains, among which that of the media, and in particular, that of the community radio stations.

By volunteer, we understand a person who agrees to perceive no remuneration for his/her work. While knowing that, in a wider conception of the term, we can include in this category also people who are punctually paid.

"The symbolic content that conveys this vocabulary is often attractive, when the word is associate with the dedication, has the availability, in the concern(marigold) of others, but it can be also repulsive when it evokes the bosses' wives of long ago, the inclination in the paternalism and the moralism or simply the amateurism." (Prouteau and Wolff, 2004: 8)

In our study, we considered as volunteers people who declare themselves as such.

According to the study about the voluntary work' situation in France led by France Bénévolat (2010), 18 300 000 people, that is 36% of population of more than 15 years old, admit a voluntary commitment. The majority of these people (11 300 000 that is to say 22,6% of people) give some of their time within the framework of an association.

One can also make a commitment in another type of organization (4 500 000 people) or directly with other people (7 400 000), these various types of commitments being able to overlap. Among the associative volunteers, 80% declare themselves committed in a regular way all year round, and among them, the most important percentage (37%) is constituted by people who give a few hours every week. Among the committed, almost half (the 41%) are in more than one association.

To make a commitment as a volunteer in a community radio station

The volunteers' profile: intelligentsia overrepresented

So far, we collected the testimonies of 19 people collaborating on three mentioned community radios from Grenoble, among which 14 "low-ranking" volunteers, 2 editors in chief, 1 radio manager, 1 salaried technician and 1 associative structure's president. There are 11 men and 8 women. The youngest of the participants is 21 years old and the oldest - 77.

The average age of the participants (without counting 3 radio managers, to which a specific questionnaire, concerning the specificities of the radio functioning with volunteers, was administered) is situated around 47 years. On average, these volunteers dedicate a few hours a week to the collaboration on their radio, collaboration which amounts mostly to the preparation (only or in team) of a programme on the theme of preference of the participant (cinema, science, art, religion). It can involve a column, but also an interview, a debate.

Eric Labaj's, *Radio Grésivaudan's* editor in chief, confirms these data⁵ saying that for more than 80% of about forty volunteers of its radio, the collaboration amounts to the preparation of a programme, preparation that occupies them from 1 to 4 hours a week.

Rare are therefore the volunteers who are more involved in the radio management (administration board, music commission, technical questions' management, participation to the organization and the management of events of various natures such as concerts, celebrations, exhibitions). And when a volunteer evolves in his functions within the radio, he or she begins generally as simple presenter before participating in one or many projects or in music's commission and finally in the administration board.

On *Radio Grésivaudan*, the voluntary collaboration is also characterized by an important loyalty. Indeed, among the volunteers of this radio, some are present continuously since its creation in 1981. Others sometimes return after long periods of absence. Otherwise, globally, the average duration of a programme presented by a volunteer of this local radio station is between 5 and 10 years. The volunteers who just collaborate for a few months or one year are hardly a few, as tells us Mr Labaj.

The volunteers' profile changes naturally from a radio to another. For example, a typical *Radio Campus*, student radio of Grenoble volunteer is, according to Alexandre Hadade, in charge of the editorial staff, a young person between 20 and 24 years, undergraduate in sciences or politics who more and more often makes a commitment to test the world of the media and/or the music. This profile conditions also the average collaboration's duration that would be of 9 months on average, what corresponds to an academic year.⁶

However, the particulars collected about the volunteers of 3 community radio station of Grenoble who participated in our study show, contrary to what one could expect, that there is no perfect correspondence between the radio format and the people who intervene there. In the *Radio Campus*, there are not only students but also working people, while in the *RCF*, a Christian radio launched and financed partially by the Roman Catholic Church, today member of a national network, it is not necessary to be Christian having a practice to intervene regularly on the radio. The image of a Christian radio's participant a - churchy person thus takes a nasty blow. Indeed, this radio station which proposes, certainly, religious broadcasts, is besides that very open to the world and its problems. People in charge of it tell us to fix its editorial line in all the independence with regard to the Catholic Church and its co-workers underline the editorial staff's open-mindedness and sense of welcome.

As for the volunteers studied' sociocultural profile, it is highly similar from a person to the other one. Indeed, in their overwhelming majority, they are under- or graduated and have intellectual occupations (students, teachers, artists, executives...). This is the case even in the *Radio Grésivaudan*, declared sympathizer of the anti-globalization movement.

Nothing to do thus with the workers' protest radio stations of the period of "*radio libres*", first independent radio stations in France, such *Lorraine cœur d'acier* (Lorraine heart of steel), radio launched in March, 1979 to relieve the popular mobilization against the dismantling of the steel-making sector from the east of France, or

⁵ Interview realized by e-mail on July 18th, 2011.

