DECENTRALIZATION DYNAMICS: ASSESSING LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE IN LINGGA

[1]**Sri Mulyani,** [2]**E.Dody Kurniawan,** [3]**Desrian hariono,** [4]**Yosrizal,** [5]**Zurrahman,** [6]**Fikky marlissawaty**

STISIP Bunda Tanah Melayu, Kepulauan Riau–Indonesia

E-mail: [1]ms.syurah@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the implementation of decentralization in Lingga, Indonesia, focusing on the performance of the local government (Pemda) and its impacts on community engagement and public service delivery. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, the research reveals both significant successes and ongoing challenges associated with decentralization. While increased local autonomy has fostered greater community participation and responsiveness to local needs, persistent issues such as financial dependency, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and geographic isolation hinder effective governance. The findings highlight disparities in public service access, particularly for marginalized communities in remote areas. The study contributes to the broader discourse on decentralization by emphasizing the need for context-specific policies that address local realities. Based on these insights, several policy recommendations are proposed, including enhanced financial support for local governments, capacity-building initiatives for local officials, and the development of inclusive governance mechanisms. These measures aim to strengthen the implementation of decentralization in Lingga, ensuring that it delivers equitable and effective governance outcomes for all residents.

Keywords: Decentralization, Local Governance, Lingga, Community Participation, Public Service Delivery

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization has emerged as a crucial framework for enhancing governance and public service delivery in various countries, allowing local governments to exercise greater autonomy and responsiveness to the needs of their communities (Shaturaev 2021). It is particularly significant in promoting participatory governance, as it empowers local authorities to make decisions that directly affect their constituents, fostering accountability and transparency. In the context of Indonesia, decentralization has been a pivotal reform since the late 1990s, aimed at redistributing power from the central government to regional administrations (Antwi and Ley 2021). This shift is especially relevant in the case of Lingga, an archipelago region in Riau Islands, where geographical and socio-economic diversity necessitates tailored governance approaches. The focus on Lingga highlights both the opportunities and challenges that decentralization presents in a local context. With its unique demographic composition and economic activities, Lingga serves as a case study for evaluating how decentralized governance can be effectively implemented to address local issues such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development. The local government of Lingga has the potential to leverage its autonomy to implement policies that resonate with the specific needs of its residents, thus enhancing overall community welfare (Rinaldo, Davis, and Borunda 2015). However, this empowerment is not without its hurdles, including limited financial resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the need for capacity building among local officials. Consequently, examining the dynamics of decentralization in Lingga provides valuable insights into the efficacy

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of local governance structures, and highlights the critical role that local governments play in realizing the broader goals of national development. By focusing on Lingga, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on decentralization and its implications for local governance in Indonesia (Fernandez 2021).

To bridge the exploration of decentralization in Lingga with its broader theoretical foundations, it is essential to understand the concept itself, which encompasses the redistribution of authority and responsibility from central to local governments. Decentralization can be categorized into several types, including administrative, fiscal, political, and market decentralization. Administrative decentralization refers to the transfer of decision-making authority and responsibilities for public services to lower levels of government, enabling them to manage resources and implement policies more effectively (Stewart and Alrutz 2012). Fiscal decentralization involves the allocation of financial resources and revenue-generating powers to local governments, empowering them to finance their operations and initiatives autonomously. Political decentralization emphasizes increasing citizen participation in governance by delegating decision-making powers to local authorities, thereby enhancing accountability and responsiveness (Brotosusilo et al. 2020). The theoretical underpinnings of decentralization draw from various governance and management theories, including public choice theory, which argues that decentralization enhances efficiency by bringing decision-making closer to the people; and participatory governance models, which stress the importance of citizen engagement in policy formulation and implementation (Administrasi dan Birokrasi Pemerintahan Daerah Dalam Menigkatkan Kualitas Layanan Publik di Daerah Berlinda Ayu Adeti et al. 2022). These theories underscore the belief that local governments, being more attuned to the unique needs and aspirations of their communities, are better positioned to deliver public services effectively (Nicotera et al. 2011). In the case of Lingga, understanding these dimensions of decentralization is critical for analyzing the performance of local governance and identifying areas for improvement. By examining how these theoretical concepts manifest in practice, the study can provide valuable insights into the success and challenges of decentralized governance in Lingga, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective and responsive local government strategies that meet the diverse needs of its residents (WHO 2020).

