

How Social Entrepreneurship Promotes Sustainable Development: With Some Examples from Developed and Developing Countries



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Abstract This chapter aims to show how social entrepreneurship contributes to solving persistent and complex problems in various parts of the world, in developed and developing countries, and, this way, how it contributes to sustainable development. By the theory review, research has focused on the activity of social enterprises. Considering the impact that social entrepreneurship has in the communities, there appears to be a clear surplus between results and resources used, both material and human, with a substantial incidence of volunteering. From the results of our study, including the examples of social enterprises presented, it is possible to imagine how empowering communities can contribute to a more sustainable future. Social entrepreneurship is still recent regarding its academic study, and several authors such as Roberts and Woods (Europe 7:45–51, 2000) or Parente et al. (*Empreendedorismo social: Contributos teóricos para a sua definição*, 2011) refer the scarcity and some confusion still existing in the literature. This work can help improve this picture. This chapter can contribute, in a relevant way, for the knowledge of how social entrepreneurship has an impact on the dynamics of the territories where it operates. And it goes beyond the more traditional approach, considering not only the situation

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L. Cagica Carvalho et al. (eds.), *New Paths of Entrepreneurship Development*,
Studies on Entrepreneurship, Structural Change and Industrial Dynamics,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96032-6_14

in developing regions but also addressing social entrepreneurship in developed countries.

Keywords Social entrepreneurship · Sustainable development · Social capital · Developing countries · Poverty reduction · Developed countries · Sustainability

1 Introduction

After the Millennium Development goals that tackled the problem of poverty, with some mixed results, the United Nations started recently with the diffusion of the Sustainable Development Goals to respond to the somewhat sense of failure of this former program, combining 17 goals, some of which are relevant for the present study.

Globalization is a reality that interconnects societies, their economy, and the environment, increasing the capacity to share resources and attention to the way different policies generate impact and act on inequalities. On a planet where world wealth continues to grow, coexisting with more than 1000 million people living in extreme poverty, and about 870 million people in chronic hunger. It is in this global context of structural and persistent inequalities that the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] are based, with the elimination of extreme poverty and hunger as the major challenge of the United Nations Development Agenda for the post-2015 (Vision 2012).

Social entrepreneurship can play a decisive role in the realization of the SDGs precisely because it has a social mission and its action is directed towards promoting well-being and improving the quality of life, working in communities around the world. The values of social entrepreneurship include the appropriate use of resources to promote a sustainable world where trust, honesty, respect, and hope are valued (e.g. Mathur 2011). Social entrepreneurship aims to improve the conditions of communities and society, through solutions to social problems, innovative and adapted to the contexts, promoting rooting in the communities and their empowerment (Mair and Marti 2006), and with an ethical concern (e.g. Zahra et al. 2009).

Thus, starting with a review of the theory about the impacts of social entrepreneurship, it is highlighted its role in the fight against extreme poverty and hunger, strategic challenges of sustainable development.

2 Social Entrepreneurship

The definition of social entrepreneurship is usually based on the definition of commercial entrepreneurship, to which is added a social mission and an alignment between the economic and social aspects (Dees 1998). Social entrepreneurship emerged in the late 1970s, at a time of rising unemployment and declining economic

growth rates (Borzaga and Defourny 2004: 352–353). The ability to combine elements of traditional business and volunteerism is characteristic of social entrepreneurship, but may also be the major obstacle to the definition itself, as stated by Certo and Miller (2008). Social entrepreneurship integrates innovation, proactivity, and capacity to overcome risk and uncertainty. In summary, social entrepreneurship is characterized by a social mission, with an alignment between the economic and social aspects (Dees 1998), in a search for results in terms of social value instead of profit (Mair and Martí 2006: 38), with a greater reliance on external funding and volunteers (Sharir and Lerner 2006; Harding and Cowling 2006), being the social entrepreneur more motivated for the creation of social value than the commercial entrepreneur (Darabi et al. 2012). Social entrepreneurship can be characterized as the act or practice of intermediation, with a positive social result, promoting improvement or complete alteration of a production pattern (innovation), with risk and uncertainty, by someone with a profile of independent, thinker, dreamer and altruistic, through the mobilization of the resources of others, and voluntary collaborators.