⁶ Interview realized by e-mail on July 27th, 2011

radios of Latin America which gave the floor to the discriminated populations from the 60s of the last century to serve as relay in social struggles (Cardon and Granjon, 2010).

The over-representation of the participants with a strong cultural capital seems to be the main rule in the community radio station today in France. It can be interpreted as a failure for a media which had to put the means of audiovisual communication within the reach of everybody, as a not held promise. A relative failure, however, in the measure that these radios and associations that are at the root of it, even led by the intelligentsia's representatives, also address culturally deprived populations and make a "ground work" of quality.

In this perspective, these radio stations constitute an excellent tool of intervention in the hands of the members of the intelligentsia committed in a social work to the advantage of less favoured classes, even if the ethos of commitment in favour of lower classes, so meaningful in the cultural history of the Central Europe's countries (Holubowicz, 2004) seems not to have an equivalent articulation in the Western Europe's countries, also in France.

Voluntary commitment: between self-sacrifice and personal interest

As we have just indicated it, the issue of voluntary work can join the anthropological issue of gift, understood as the sum of not trade services (Weber, 2010). Because it is clear that voluntary work works at first as a gift, as underlines it Alain Caillé. This French sociologist, in the trail of the ethnologist Marcel Mauss, recognizes the major role of giving, receiving and reciprocating in the society by lauding the introduction of an antiutilitarian paradigm in social sciences, of a "third paradigm", as he calls it. This paradigm is going to complete both paradigms still dominant: individualist-utilitarian paradigm and holistic paradigm (Caillé, 2007: 123).

Indeed, he says, individuals do not act only by interest nor by obligation, but, "in the social action [] there is also some obligation, some spontaneity, some friendship and the solidarity, in brief some gift" (*Ibidem*: 16).

This gift is at the root of any alliance, any association, in brief, of any social link. It is thus essential to take it into account it in the study of social actions.

From the sociological point of view, the gift, according to this author, would be "any good's and services' service made without guarantee of return in mind to create, to maintain or to regenerate social link. [Thus], in the gift's relationship, link is worth more than property" (*Ibidem*: 124).

At the same time, gift has nothing disinterested, but it is situated outside instrumental interests by aiming at what we can call link's interests, those of alliance, friendship, solidarity ... Gift works according to the principle which mixes strictly freedom and obligation for the realization of public interests (*Ibidem*: 131).

The first results of our study show that the voluntary participants' motivations can be summarized by a certain number of keywords. These keywords return regularly in the testimonies collected.

In several cases, people speak about their *passion*. Passion for the field where they are specialised: painting, cinema, science, but also for radio as a medium.

" I like this medium, I listen to it a lot, I wanted to try and to broadcast the kind of music that was very bad known at the time. " (*Radio Campus 1*)

" A passion for the listening of the radio in my everyday life. " (*RCF 6*)

...a passion that radio allows to share with the others.

" Share my passion for science. " (*RCF 9*)

To participate is another term which often returns in the testimonies collected. (To participate in social life, in broadcasting programmes).

But also the expression *to do a service* (" to the friends " – *RCF 7*, " to a Christian radio " – *RCF 1*)

Some people consider even their engagement as a *mission*.

"To accomplish the mission that my bishop entrusted me as I am a deacon." (RCF 7)

This participation allows to meet new people and to form new relationships.

And one can do it with an important freedom ("Possibility of initiative."- RCF 5; "freedom of expression" – RCF 3)

Even if this freedom is accompanied by constraints due to the imperatives of the structure in which people are inserted.

"Necessity of following news for my programme of Monday morning." (RCF 7)

Finally, all the questioned people announce multiple gratifications obtained thanks to the various elements of collaboration on the radio. The gratification's expressions, expressed by the terms such as *enjoyment, pleasure, pleasant, enriching*, are present in the majority of the collected testimonies.

These results thus confirm the thesis that, in the context of voluntary participation, the gift (of time, of skills, sharing of one's passion), that is made freely but implying the respect for certain number of constraints – even if it does not involves an immediate "return on investment", always ends in symbolic earnings satisfactory enough so that the givers continue to give. What confirms Marcel Mauss's thesis formulated at the beginning of the last century saying that the human dimension exceeds that of «*homo oeconomicus* »" and of "frosty utilitarian calculation" (Mauss, 2010: 238).

Community radio generating social links

The associative phenomenon also implies the nearby problem of social link. Indeed, the association's membership allows making bonds of elective participation, created beyond the family socialization and which define themselves by their unforced character (Paugam, 2011). What are the forms and the specificities of the links which we can form by being voluntary within an associative radio?