Building upon the understanding of decentralization and its implications for local governance in Lingga, it is imperative to evaluate the performance of local governments to ascertain the effectiveness of these decentralized structures (Burgess et al. 2021). The evaluation of local government performance involves establishing specific criteria and indicators that measure various dimensions of governance, including efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. Key performance indicators (KPIs) may encompass service delivery metrics, citizen satisfaction surveys, and financial management assessments, all of which provide a comprehensive view of how well local authorities are meeting the needs of their constituents (Marston, Renedo, and Miles 2020). Methodologically, performance evaluation can employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative methods may involve the analysis of statistical data related to service outputs and financial reports, while qualitative methods can include interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders, such as community members and local officials, to gain insights into their experiences and perceptions (Gilmore et al. 2020). Combining these

methodologies allows for a more nuanced understanding of local governance performance, capturing not only the numerical data but also the lived experiences of citizens. In the of Lingga, this evaluation process is crucial for identifying both strengths and weaknesses in local governance, thereby informing future policy decisions and resource allocations. By assessing the performance of the local government through these established criteria and methodologies, the study aims to shed light on how effectively decentralization is functioning in Lingga, ultimately contributing to the improvement of governance practices and enhancing the overall welfare of the community (Betsill and Bulkeley 2006). This comprehensive evaluation framework will not only provide valuable insights into current performance but also pave the way for future research and policy development in decentralized governance.

As we seek to evaluate local governance performance in Lingga, it is essential to articulate the core research questions that guide this inquiry, focusing on the challenges and opportunities of decentralization, as well as the subsequent performance of the local government (Shaw, Kim, and Hua 2020). First, identifying the challenges associated with decentralization in Lingga requires a thorough examination of the specific obstacles that local authorities face, such as limited financial resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and gaps in human capacity. These challenges can hinder effective governance and the successful implementation of policies that aim to benefit the community. Conversely, the opportunities presented by decentralization, such as enhanced local participation, tailored services, and increased accountability, must also be explored, as they can lead to improved outcomes for residents (Nani and Ali 2020). Second, evaluating the performance of the Pemda (local government) of Lingga post-implementation of decentralization policies is crucial for understanding how well these authorities are responding to the needs of their constituents. This evaluation will consider both quantitative indicators, such as service delivery statistics and budget execution, and qualitative insights gained from stakeholder interviews (Liu et al. 2020). By addressing these research questions, the study aims to paint a comprehensive picture of the local governance landscape in Lingga, revealing the intricate interplay between challenges and opportunities. This exploration will not only enhance our understanding of how decentralization impacts local governance but also provide actionable insights for policymakers, enabling them to make informed decisions that can strengthen governance practices in Lingga (Chen, He, and Liu 2019).

Despite the growing body of literature on decentralization and local governance, significant gaps remain that this study seeks to address. For instance, a recent study by (Desmidt and Meyfroodt 2024)emphasizes the need for localized frameworks to assess the effectiveness of decentralization in diverse contexts, yet lacks specific examples from Indonesian regions like Lingga. Similarly, (Gupta et al. 2021) highlight the importance of citizen participation in decentralized governance but do not provide empirical evidence from rural settings, where challenges may differ significantly from urban areas. Moreover, the research by (Dutta and Fischer 2021)identifies the financial constraints faced by local governments in implementing decentralized policies but overlooks the qualitative aspects of community perceptions and experiences. In another study, (Lin and Xu 2022) discusses the relationship between decentralization and public service delivery; however, it primarily focuses on large metropolitan areas, leaving smaller regions underexplored. Lastly, (Pu, Zeng, and Zhang 2023) provides insights into the administrative challenges of decentralization but fails to consider the unique socio-cultural factors that influence local governance in specific contexts. This study aims to fill these gaps by providing a

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comprehensive evaluation of decentralization dynamics in Lingga, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to offer a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities present in this unique setting. By addressing these overlooked areas, the research will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how decentralization can be effectively implemented in diverse local contexts.