Social entrepreneurship has many advantages. For example, it contributes to solving social problems that governments and philanthropic organizations do not solve (Dees 1998), in areas such as combating poverty through access to minimum wages, housing, or affordable health care, helping to develop social capital, essential for the sustainability of communities (Enterprising Non-Profits 2010; Smith et al. 2013).

Some authors, such as Caldwell et al. (2012), point also some possible disadvantages of social entrepreneurship, including the possibility of perpetuating the marginalization and oppression. Zietsma and Tuck (2012) point out that unexpected negative effects may occur, since social enterprises intervene in complex social structures, and often have backgrounds with cultures and traditions very different from those in the communities in which they operate. Other authors, such as Dees et al. (2002), Hails et al. (2006), Neck et al. (2009), Nicholls (2009), or Nussbaum (2011), call for the advances in social accounting tools and methods to assess the impacts of social enterprises, and an appropriate metric to assess social and environmental outcomes, and to make comparisons, for example in financial terms, with universally accepted indicators to measure the effects on the persons covered.

There have been several projects to promote knowledge of social enterprises. Some examples are the Mapping Social Entrepreneurial Enterprises in Ireland (Prizeman and Crossan 2011), the Social Entrepreneurship Monitor, United Kingdom (Harding and Cowling 2006), the study Social Entrepreneurship in Portugal: Policies, Organizations and Practices of Education/Training, submitted in 2014 (UPorto, n.d.), and the Map of Innovation and Entrepreneurship of Portugal, made available in 2015 (MIES, n.d.). This new dynamic is linked to the quest to exploit the potential of the Internet and the increase of financial resources for the promotion and development of the social economy, for example through European Community programs.

The increased use of the Internet and the advances of the technology made possible to develop platforms available at a global scale, helping, for instance,

microfinance projects, such as Kiva, to succeed. At the same time, the action of the European Commission for social innovation, arising from the Innovation Union Initiative (2010) and the Social Investment Package (2013), include some programs and initiatives to help social innovation being a source of jobs and growth in Europe, through the promotion, sharing, and supporting of social innovation projects and knowledge (European Commission, *n.d.*).

3 Sustainable Development

Hundreds of definitions can be found for sustainable development (Dale and Hill 2001) and the expression is increasingly used. Searching for a general engine on the Internet, for the expression “sustainable development” 95,500,000 results were found (Google, *n.d.*); going to an academic search engine, 2,960,000 results were found (Google Scholar, *n.d.*).

The concern for sustainable development was already present in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, with the need for sustainable management of forests, in works of reference of John Evelyn, Hans Carl von Carlowitz, or Malthus and Jevons, concerned about the limitation of resources (Malthus) and coal scarcity (Jevons) (Dyllick and Hockerts 2002; Baker 2006). Still in Europe, but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, works by von Carlowitz, Alexander von Humboldt and Georg Ludwig Hartig lead to the emergence of the science of forestry and the land ethos of Aldo Leopold (Dyllick and Hockerts 2002). Later on, in the 1960s and 1970s, there were concerns about the consequences of pollution to motivate questions about the form of economic development (Baker 2006).

But it is in 1987, with the publication of *Our Common Future*, The Brundtland Commission Report, or more commonly called The Brundtland Report, of the World Commission on Environment and Development, that the expression sustainable development has gained widespread use (Daly 1990; Redclift 2005; Sneddon et al. 2006; Jordan 2008), establishing sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED] 1987: 43).

The Brundtland Report has gained international authority in the field of sustainable development (Baker 2006), and is almost necessarily considered by international organizations and institutions (Lafferty and Meadowcroft 2000). It is referenced in great part of the published texts on the subject of sustainable development.

The Brundtland Report recommends a new development model that includes the traditional economic and social model, but with ecological objectives (Baker 2006). It advocates changes in the perceptions of the quality of life of Western countries, in order to reduce consumption and satisfy the needs of the poor (*ibidem*), taking into account the limitations of the environment, technology, social organization in relation to natural resources, and the capacity of the biosphere to cope with the

consequences of human activity (WCED 1987). For this new reality, a more equitable sharing of resources with global effort will be needed in a world where the North is governed by pretensions and the South is still driven by needs (Baker 2006). Regarding pollution, for example, the richest 20% of the world population account for 63% of CO₂ emissions (Bina and Soromenho-Marques 2008).