According to the first results of this study, the search for sociability's place does not seem to be a dominating criterion in the voluntary commitment in a community radio station. Indeed, the most popular objectives of this commitment are to share a passion (for the cinema, the art, the science, a kind of music) with a wider public either to work on the radio. So that often, the volunteers of a radio admit not to know the other contributors, even less that these contributors are many in a given structure and that a turn-over is relatively important, like in a student radio such as *Radio Campus*.

However, as we have already mentioned above, it is the relational bonuses which are generally emphasized by our interlocutors when they speak about symbolic gains that they remove from their voluntary contribution to a community radio. They speak about fascinating relationships (RCF 8), about human and relational wealth (RCF 2), they state a pleasure inherent to the new relationships (*Radio Campus* 1), those within the editorial team, but also the others, with the guests and the public, relationships which are easier and more frequent for a journalist or radio presenter, even if he or she is volunteer.

It would thus seem, finally, that this link's pleasure, which could be summarized in relationships, testimonies, communication and sharing, has the edge, for these volunteers, on the pleasure of the air, even if the satisfaction of hearing oneself on the radio is not the slightest. These results thus confirm the importance of the relational dimension of voluntary work that has been already emphasised by some previous studies (Prouteau and Wolff, 2004: 27).

Volunteers and professionalization

Volunteers' commitment in the local radio structures allows also to raise questions relative to the professionalization.

The common sense usually assimilates a volunteer to an amateur, someone who, according to a basic definition "*exercises an activity in a careless or fanciful way*" (Le Petit Robert, 1993). While a finer observation shows that professionals in various fields, (who can be defined as people possessing skills attested by competent authorities in such or the other field), make a commitment in voluntary activities.

Members of the medical professions: doctors, nurses who exercise their activity for various humanitarian organizations without being paid are certainly the most known example. But also in other professional fields, more and more often volunteers possessing very precise skills are in great demand.

As for amateurs, they are traditionally compared with professionals (Cf. definition quoted above). Thanks to the internet, they won in visibility. The new tools of self-publishing allow them to let know their skills developed outside the professional frame and to use it, especially since these new tools make them autonomous and independent from various sorts of "watchdogs". Patrice Flichy, a French specialist of new technologies of information and communication, calls this phenomenon *democratization of skills*. To name this kind of amateurs, Flichy employs the term *pro-am*, professional-amateur, that he borrows from Charles Leadbeather and Paul Miller.

The volunteer who develops, within the framework of his activity, specific skills to such or the other profession, often presents the same characteristics of such a pro-am.

The internet allowed, certainly, numerous amateurs to become visible, but did not create them, far from that. We can probably advance, without too much risk of making a mistake, that the amateurs, who showed their skills in a such or the other field, without being paid for their activity practiced as a leisure, always existed, even if the distinction between the amateur and the professional begins to wide from the industrialization's and professionalization's movement during the second half of the 19th century (Flichy, 2010: 14).

The rise of amateur practices is, according to Flichy, part of the contemporary individualism's movement as far as it reflects the individual will "to construct his identity, to favour his self-fulfilment, to develop personal activities, to act for his pleasure" (Flichy, 2010: 87).

The competition of the non-professionals, rising in force and sometimes unfair, frightened quite a lot of experts of all kinds, until now only justified to spread their knowledge within the wide public. But Flichy is of those who warn against the radical opposition of these two categories: that of amateurs and that of experts by saying that "*no more than the "new digital economy" killed the old economy, amateurs are going to chase away experts*" (Flichy, 2010 : 7-9).

In the common spirit, community radio stations, mainly led by volunteers, are thus made by non-professionals. In reality, the issue is more complicated. As show the first results of my study, the volunteers who collaborate on the associative radios are far from amateurs in the first meaning of the term, it is to be said, let us remind it, those who "exercise an activity in a careless or fanciful way".

Certainly, they did not acquire their professional knowledge on the school bench; their knowledge is not testified by a specific diploma. However, thanks to an auto learning, to a regular practice more at least supervised by professionals that allows however an accumulation of experience, the amateurs acquired "*arts de faire*", to resume the notion that the French scholar Michel de Certeau proposed to describe practices of everyday life. These "*arts de faire*" allow them to move in the semi-professional space of their community radio station with enough ease.

The position that they occupy there and their personal progress towards the progressive control of the professional *tours de main* place them in the space of the "*entre-deux*", intervening period between the world of the amateurs and that of the professionals. "[They] are held halfway between the common person and the professional, between the layman and the virtuoso, the ignoramus and the scholar, the citizen and the politician", says Patrice Flichy about these *pro-am* to whom the internet lends credibility (Flichy, on 2010; 11).

And with these characteristics, they are less taken away from certain professionals as it appears. It is in particular the case in the field of media and journalism where, as demonstrated Denis Ruellan (1993), the professionalization was never really accomplished.

The results of the present study show also that the border between volunteer's status (thus presumed amateur) and that of professional is very unstable.