Building on the identified research gaps, the primary objective of this study is to thoroughly examine the dynamics of decentralization in Lingga, with a specific focus on assessing the performance of the local government following the implementation of decentralization policies. By exploring both the challenges and opportunities that arise in this context, the research aims to provide actionable insights that can inform policy decisions and enhance governance practices. Furthermore, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on decentralization in Indonesia by offering empirical evidence that reflects the unique socio-economic landscape of Lingga, thereby enriching existing literature. The findings of this research hold significant benefits for multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, local government officials, and community members. For policymakers, the insights gained can facilitate the development of more effective strategies that align with local needs, ultimately leading to improved service delivery and governance outcomes. Local government officials can leverage the evaluation results to identify areas for capacity building and resource allocation, while community members can benefit from enhanced participation in governance processes, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making. By bridging theory and practice, this research not only advances academic understanding but also fosters a more engaged and responsive local governance system in Lingga, setting a precedent for other regions grappling with similar challenges in the context of decentralization.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the dynamics of decentralization and assess the performance of local governance in Lingga. Qualitative research is particularly suited for this inquiry as it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena by capturing the nuances of participants' experiences and perceptions. The research will utilize a case study methodology to provide a comprehensive analysis of the specific context of Lingga, allowing for the exploration of unique local challenges and opportunities that influence governance. Data will be collected through various techniques, including observations of local government operations, which will provide real-time insights into the functioning and effectiveness of decentralized practices. Additionally, document analysis will be employed to review existing reports, policies, and relevant literature, enriching the understanding of the local governance landscape and offering a historical context for the study.

The selection of research subjects will be guided by specific criteria to ensure a representative sample of perspectives. Informants will include local government officials, community leaders, and residents, chosen based on their involvement and knowledge of the decentralization process in Lingga. This diverse selection will enable the study to capture a wide range of insights, reflecting the varying experiences and expectations of different stakeholders. For data analysis, a thematic analysis approach will be utilized, allowing for the identification of

patterns and themes that emerge from the data. This method facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors influencing local governance performance and the implications of decentralization. By employing this structured yet flexible analytical framework, the study aims to generate meaningful interpretations that can inform future governance strategies and contribute to the ongoing discourse on decentralization in Indonesia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of Decentralization in Lingga

Lingga, an archipelago in the Riau Islands Province of Indonesia, presents a unique case for examining the implementation of decentralization policies due to its geographic isolation, socio-economic diversity, and reliance on specific local industries such as fisheries and agriculture. As part of Indonesia's sweeping decentralization reforms that began in the late 1990s, Lingga's local government was granted greater authority over regional decision-making, financial management, and public service delivery. These reforms aimed to improve governance by empowering local administrations to address the specific needs of their communities more effectively. However, the implementation of decentralization in Lingga has been met with mixed results. The local government, while equipped with greater autonomy, faces significant challenges related to its limited fiscal capacity and human resources. This has hindered its ability to fully capitalize on the opportunities provided by decentralization to improve infrastructure, healthcare, and education services for its residents (Ji et al. 2021).

In addition to fiscal and administrative challenges, the geographic characteristics of Lingga—comprising numerous small islands—have posed logistical difficulties for local authorities. Providing equitable public services across such a dispersed population requires innovative governance approaches, yet the local government often struggles with coordination and resource allocation. Furthermore, the regional economy's dependence on primary industries such as agriculture and fisheries leaves it vulnerable to external economic pressures, complicating efforts to generate local revenue for reinvestment in public services. Previous studies on decentralized governance in archipelagic regions like Lingga indicate that geographic and economic isolation often exacerbate the inefficiencies of local administrations, limiting their capacity to meet community demands (Hoffman, Ibáñez, and Simperl 2020). These contextual factors, while challenging, also provide a crucial lens through which to assess the successes and limitations of decentralization in enhancing the governance and development outcomes of remote regions like Lingga.