In the Brundtland Report there is a concern with intergenerational justice, but also with the poor people of every generation (WCED 1987). The Brundtland Report implies changes to the levels of the economic growth model, population growth and territorial distribution, industry performance, food production, energy production and use, and biodiversity protection (Baker 2006: 23–24).

For UNESCO, sustainable development encompasses the four dimensions (1) social (people in society), ensuring peace, human rights, and equal rights, (2) economic (work and income), which must follow appropriate development, (3) political (policies, politicians, and decision-making), essential to ensure democracy, and (4) natural (living beings, systems and resources to support life) (UNESCO 2010). The concept of sustainable development is based on a vision of the world as a system of systems, related in space and time, facilitating the way people see themselves and the world they are part of (IISD, n.d.). For example, pollution produced in the Northern Hemisphere can influence air quality in the Southern Hemisphere, and decisions to combat poverty at present can have an impact on the poverty levels of the next generations. For development to be sustainable, natural resources (the sum of which is called natural capital) must be replenished at least at the rate at which they are consumed, to avoid environmental degradation, negative for human life and that, in the limit, can lead to its extinction of the planet (Costanza and Daly 1992). It is also essential to ensure that future generations can maintain a wide range of options (Tonn 2004). Innovation poses new challenges to sustainability but also helps to ensure sustainability. The lack of a broadly accepted definition, sufficiently objective, has given rise to a large number of programs, institutions, and sectors of society to project their own approaches (Robert et al. 2005).

The SDGs were launched at a UN summit between 25 and 24 September 2015, effective until 2030, following the eight Millennium Development Goals, which were in action between 2000 and 2015 (UNRIC, n.d.). There are seventeen SDGs. In the SDGs, the eradication of hunger and misery is divided into two specific goals and is addressed in two additional ones (UNRIC, n.d.). Sustainable development is evident in the 17 SDGs, starting with the very name of the objectives, and shows a concern for social, environmental, economic, and cultural sustainability.

4 Methodology

The methodology used to carry out the study was based on a bibliographical research, documental, qualitative, followed by the study of some social enterprises, with the objective of knowing how social entrepreneurship promotes sustainable development.

Table 1 Overview of the analyzed organizations

Study context about social entrepreneurship	Study unit	Description
In developing countries	People in Need	Interview face-to-face, printed and online information
In developed countries	Center for Social Innovation	Interview face-to-face, printed and online information
At large-scale	Ashoka, Grameen Foundation, Oxfam, and World Vision	Printed and online information

The first step was going through a large review of the literature on the subject, with a particular focus on the theory on social entrepreneurship and sustainable development, and how the two concepts are related.

The second step was to make a selection of social enterprises that could be good examples to consider, based on their positive impact on sustainable development, in particular through their activity for poverty reduction, in developed and developing countries. The focus on poverty alleviation was because of its relevance within the SDGs and positive impact on all dimensions of the sustainable development (UNRIC, *n.d.*).

It was used LinkedIn (*n.d.*) as a source to identify and obtain information on social enterprises, mainly because it is a database that allows broad access to social enterprises, from any place in the world. In this database of organizations, it can be found information about each social enterprise, including descriptive of the activity developed, Internet address, type of organization, size in number of employees, location of headquarters, and date of foundation. Social enterprises, in general, are relatively recent and are concerned to be present on LinkedIn (*n.d.*) and to give complete and up-to-date information. Subsequently, additional information about the selected social enterprises was searched through their web pages or other relevant documentation. It was also considered information from previous semi-structured interviews and observations, done for a study on how social enterprises innovate and promote social capital (Bento 2016). Those interviews were conducted in English, face-to-face, and took place in July 2013, in Prague, with People in Need, and in August 2015, in Toronto, with the Center for Social Innovation.

Table 1 presents an overview of how the information was collected for the analyzed organizations.

