

# Entrepreneurial Women in the Parish Councils of the Guaranda Canton. The Practical Application of Ancestral Knowledge

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## ABSTRACT

The project addresses the lack of information about women leaders and organizations in the Guaranda Parish Council. This comprehensive approach was developed between November 2023 and February 2024 and included participation in key events, strategic meetings and direct data collection. The findings reveal the diversity and challenges of women's leadership and highlight the effectiveness of identifying organizations. The information obtained contributes not only to academic knowledge, but also to a practical vision of inclusive politics. The project marks significant progress in the understanding of women's leadership in the Guaranda Parish Council.

**Keywords:** leaders, women's organizations, parish councils, baseline.

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## INTRODUCTION

Female entrepreneurship in rural areas of Ecuador has gained relevance in recent years, especially in local spaces such as parish councils. In the canton of Guaranda, women play a crucial role in the creation of small community economies, where ancestral knowledge becomes an essential resource to promote sustainable development. This essay analyzes from a socio-anthropological approach how women entrepreneurs in the parish councils of Guaranda are recovering, applying and adapting traditional knowledge to face the demands of the modern market. In addition, it studies how this practice reinforces their cultural identity and promotes their economic and social empowerment.

The objective of this project is to identify, recognize and make visible the organizations, associations and groups of women that exist in the canton of Guaranda, the activities they carry out and the main problems they face in their different territories. Indicators and statistics indicate that women's work is not always valued or is invisible to society. In this sense, having a baseline will allow public and private institutions to channel in a more equitable and inclusive way, the resources and projects that can be generated with a gender perspective, interculturality and popular and solidarity economy in the Guaranda canton.

In the rural areas of the canton of Guaranda, women have assumed a leading role in community leadership and social organization. However, their participation and representation in local decision-making bodies, such as rural Vestry Vessels, still faces significant challenges and barriers. It is essential to carry out a baseline survey that allows us to understand the current situation of women's leaders and organizations on these boards, in order to design strategies and public policies that promote their empowerment and effective participation.

Parish councils are spaces of local governance that allow the active participation of citizens in decision-making, promoting community development. In many rural communities, women assume a leading role that transcends domestic activities, getting involved in productive and social projects. Through these boards, they manage initiatives that seek to preserve ancestral knowledge in areas such as agriculture, natural medicine and gastronomy, generating income and contributing to social cohesion. According to Latorre and Muñoz (2021), rural women have the ability to transform traditional practices into economic

resources through community collaboration networks, which allows them to consolidate themselves as social leaders in their communities.

However, the path to entrepreneurship has not been easy for many of these women. Male migration to urban areas and lack of access to financial and educational resources have increased their responsibilities. Even so, their participation in the parish councils has made it possible to overcome some of these barriers, encouraging organization and collaborative work. The empowerment of women through entrepreneurship not only generates economic independence, but also revitalizes cultural traditions, making them relevant today (Torres, 2022). The problem identified is that there is little comprehensive information about women leaders and organizations in rural parish councils, which limits the understanding of their contributions and challenges to local development. This lack of knowledge underscores the importance of the current study, which aims to fill this gap and provide a solid foundation for future inclusive interventions and policies.

Baseline survey is a systematic process of gathering and analyzing information that allows a reference point to be established on a given situation. In the case of women leaders and organizations in the rural Parish Councils of the canton of Guaranda, this process is fundamental for the following reasons: (a) To make visible the role and contribution of women in community leadership and local decision-making; (b) Identify barriers and obstacles that women's leaders and organizations face in exercising their leadership and effective participation in vestry councils; (c) Establish a baseline to assess progress and progress in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in these decision-making spaces; and, (d) Generate key information for the design of public policies, programs, and projects that respond to the specific needs and demands of rural women's leaders and organizations.

The baseline survey of women leaders and women's organizations in the rural parish councils of the canton of Guaranda should address various key aspects, such as the participation and representation of women in parish councils, the profile of women leaders and characteristics of women's organizations, the barriers and obstacles faced by women's leaders and organizations in the exercise of their leadership and participation, the perception of the leaders and organizations themselves about their role and contributions in local decision-making, as well as the training, training and capacity building needs of women's leaders and organizations, as well as the resources and support mechanisms available to promote the empowerment of women in these decision-making spaces.