Lingga Local Government Performance Findings

The performance of the local government (Pemda) in Lingga post-decentralization reveals both significant achievements and persistent challenges. One of the notable successes is the increased participation of local communities in governance processes. Decentralization has allowed local leaders to become more responsive to community needs, particularly in sectors such as fisheries and agriculture, which are the backbone of the regional economy. Through local initiatives, Pemda Lingga has successfully implemented policies that support small-scale fishers and farmers by providing them with access to necessary resources, such as tools, subsidies, and training programs. This has had a positive impact on the livelihoods of many residents, improving productivity and income levels. Moreover, decentralization has led to the establishment of participatory planning processes, where community members can voice their concerns and

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contribute to local development agendas (Cheng et al. 2021). These participatory processes have not only fostered greater accountability among local officials but have also enhanced the legitimacy of governance in Lingga by ensuring that policies reflect the specific needs and priorities of its citizens.

However, alongside these successes, Pemda Lingga faces several challenges that hinder the full realization of decentralization's potential. One major issue is the limited financial capacity of the local government. Despite the autonomy granted by decentralization, Lingga remains heavily dependent on transfers from the central government, as local revenue generation is constrained by the region's economic structure and geographic isolation. The dependency on central funds limits the ability of Pemda Lingga to invest in critical infrastructure projects, particularly in remote areas of the archipelago. The uneven distribution of resources has led to disparities in public service delivery, with rural and outlying islands often receiving less attention in terms of healthcare, education, and infrastructure development (Sockin 2022). This imbalance has raised concerns about the inclusivity of development efforts in Lingga, with certain segments of the population, especially those living in more isolated areas, remaining underserved. Additionally, bureaucratic inefficiencies and capacity gaps within local institutions pose ongoing obstacles to effective governance. The lack of skilled human resources has impeded the implementation of more complex development programs, and local officials often lack the training necessary to manage decentralized functions efficiently.

The impact of these successes and challenges on the community has been mixed. On one hand, the empowerment of local communities through decentralization has fostered a greater sense of ownership over development initiatives, as citizens have more opportunities to engage with local decision-making processes. This has led to improved satisfaction among community members, particularly in sectors where the local government has managed to make tangible progress, such as in agricultural support and small-scale infrastructure projects. However, the challenges posed by financial constraints and uneven resource distribution have limited the scope of these benefits. For instance, while some villages have seen improvements in public services, others continue to struggle with access to basic amenities such as clean water, reliable transportation, and healthcare services (Zarrin 2021). These disparities have, in some cases, exacerbated social inequalities, as more affluent areas or those with stronger connections to local authorities are often prioritized over more marginalized communities. Consequently, while decentralization in Lingga has had a positive impact on governance and community engagement, it has yet to fully address the systemic issues that limit equitable development across the archipelago.

In summary, the performance of Pemda Lingga post-decentralization has been characterized by a combination of achievements and ongoing challenges. The increased participation of local communities in governance and targeted support for key economic sectors like agriculture and fisheries represent important steps forward. However, financial limitations, geographic challenges, and institutional weaknesses continue to impede the full potential of decentralization to transform public service delivery and infrastructure development in the region. The mixed impact on the community reflects these dual realities, where some areas benefit significantly from decentralization while others remain disadvantaged. Moving forward, addressing these challenges will be crucial for Pemda Lingga to achieve more inclusive and effective

governance, particularly in terms of reaching underserved populations and reducing regional disparities. The experience of Lingga offers important lessons for understanding the complexities of decentralization in remote and economically constrained regions, contributing to the broader discourse on decentralized governance in Indonesia (Susiati et al. 2024).