5 Findings

Nowadays, people live in a very unequal society where, of the estimated 7 billion people on the planet, more than 1 billion live in extreme poverty (living on less than \$1.25 a day) with about 870 million people in situation of chronic hunger, while more than 80% of all wealth is accumulated by less than 10% of the people (World Bank, *n.d.*; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN/DESA] 2013; United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network [UNSDSN]

2012). In 2010, 1210 people had fortunes of US\$1 billion, according to Forbes magazine (Magazine 2011).

Eradication of poverty (first SDG), eradication of hunger (second SDG), widespread access to affordable housing, basic services, and improvement of living conditions in slums (eleventh SDG), and reduction of inequalities (tenth SDG) (UNRIC, n.d.), show how these are sensitive areas for sustainable development, coinciding with the dominating role of social enterprises. The contribution of social entrepreneurship is visible in practically all regions of the globe, in different ways, but in a growth that has been very relevant in recent years, and translated into numbers of social enterprises, people covered by their activity, generated employment, and an increasingly significant contribution to the economy, as referred by authors such as Yeoh (2012) or Anheier (2005).

Muscat and Whitty (2009) argue that the mission of social entrepreneurship is based on ethics, on the pursuit of the common good and on contributing to sustainability through the satisfaction of basic needs. In developed countries, social entrepreneurship has helped to break the inertia and lack of financial resources facing countries and organizations with impact on poverty and associated problems. Innovative solutions for agricultural production and land use, selection of species appropriate to each climate and season of the year, optimization of water and land use, as well as methods of recycling, recovery and reuse of resources, or innovative energy production solutions, or models that are simple, replicable, and scalable, that create wealth and employment, are some of the practices that justify the contribution of social entrepreneurship to sustainable development, as advocated by authors such as Pretty et al. (2003), Sarkis et al. (2010), or Cherian (2009), and that make it preferable to other solutions to combat social problems. Krishnamurthy and Jalnawalla (2011) highlight the greater return of social entrepreneurship in the application of financial resources, compared to that achieved by other solutions for development. As an example, in India, that has, among its population of 1.200 million inhabitants, 2/3 in poverty, it is estimated that of the resources applied in non-profit organizations, 90% reach the group to be supported, a figure that compares with the only 10% achieved by the traditional support for development (ibidem). By engaging populations and facilitating their settlement, social entrepreneurship helps to reduce the growing trend of migration of populations to cities and thus contributes to sustainable development. This is possible because social entrepreneurship empowers people by involving them in solving their problems and by creating jobs and sources of income that enable them to stay in their communities instead of having to find work elsewhere, as referred by authors as Bornstein and Davis (2010).

5.1 Social Entrepreneurship in Developing Countries

Of the 6,986,951,000 people on the planet (data of 2011), 82.23% live in developing countries, and 17.77% in developed countries (Population Reference Bureau 2011: 2). Population growth and the lack of resources and infrastructures, characteristic in

developing countries, create opportunities for social innovation, for which local human resources must be prepared as potential agents of change (Wang 2012).

In developing countries, social entrepreneurship has certain characteristics, which it is important to mention. For example in Latin America and the Caribbean, hybrid social entrepreneurship is dominant; in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa [MENA], there are the lowest estimated levels of social entrepreneurship; in Latin America and Africa there is more social entrepreneurship at an early stage, which can be justified because there are more problems of basic needs to be fulfilled, along with weaknesses in the functioning of state institutions and in the organization of the civil society (Lepoutre et al. 2013). By hybrid social entrepreneurship, it is considered entrepreneurship with a mix of elements from the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors, such as a shelter for homeless people that starts a for-profit business to create employment for their residents, as considered by Dees (1998). In Southeast Asia, social entrepreneurship contributes to the development, through social inclusion, training, intermediation, and mediation of existing resources (Decanay 2006).

Social capital may be especially important for poor people, replacing or improving the performance of both physical capital and human capital (Collier 2002). Associativism is an example of a source of social capital and cultural capital, favoring the articulation of both an upward social mobility (Albuquerque 2008: 12–14). Especially in developing countries, efforts to improve levels of citizenship and the promotion of equal rights and obligations among populations continue to be needed.