Indeed, the study of the volunteers' "careers" within the contacted community radio stations and their relation to the professionalization, allow to establish the existence of three different situations.

Thus, in the first place, and without surprise, there are *pro-ams* in the sense of the term explained above, that are those who, coming from other occupations, always exercised their radio activity in voluntary mode. It is often the matter of retired people who try to stay active, to be fulfilled and to put a lot into the service to the others by means of the associative commitment.

Sometimes, a voluntary radio activity constitutes a kind of continuation of their professional activity. So, a retired scientist participates in the creation of a scientific programme and a retired journalist woman copresents a programme on the local history.

Those who are always in service, the implication in the running of a community radio station allows to recognize their other skills, not necessarily exploited in their paid employment. Such a recognition is all the most considerable as jobs connected to the media are always strongly valued in France.

*"I began because a friend, a professional journalist of this radio said to me that I had an attractive voice, that I was quick at repartee, so he encouraged me to put on my programme", said one of participant to our study.*⁷

But there are also those, probably more numerous than we can imagine, for whom the voluntary radio activity is a way to integrate the field of media professionals. We can call them *am-pros* or future professionals.

Among those, without surprise, we find young people, for whom the voluntary activity within a community radio station allows to test themselves as journalists, technicians or presenters, to start out and to make their first contacts in a professional environment that they wish to integrate, or, why not, to be hired by an associative structure of which they are a member.

We meet these candidates journalists especially within *Radio Campus*, student radio par excellence settled on the university campus of Grenoble, but they are present also in two other studied structures, *RCF* and *Radio Grésivaudan* which also accomplish the mission of media school, the first one for the students of the local school of journalism, the second essentially for the high school students.

Finally, there is also a third kind of situation, certainly rarer, when he or she becomes voluntary in a structure having been salaried there (thus professional). In our study, it is in particular the case of the programme manager who, once retired, joined her community radio after having spent about twenty years there as wage earner.

Due to several aspects, the contribution of these volunteers is comparable to the professionals' contribution. The relation that these two categories maintain with the activity which they exercise is the main thing that differentiates them. Consequently, the absence of compulsory, major constraints that must be undergone seems to be one of the major advantages of the activity exercised voluntarily.

*"I could not work on the "order". Furthermore I make this voluntary work for pleasure, in case of "big frustrating constraints "I think that I shall stop", says one participant and this type of testimony is not isolated in the answers collected.*⁸

This volunteers' freedom in front of possible constraints seems to be moreover one of main difficulties with which are confronted the managers of the radios running above all thanks to the willingness of some enthusiasts.

⁷ RCF 8.

⁸ Ibidem.

Is voluntary participation citizen participation?

The voluntary work is a shape of collective commitment. Can we speak for all that about a civic engagement? Yes, if we follow Peter Dahlgren (2009), for whom the civic engagement is often defined as a shape of voluntary activity which aims at resolving the problems that arise in a community and to help the others. It is also the Alain Caillé's opinion.

"Gift's paradigm is also politics' paradigm. Gift is the shape taken by politics in the small society", says Caillé for whom there is a privileged link between association and democracy. "Because the fate of democracy, he pursues, is decided not only at the level [] of the established politics, at the level of what we could call secondary public spaces. It is also decided, and maybe at first, within these primary public spaces established by associations "(Caillé, 2007:128, 134).

But political disengagement and increasing individualization did not either save associations, these basic spaces where civic engagement can show itself and be applied. Although the number of associations keeps increasing these last years, the link which attaches the members to the associative structures seems to slacken more and more by announcing a time of the "zapper" activist changing his membership according to his present personal interests, according to the consumerist mode, as explains it Jean-Luc Charlot.

"The common good represented by association (as space of solidarity and sociability), does not seem to be any more able to establish prolonged attachments, long-lasting memberships. Because there also, we could say, the trajectories of personal life cross the thickness of multiple associations to remove what from it each considers beneficial for him: the manners that we make associations seem then more and more consumerist, changeable and multiple" (Charlot, 2006, 100-101).

The voluntary commitment in a community radio station constitutes also a shape of commitment in the common interest, so primary it is, and consequently, it takes part of issues expressed above.

Even if in the confessional and student radio stations the civic debate can present a rudimentary shape, it exists well and truly in small societal public spaces (Miège, 2010) incarnated by the radios in question. It is moreover enough to consult the program schedule of these radio stations to realize that they schedule programs concerning questions of collective interest.

Certainly, the volunteers of the local radio stations whom we were able to question until now never evoke the civic function of their commitment. The odds are however that this civic demand, implied in the activity of the volunteers working for associations with cultural objectives as community radio stations are, would appear probably in broad daylight in the testimonies of the more militant radios' co-workers. What remains however to demonstrate.

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