Ancestral knowledge, understood as the set of knowledge transmitted from generation to generation, constitutes the basis of many enterprises led by women in Guaranda. This knowledge ranges from agroecological techniques to processes for transforming natural products into marketable goods. For example, the cultivation of quinoa, potatoes and corn, as well as the production of dairy products and textiles, are activities that reflect this integration between tradition and entrepreneurship. As Rengifo (2020) explains, the use of ancestral practices not only guarantees the sustainability of the environment, but also strengthens community identity in the face of the challenges of globalization.

The socio-anthropological approach allows us to understand how women build hybrid spaces between the traditional and the modern, taking advantage of ancestral knowledge to meet the demands of the market. Through their participation in the parish councils, the entrepreneurs find support to consolidate these practices, giving them a commercial focus without losing the cultural essence. In addition, the development of artisanal products, such as fabrics and natural medicines, allows for the creation of a differentiated offer that generates added value and attracts consumers interested in sustainable and culturally significant goods.

One of the greatest achievements of female entrepreneurship in the parish councils of Guaranda has been the social and economic empowerment of women. Participating in the local economy by marketing traditional products gives them financial independence and greater control over their lives. According to Martínez and Pérez (2023), economic empowerment encourages autonomous decision-making and promotes changes in gender dynamics within communities. This empowerment also has a significant social dimension. Through their leadership in the vestry councils, the women promote projects that improve the

quality of life of the community, such as access to clean water and the implementation of community gardens. In addition, their involvement generates reference models for younger generations, encouraging female participation in decision-making spaces. In this way, rural women entrepreneurs not only challenge gender stereotypes, but also strengthen the social fabric of their communities.

Despite the progress made, women entrepreneurs in Guaranda face significant challenges. Lack of access to formal financing remains a major barrier, limiting the expansion of their projects. Likewise, bureaucracy and the scarcity of specialized training hinder the professionalization of their enterprises. However, vestry has begun to establish partnerships with non-governmental organizations and public entities to provide technical and financial support to these projects. On the other hand, globalization represents both a challenge and an opportunity. While competition with industrialized products can put local economies at risk, there is also a growing demand for artisanal and ecological goods in national and international markets. In this context, women entrepreneurs have the opportunity to position their products as ethical and sustainable alternatives, taking advantage of cultural tourism and fair trade channels (Guamán, 2022).

### METHODOLOGY

Especially the rural area of the Guaranda canton, has an organizational structure determined by cultural, socio-political and territorial factors that give life to the social fabric and cross the interrelation between individuals and communities. It is identified that the vast majority of external projects that are carried out in the communities do not have a positive impact because the institutions do not always understand the importance of respecting the socio-organization of communes and indigenous, peasant and rural communities. In addition, being aware of the collective right that assists these groups, the project "Raising a baseline of women's organizations" applied the guidelines of free, prior and informed consent as an instrument to guarantee the legitimacy of this initiative and its results.

The selected design is of a concurrent mixed type, where the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data are carried out simultaneously, giving equal importance to both methods to later integrate the results into the general interpretation. Regarding the structure of the design, the quantitative phase uses a survey to collect numerical data, which will be subjected to statistical analysis to identify patterns, trends and relationships between variables. In parallel, the qualitative phase uses techniques such as in-depth interviews and focus groups to gain a detailed understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and meanings that participants attribute to the phenomenon studied. The integration of both approaches is carried out both at the level of data collection and in the analysis and interpretation of the results.

The scope of the research is defined as descriptive-explanatory (Hernández-Sampiere & Mendoza Torres, 2018), which allows not only to characterize and describe in detail the phenomenon studied in its different dimensions, but also to understand the causal relationships between the identified variables. In its descriptive dimension, the study seeks to specify the properties, characteristics and important profiles of the groups of women under analysis. The explanatory facet, on the other hand, is aimed at responding to the causes of physical or social events, focusing on explaining why and how women develop their enterprises and under what conditions it manifests itself, allowing the generation of a baseline of these organizations.