5.1.1 People in Need

People in Need [PIN], is headquartered in Prague (Czech Republic) and was founded in 1992 by a group of war correspondents and foreign correspondents (PIN, n.d.). It has become an organization that provides humanitarian aid in problematic areas of the globe, and acts in the defense of human rights, developing its activity by projects, and maintaining dozens of stable and diversified partnerships with the United Nations and the Government of the Czech Republic, as well as regional governments, foundations, NGOs, companies and individuals (ibidem).

In 2015, PIN had a budget of 54,338,000 euros (PIN, n.d.). About 80% of the total expenditure was for Humanitarian Aid and Development in developing countries, with 23,806,320 euros spent in emergency support, 8,611,788 euros for resilience and nutrition, 2,872,008 euros in education and capacity building, 2,838,120 euros for sustainable livelihoods and environment, 2,122,236 euros in social protection and inclusion, and 2,109,528 euros for good governance; the most benefited countries were Syria/Turkey (14,814,003 euros) and Ukraine (12,267,183 euros) (ibidem). Between 1992 and 2012, PIN was active in 55 countries (PIN 2012).

PIN works mainly in developing countries, but also carries out activity in its country of origin, having, in 2015, applied 2,534,000 euros in education and prevention and 2,427,000 euros in social work and counseling (PIN, n.d.).

The PIN works on essential components of sustainable development and, by targeting its activity primarily to developing countries, it is also contributing to the achievement of the tenth SDG, at the part of reducing inequalities between countries. Its performance in the Czech Republic meets the eleventh SDG to make cities inclusive, resilient, secure, and sustainable.

5.2 *Social Entrepreneurship in Developed Countries*

In developed countries, the reduction of tax-based financing for the social sector has opened the way for social entrepreneurship and social innovation (Fowler 2000) to solve social problems not solved by private companies and governments (Lasprogata and Cotton 2003). It is an alternative and/or a complement to the action of governments or international organizations in combating social problems such as poverty (Seelos et al. 2011) and helps to stimulate economic and social growth (Joshi et al. 2007). Entrepreneurship and the growing importance of knowledge management are relevant components of changes in the economies of Western countries (Jacquinnet 2008).

In both the US and Western Europe social entrepreneurship exists more in the form of NGOs (Lepoutre et al. 2013).

5.2.1 **Center for Social Innovation**

An organization in the field of social entrepreneurship with activity in developed countries is the Center for Social Innovation [CSI]. Founded in 2004, with activity in Toronto (Canada), the CSI unfolds in three spaces in Canada (Spadina, Regent Park, and Annex) and one in the USA (New York City). The CSI is a coworking community focused on social innovation, for entities with up to five employees. Currently, it houses social enterprises, non-profit organizations, independent professionals in the areas of design or fashion creation, and activists to improve living conditions.

The CSI provides access to physical and human resources, promoting innovation in entities with a social mission installed there. CSI is a space open to the community, promotes the construction/reinforcement of social capital, which extends internally, through all the dynamics created among resident social enterprises. The CSI is installed in districts that are weakened by social problems and poverty, often associated with drug use and trafficking scenarios, and prostitution, as mentioned by the interviewee.

In Toronto, the CSI integrates 1000 organizations in the field of social innovation; generates employment for over 2500 people, reaching a combined annual revenue of \$250 million (Center for Social Innovation, n.d.).

By promoting the creation of social enterprises, the CSI contributes to the generation of employment and wealth and, by being a space open to the community,

facilitates the improvement of its situation. In this way, the CSI is contributing to sustainable development, and promoting the achievement of the SDGs.

5.3 *Social Entrepreneurship at Large-Scale*

With large-scale activity, can be considered organizations such as Ashoka, Grameen Foundation, Oxfam, or World Vision. These social enterprises usually have activity in both developed and developing countries.

Ashoka, founded in 1980, based in Washington, District of Columbia, USA, has offices in over 36 countries on five continents, operates in more than 90 countries, provides professional support and facilitates access to finance for social enterprises, to combat social problems on a global scale (Ashoka, [n.d.](#)).

The Grameen Foundation, founded in 1997, based in Washington, District of Columbia, US, works in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East through local partners to strengthen microfinance in the fight against poverty, mainly extreme poverty (Foundation, [n.d.](#)).