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis of decentralization in Lingga, based on the case study approach, reveals deep insights into the practical outcomes of decentralized governance in a remote, archipelagic region. First, the case study findings highlight that while decentralization has brought decision-making closer to the people, the practical application of these policies is often constrained by local realities, such as limited infrastructure, financial shortfalls, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The case of Lingga illustrates that despite the good intentions of decentralized governance, local governments struggle to execute complex development programs due to gaps in administrative capacity and uneven resource allocation (Fernandez 2021). For example, the provision of public services in remote areas continues to lag behind that of the more accessible regions, reflecting a disparity in development outcomes across the archipelago. The case study also reveals that local leaders often focus on short-term, visible projects—such as road construction—while more long-term investments in education and healthcare remain underfunded, which limits sustainable development.

In terms of the relationship between theory and practice, decentralization in theory promises greater efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness by empowering local governments to make decisions that are more aligned with local needs. According to public choice theory, decentralization should enhance governance by creating competition among local governments, which in turn drives efficiency in resource allocation and public service delivery (Oates, 1999;(Stewart and Alrutz 2012). However, in practice, the findings from Lingga show that while decentralization has enabled some degree of community participation and local autonomy, these theoretical advantages are not fully realized due to structural and contextual barriers. For instance, the lack of skilled human resources in Lingga undermines the theoretical promise of improved governance through decentralization, as local officials often lack the expertise to manage complex administrative tasks. Moreover, while decentralization is meant to reduce reliance on the central government, the financial dependency of Lingga's local government on central transfers contradicts the theoretical expectation of fiscal self-sufficiency (Brotosusilo et al. 2020). This dependence limits the local government's ability to independently plan and implement development initiatives, leading to inefficiencies and delays.

The qualitative analysis further explores the gap between the participatory governance models advocated by decentralization theories and the reality on the ground in Lingga. While participatory planning processes have been introduced, the case study shows that these mechanisms are not always inclusive or effective in reaching marginalized communities, particularly those in more remote areas. The ideal of decentralization includes the empowerment of citizens to actively participate in governance, thus ensuring that development reflects local priorities (Administrasi dan Birokrasi Pemerintahan Daerah Dalam Menigkatkan Kualitas Layanan Publik di Daerah Berlinda Ayu Adeti et al. 2022). However, in Lingga, there is evidence that participation is often limited to more accessible communities, while the voices of those in geographically isolated or economically disadvantaged areas remain underrepresented. This discrepancy between theory and practice points to the need for more tailored approaches to decentralization that take into account the specific

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challenges faced by rural and remote regions. Without addressing these gaps, the promise of decentralization—greater equity, participation, and local accountability—will remain only partially fulfilled in areas like Lingga, where logistical, financial, and capacity challenges continue to obstruct meaningful community involvement and balanced development (Nicotera et al. 2011).

This analysis underscores the importance of contextualizing decentralization policies and practices within the unique geographical and socio-economic realities of regions like Lingga. By interpreting the case study findings in light of decentralization theory, it becomes evident that while the theoretical benefits of decentralization are clear, their practical realization depends heavily on local conditions, administrative capacity, and resource availability. Thus, for decentralization to truly succeed in enhancing governance and development outcomes, policy adaptations are necessary to address these local challenges. This study contributes to the broader discourse by providing empirical evidence of the complex relationship between theory and practice in decentralized governance, particularly in under-resourced, geographically fragmented regions like Lingga.

Implications of Research Findings

The findings of this study have significant implications for public policy, particularly in the context of decentralization in remote and underdeveloped regions like Lingga. One key implication is the need for more tailored policies that consider the unique geographic and economic constraints of such regions. The financial dependence of Lingga on central government transfers highlights the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach to decentralization, where local governments are expected to generate their own revenue despite limited economic capacity (Burgess et al. 2021). Policymakers should consider implementing more flexible fiscal policies that provide additional financial support to regions with limited economic resources, while also strengthening local revenue-generation mechanisms. Additionally, targeted investments in infrastructure, human resource development, and capacity-building are essential to enable local governments in regions like Lingga to fulfill their decentralized functions effectively. Without addressing these foundational gaps, decentralization may continue to exacerbate disparities between well-resourced and underserved regions, rather than promoting equitable development across the archipelago.