This dual scope allows us to build a complete panorama that goes beyond the mere description of the phenomenon associated with neotribalism and the use of soft skills, entering into the understanding of the relationships between them and the adaptability strategies generated by students explaining why phenomena occur and under what conditions they manifest themselves. The combination of the mixed approach with the descriptive-explanatory scope allows a rigorous and comprehensive approach to the object of study, allowing not only to know its fundamental characteristics but also to understand the reasons and mechanisms that underlie its manifestation.

The study was carried out with a mixed design, descriptive-explanatory scope with a comprehensive approach, from the strategic design of matrices and questionnaires to the collection, cleaning and

implementation of data. Participation in events, data collection in selected parishes, and interviews with community representatives helped to gain detailed information. Data cleaning and implementation ensured the quality and accuracy of the information collected, which supported the final analysis of women's leadership in parish councils in the state of Guaranda.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained provided a comprehensive view of women's leadership in parish councils in the state of Guaranda, revealing the presence, roles, and challenges of women leaders and organizations. The results are indicated for each place visited.

### Salinas Parish

The rural parish of Salinas, in the canton of Guaranda, is fundamentally characterized by its socio-productive development marked by the existence of micro-enterprises and organizations. During the fieldwork carried out between the months of November and December 2023 and January 2024, 9 women's organizations were identified in the parish seat, the community of Verdepamba, Pambabuela, Yurak usha, Pachancho, Natawa, La Palma and Lanzaurco.

#### 1. Association for the Social Development of Artisans-TEXAL

This association was born as a space to promote the economic autonomy of rural women through the production of handicrafts. It is currently made up of 102 members from the communities of Yurak Uksha, Natahua, Verdepamba, Pachancho, Pambabuela and La Palma. It was created in 1973, but it was only on August 3, 2003 that it obtained its legal status. The women who make up this association are especially dedicated to the elaboration and marketing of handicrafts and textiles made with natural fibers such as sheep and alpaca wool, moorland straw and cabuya.

TEXAL operates through self-financing from sales of handicrafts developed by women. Weekly meetings are held according to requests or technical needs, although the frequency may be two weeks or more. The main problem that women identify at the macrosocial level is machismo. The main problem they identify at the level of the association is the possibility of providing employment to a greater number of women due to the lack of an established market where they can market handicrafts. In addition, they cannot maintain a stable customer abroad due to the high cost of air tickets to move the products.

#### 2. Women's Artisan Center of the Verdepamba Laurita Vikuña community – Verdepamba community

This organization was born as a space for women and as a source of work. It was formed in 1984 by the mothers of the members who currently make up the organization. Today it is made up of 40 women, and although it is not legally constituted, it remains in force. Currently women make textile materials such as jackets, hats, ponchos, bracelets, collars. In addition, they weave some straw crafts. It is sustained thanks to the self-financing of sales of handicraft products developed by women. The main problem identified is that there is no stable market in which to market their products.

Representative: Rosa Pajuña

#### 3. Pambabueleñita Association – Pambabuela Community

This association arose due to the need to obtain sources of work. It is mentioned that initially, the women lived only from the sale of milk, but they participated in a workshop in Guaranda on the creation of associations to generate employment, and they decided to form the Pambabuelenita Association. Mrs. Elenita Vargas visited the community to give workshops and training courses in weaving. At that time, they were already making shipments to Quito, and it was then that their colleagues suggested the creation of the association to receive more benefits. Subsequently, they formed the association with an investment of 20 dollars per person, adding a total of 19 people at that time, being the first legal associates.

This organization was created in 1990 and has been legally constituted since 2017. It currently has 30 active women. They are mainly engaged in the weaving of wool shigras, straw and cabuya, among others. Also

to the knitting of sacks, hats, ponchos and rugs. The way to sustain this organization is through self-financing of sales of the handicraft products developed by the members with a contribution of \$5 or \$10. In addition, they sustain the organization through the family gardens that they have. The main problems they mention is that they do not have their own artisan house and only borrow the communal house. Another problem is that they do not have a stable market to market their handicrafts. They request to have constant training to perfect the finish of the fabric.

Legal representative: María Rosa Cañar Guañamo

#### 4. Heart of Jesus Women's Group - Yurak Usha Community

This organization arose due to the need to obtain sources of work and economic autonomy for rural women in this area. It was created in 1983, and is not legally constituted. It currently operates with 17 active members. They weave sacks, ponchos, vests, scarves with wool, and weave baskets and rugs with straw. This group of women works thanks to the self-financing of sales of the artisanal products developed by the members. The problem identified is that there is no stable market to market the products. In addition, they do not have their own brand to sell the products and set prices.