Oxfam, founded in 1942, based in Oxford, United Kingdom, is active in the fight against poverty and injustice through 17 affiliated organizations in more than 90 countries (Oxfam, [n.d.](#)).

World Vision, founded in Monrovia, California, US, promotes the fight against poverty, access to food, water, hygiene and health, education and literacy, agriculture, and economic development in communities in nearly 100 countries, through 46,000 collaborators (World Vision, [n.d.-a, -b](#)).

6 Discussion

Considering what the theory says, from authors referred along this work, one can synthesize the main characteristics of social entrepreneurship and sustainable development, and how social entrepreneurship contributes to sustainable development, as shown in Fig. 1.

Taking into account (1) the requirements of sustainable development, in its dimensions (in particular social and economic), consideration of culture as one of its pillars, and the dynamic and complex perspective in time and space, and (2) the characteristics of social entrepreneurship of social mission, search for creation of social value, and alignment of social and economic aspects, social entrepreneurship seems to have a prominent place to contribute to sustainable development, through innovative solutions and the empowerment of populations. In this way, social entrepreneurship can contribute to medium/long term solutions thus contributing, also, to sustainable development.

Considering the impact that social enterprises have, facilitating communities to generate wealth and solve social problems, it can be found a clear surplus between

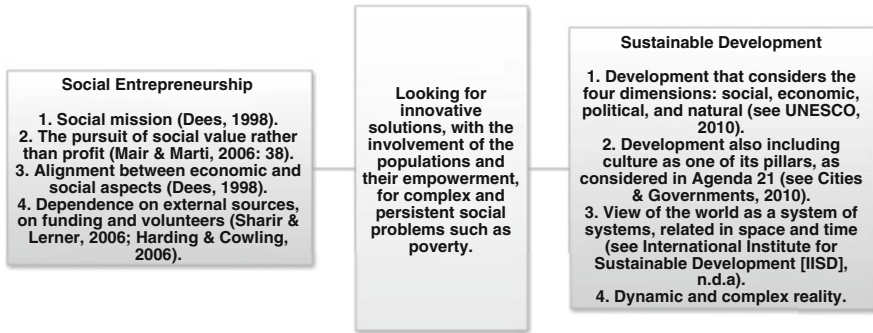


Fig. 1 Social entrepreneurship and sustainable development

results and resources used, both material and human, with a substantial incidence of volunteerism. The examples reviewed in the previous section give us a hint of the variety and depth of activities and social sectors that the social entrepreneurship is dedicated to. Few social problems can be untouched by social entrepreneurs and social organizations. And much of the problems in society are related to the big issue of sustainable development, from pollution, food, unbalanced diets, poverty, drug use, to name a few mentioned earlier.

Social capital gains importance within the scope of the SDGs, being suggested in Goal 8 that social capital be part of the national accounts as one of the countries' sustainability indicators (Cutter et al. 2015). Social capital is more relevant to social entrepreneurship than to commercial entrepreneurship, for example in the mobilization of weak ties, facilitating access to information, financial resources and others that would otherwise be difficult, as Sakurai (2008) points out, based on the findings of the study of eight cases. By weak ties, it is considered the ties with the acquaintances, people less close than our family or friends, as referred by Granovetter (1995).

The major challenge is to continue the long road to eradicating social problems, such as poverty, and to maximize resources and achieve the most sustainable and scalable solutions. More important than charity is the generation of real social value, through social entrepreneurship, allowing results to last in the medium and long-term. The financial wealth that exists in the world is certainly more than sufficient to support the necessary projects, and the sharing component should be encouraged. Organizations such as CSI and PIN, or Ashoka, Grameen Foundation, Oxfam, and World Vision, show us how social entrepreneurship can have an impact and act positively on the various dimensions of sustainable development in societies most in need, but also in the wealthier, on a more local or more global scale.

Thus, by the theory, by the examples, and by the results of our study, it was verified the contribution of social entrepreneurship to the dimensions of sustainable development (especially to the social and the economic) and to the realization of SDGs (particularly to those related to the eradication of poverty and hunger).

Acknowledgments The authors deeply acknowledge the valuable contribution of the anonymous reviewers to achieve the final version of this manuscript.

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