In terms of the theoretical development of decentralization, this study challenges the assumption that decentralization inherently leads to greater efficiency, accountability, and community participation, as proposed by decentralization theories such as public choice theory and participatory governance models (Oates, 1999;(Stewart and Alrutz 2012). The case of Lingga demonstrates that these theoretical benefits are contingent upon local administrative capacity, financial resources, and the socio-economic context. In particular, the study reveals that in remote regions, the absence of skilled human resources and infrastructure limits the extent to which local governments can deliver on the promises of decentralization. This suggests that existing theories of decentralization need to be expanded to account for the diverse realities faced by local governments in different contexts. The relationship between decentralization and governance outcomes is not linear, and the success of decentralization is highly dependent on the local capacity to manage newly devolved responsibilities (Nani and Ali 2020). Therefore, future theoretical frameworks should incorporate a more nuanced understanding of how contextual factors, such as geography and economic isolation, affect the practical implementation of decentralization.

Moreover, the findings of this study also contribute to the broader discourse on decentralization by emphasizing the importance of inclusive and participatory governance. While decentralization is designed to enhance citizen participation, the case of Lingga illustrates that participation mechanisms often fail to reach marginalized and geographically isolated communities, limiting their effectiveness in promoting equitable governance (Ji et al. 2021). This underscores the need for decentralization theories to place greater emphasis on inclusivity, particularly in rural and remote settings. Theories of participatory governance should not only focus on creating spaces for citizen engagement but also on ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic status, have equal access to these spaces. In practice, this requires the development of more innovative and context-sensitive approaches to participation, such as the use of mobile outreach programs, digital platforms, and localized decision-making bodies. By integrating these considerations into the theoretical framework of decentralization, policymakers and scholars alike can develop more effective strategies for promoting inclusive and responsive governance in diverse regional contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the complexities of decentralization in Lingga, highlighting both the successes and challenges faced by the local government in implementing decentralized policies. The findings indicate that while decentralization has increased community participation and local autonomy, significant barriers remain, including financial limitations, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and geographic isolation. These challenges hinder the effective delivery of public services, particularly in remote areas, and contribute to disparities in development outcomes across the region. The insights gained from this research contribute to a broader understanding of decentralization in Indonesia, emphasizing the need for context-specific approaches that address local realities (Cheng et al. 2021).

Given the identified limitations of this study, including its reliance on a single case and qualitative data, future research should expand the scope to include comparative analyses across various regions with different socio-economic conditions. This would enable a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the effectiveness of decentralization. Additionally, integrating quantitative measures alongside qualitative assessments could provide a more robust evaluation of governance performance and community impacts. Future studies might also explore innovative participatory mechanisms that can better engage marginalized communities, ensuring their voices are heard in local governance processes (Zarrin 2021). By addressing these limitations, subsequent research can offer deeper insights into the dynamics of decentralization and its implications for local governance in diverse contexts.

Based on the findings of this study, several policy recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of decentralization in Lingga. First, policymakers should consider providing additional financial support to local governments, particularly in regions with limited revenue-generating capabilities. This could involve revising fiscal policies to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources that take into account the unique challenges faced by remote areas. Second, investment in capacity-building programs for local officials is crucial to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage decentralized functions effectively. This includes training in project management, public finance, and community engagement strategies. Lastly, fostering inclusive governance mechanisms that prioritize the participation of all

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community members—especially those in remote or underserved areas—will be essential in ensuring that decentralization fulfills its promise of enhanced accountability and responsiveness to local needs. By implementing these recommendations, the Pemda of Lingga can better navigate the challenges of decentralization and work toward achieving more equitable and effective governance outcomes.

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**DECENTRALIZATION DYNAMICS: ASSESSING LOCAL
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