Legal representative: María Francisca Toapanta

#### 5. Women Entrepreneurs "El Belén" – Pachancho community

This group arose from the need to obtain sources of work and economic autonomy for women. It was created in 2015, and is not yet legally constituted. It currently operates with 32 active women. They weave with straw and wool and make products such as: baskets, hats, sacks, ponchos, scarves. In addition, they make rugs that combine straw with wool. The sustenance comes from the self-financing of sales of handicraft products developed by women.

The main problem is that they do not have a stable market where they can sell their products. In addition, they do not have their own brand to differentiate their crafts and set prices. Nor do they have an artisan house to meet to carry out their artisanal work.

Legal representative: Etelvina Chisa Mazabanda

#### 6. Natawa Women's Group – Natawa Community

It arose due to the need to obtain sources of work, in 2003. It currently has 10 active women, and is not legally constituted. They weave with straw and only focus on making baskets currently. The main problem is that they have a deteriorated infrastructure and do not have spaces for commercialization, which affects them in the cost-benefit ratio.

#### 7. Rosa María de la Palma Women's Group

This organization emerged 38 years ago. The older women of the community saw the importance of organizing themselves in mingas to make the women's house, and to have a space where they can make the weaving that is traditionally made. When the organization began, there were only 15 women. Father Antonio Polo supported them to build the artisan house, they made a minga together. They wove bringing the thread from somewhere else. They were taught to weave by a lady from Chasojuan, named Marcia Sevilla, sent by Father Polo. The women were trained to learn how to weave. Juana María Aldaz is one of the founders and learned to weave and then taught other women. They wove with yarn and cabuya from the beginning. The origin of the name of the organization is because the first founders were called Rosa María.

This group of women is reactivated after a while to make handicrafts and improve the women's economy, because they feel capable of doing so. Women get together specifically to knit. There are currently 30 registered women, but only 25 are active. They do not yet have legal status. It is a self-financing organization. A year, they sell approximately 1000 dollars. They currently make handicrafts with cade,

thread and cabuya, which is the raw material. The handicrafts in cade began 2 years ago, because the people of ChaupiMatiaví taught them.

To bring the cade, the women go to a place that is an hour from the village. The procedure consists of cutting the cade, which is a palm, removing the stems and leaving the leaves. Then the leaves are left to decompose for 2 months, if it is too hard they beat it, then they wash it and let it dry for half an hour in the sun. In summer they bring the Cade. They make a minga, they agree and they all go together to bring the raw material, paying for a car. Once the thread is dry, they are weaving with that, taking approximately 2 days. The cabuya and the thread are bought in Salinas. They sell their handicrafts in Salinas, in Warmi Ruray and in the Killa.

The main problem identified is that they do not have a market to sell the products. The longhouse needs maintenance and they need machines to carve the cabuya. They would like to be trained in techniques for making caps and individual in cade and finished, new designs for shigras.

Name of the representative: María Beatriz Collay

#### 8. New Generation Women's Group – community of Lanzaurco

Previously there were other organizations. Since long before, grandmothers wove shigras with cabuya and thread. They currently have an artisanal house for the organization, which was given to them by the parish council and the community made the minga. It is a self-financing organization. Every woman buys and sells. They are only women from Lanzaurco. This organization began a year ago with the aim of achieving women's economic autonomy. It is made up of 16 active women. They started with 23. They are not legally constituted. They currently sell at the Warmi Ruray store in Salinas. They are dedicated to the weaving of baskets, shigras, keychains, cade, thread, cabuya, mullos.

The main problem identified is that sometimes they do not advance to fulfill orders. They don't meet much. They are just getting organized. Women have other domestic activities to fulfill. They have to fix and improve the conditions of the women's house. Of the 16 women, only one woman cannot read and write. They meet only when there are orders. They need training in socio-organization and crafts and a handicraft workshop in Cabuya. They feel marginalized and require training in the territory because it is difficult to mobilize women to the city. They are super far away to get their products out. Training in Gastronomy issues, so that they make bread and have an oven.

Name of the representative: María Ernestina Punina (president)

#### **Parroquia Simiatug**

Simiatug is a rural parish in the canton of Guaranda, with a population of 11,246 inhabitants. It has a slightly higher presence of women (51%), and is characterized by having an indigenous population (94%) (INEC, 2010). This parish possesses a strength and strength of organizational and community structure. The women's organizations that we were able to identify are mostly articulated to the leadership of each community, that is, many of the decisions, even those that are pertinent only to women's groups, are taken collectively in a community assembly and with the presence of the leaders.

According to the information provided by the community authorities, in the 39 communities that are part of the parish, there are women's groups that are dedicated to weaving, embroidery and crafts. There is no precise census, but it seems that about 1500 women would dedicate themselves in a traditional and intergenerational way to the elaboration of embroidery and shigras.

##### 1. Pímbalo Community

The women artisans and weavers of the Pímbalo community work at the community level, and therefore do not have a specific organization or group, nor a defined name. However, they have been working in weaving for several generations, not always with the purpose of generating economic income, but because weaving is part of the identity and vocation of Simiate women. Although they do not have a defined group,

there are 14 women who are more actively engaged in the elaboration of shigras, ponchos, girdles, sometimes with the participation of men from the community. Many of the handicrafts are sold on Wednesdays of the fair in the center of Simiatug.

The main problem faced by women weavers and artisans in Pímbalo is the impossibility of getting their products to the markets; the prevalence of unfair trade; the lack of a meeting place (since they do not have their own artisan house), they do not have specific knowledge about administrative and accounting management, and they face an unstable sales market affected by the lack of an independent organization. Despite the challenges, both the community in general and the women's group showed total willingness to strengthen the women's group and to appoint a board of directors made up of women, which implies a level of commitment to artisanal development.

Luz María Azogue, a 33-year-old indigenous woman, is leading this effort to maintain the organization. This same group of artisan women has now formed a religious choir, which allows them to stay together and organized.

## 2. Warmikunapa Mushuk Ñan - Comunidad Tingo

The main objective of the Warmikunapa Mushuk Ñan group is to share traditional knowledge, organize themselves and find an economic livelihood. The group was formed 10 years ago in response to the need to be united and have financial autonomy. Although it is not legally constituted, it currently has 24 active women who are mainly engaged in the weaving of shigras, purses and rugs, as well as raising small animals, although previously they organized themselves to plant vegetables.

Their self-financing comes from the sales of artisanal products developed by the members. The main problem they face is the lack of a market for the commercialization of their handicrafts; the absence of fair payment for their products, which means that their labor is not properly valued; the lack of a suitable meeting place (currently meeting in the artisan house of the commune), and the lack of a legal constitution. The group meets monthly to address their needs and is led by Nelly Lucinda Chisag Ramos, a 43-year-old indigenous woman. Despite the challenges, Warmi Kunapa Mushuk Ñan demonstrates its dedication to sharing knowledge and working together to sustain itself in the Tingo.

## 3. Mushuk Yuyay - Cocha Colorada Community

The Mushuk Yuyay group, from the Cocha Colorada community of Simiatug, has as its main objective to generate income and establish a fund so that women can support themselves through the manufacture of fabrics. The group was formed 25 years ago with the idea of forming a solidarity box, and for the production of fabrics. Nowadays they especially make shigras of beautiful and unique designs. It has 21 members and diversifies the fabric with other activities, such as the production of bread and other artisanal products. Although it is not legally constituted, it is strengthened.

The main problem they face is the lack of a stable sales market; the intermediation in the sale of their products without receiving a fair price, and the absence of a suitable meeting place. Despite the obstacles, Mushuk Yuyay demonstrates his dedication to income generation and sustainable development in Cocha Colorada de Simiatug. The group meets every 15 days to address their needs and plan activities. Lida Gabriela Camboallas, a 47-year-old indigenous woman, leads the group.

## 4. Papaloma Community

In this community, the women's group is currently inactive. A few years ago, the Runakunapak Yachana Wasi Foundation took the initiative to organize women with the purpose of generating income through the manufacture of fabrics and establishing a sales market. However, due to the lack of a stable marketing space, the women's organization stopped meeting. Despite being active, the women of the community have not stopped weaving independently. They specialize in the production of fabrics of all kinds, such as shigras, ponchos, girdles, among others.

### 5. Santo Domingo Community

The currently unnamed group, formerly known as "New Thought," has as its main objective that the communes receive support from some public entity and that women help each other. Although they were previously legally constituted, they do not currently have that status. The initiative was formed 23 years ago with the purpose of providing support among women in their communes, focusing on activities such as the elaboration of handicrafts, bakeries and resuming practices that they carried out previously.

With 10 members, the group used to meet since 2001, but they stopped doing so over time. At the beginning of 2024, they decided to resume their organization. Despite not facing significant problems, they simply stopped organizing for a while. Recently, they resumed their organization. Although they do not have an established name at present, they are led by Carmen Yanchalinqui, a 60-year-old indigenous woman.

### 6. Las Florcitas Women's Group - Chiguil Community

The main objective of the group "Las Florcitas" is to establish an artisan house. Although it is not currently legally constituted, this group of 9 women meets in their own commune, Chigüil, and seeks to create a space to share knowledge that has been passed down for generations. With 20 years of existence since 2003, "Las Florcitas" is dedicated to the elaboration of shigras, hats, scarves, sweaters and various handicrafts. They finance their activities through contributions from the members, but face challenges such as the lack of a stable market to sell their products and the high cost of materials.

Emma Janet Toapanta, a 34-year-old indigenous woman, leads the group. Despite the obstacles, "Las Florcitas" demonstrates its commitment to the preservation of traditional knowledge and the creation of a collaborative space in Chigüil. The group meets regularly every month to strengthen its organization and continue its artisanal work.

### 7. "New Life" Women's Group - Cutagua Community

The main objective of the "Nueva Vida" group is that all its members learn to make all kinds of crafts. Although it is not currently legally constituted, this group of 10 women is located in the Cotagua commune and has a physical store in the Simiatug parish. The initiative emerged 28 years ago as a women's group aimed at helping each other in the parish and sharing their skills. "Nueva Vida" is dedicated to the elaboration of shigras, handicrafts, vegetables and a variety of garments and accessories.

The main problem they face, like other groups of artisans, is not having a stable market. Women finance their activities through individual contributions. The group's representative, Enma Sigcha, a 49-year-old indigenous woman, regularly summons the women, via telephone every 3 or 4 months.

### 8. Mushuc Apacuna - Mindina Community

The main objective of the "Mushuc Apacuna" group is to finance the education of their children. This group of 18 women is located in the Mindina community and operates in a physical store. Legally constituted since 2006, "Mushuc Apacuna" was formed with the purpose that all women master the elaboration of handicrafts and provide training to all members of the community. With 29 years of existence since 1994, "Mushuc Apacuna" specializes in the elaboration of cabuya shigras, embroidery and various handicrafts. Women finance their activities through individual contributions, but they face challenges such as lack of markets and issues related to the migration of some partners. Consuelito Caiza, a 50-year-old indigenous woman, leads the group. Despite the obstacles, "Mushuc Apacuna" meets monthly, demonstrating its commitment to the educational well-being of its children and the development of crafts in the Mindina community.

## CONCLUSIONS

This project makes a significant contribution to knowledge by making visible the diversity and challenges of female leadership in the Rural Parish Council of Guaranda. Practical results demonstrated in identifying organizations, analyzing problems, and supporting recommendations support a solid and concrete



understanding. These contributions support the need for inclusive policies and concrete actions to strengthen women's active and fair participation in public decision-making, marking clear progress in understanding this important socio-political aspect. Additionally, it is indicated that as a result of the linkage project:

- 8 women's organizations have been identified and registered in Simiatug.
- 9 women's organizations have been identified and registered in Salinas.
- 99% of women's organizations point to the lack of stable marketing spaces for their handicrafts as the main problem, as well as the persistence of unfair payment for their work and effort.
- There is a negative perception towards the Simiatug Samay association. The artisans perceive that they do not always receive a fair price for the crafts that are marketed by this association.
- Women especially recommend training in administration and accounting, as well as in perfecting their finishes.
- It is important to develop a second stage of information collection to have a complete record in the communities of the parishes.
- This information is synthesized in an Excel matrix.

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