

# Measuring Property Owners' Perceptions on Sustainable Tourism in a Coastal Resort Community

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## Measuring Property Owners' Perceptions on Sustainable Tourism in a Coastal Resort Community

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to explore factors influencing property owners' attitude (both full time residents and second home property owners) toward sustainable actions in tourism development in an amenity-rich coastal community with a predominance of second home property owners. A total of 858 property owner respondents (466 permanent residents and 392 second home property owners) contributed to information about their perceptions on the importance of sustainable actions in tourism development and to future economy success in their community. Principal component analysis was used to identify the primary structural dimensions underlying the variables, as well as to avoid the effect of multicollinearity among independent variables. Factors influencing local resident property owners' attitudes toward sustainable tourism development include gender and infrastructure, while only the quality of life factor is associated with second home property owners' attitudes toward sustainable tourism development.*

**Keywords:** *sustainable tourism, property owners attitude, sustainable actions, amenity rich destinations, second home economy.*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been appraised for being able to create new jobs and generate revenues, leading some to consider it a panacea for many economically depressed communities across the globe. Yet, despite these positive impacts, rapid and unplanned conventional tourism development has also produced adverse socio-cultural and environmental effects. To reduce the negative impacts of conventional mass tourism, more benign forms of tourism such as ecotourism, agro-tourism, and green tourism have been gaining prevalence since the 1980s. These alternative forms of tourism can be collectively considered components of a larger developmental paradigm called sustainable tourism (Sirakaya, Ekinici and Kaya 2008).

In order to achieve sustainable tourism development at the community level, broad stakeholder support is essential (Andereck and Vogt 2000; Choi and Sirakaya 2005). The extent to which members of a community have input, feel ownership, and participate in the planning and development of their own tourism industry, can help shape the direction and degree of the economic, socio and environmental impacts of tourism development. Hence, understanding the extent to which residents (both local residents and seasonal residents) actively support

sustainable tourism development is crucial for tourism business owners, planners, developers, government officials and other stakeholders.

A prevalent area of research in sustainable tourism has focused on the development of sustainability indicators or a process of accessing changes and progress toward goal attainment (Choi and Sirakaya 2005; Cottrell, V/d Duim, Ankersmid, and Kelder 2004; McCool and Stankey 2004; Miller 2001; Innes and Booher 2000)). Since communities are diverse in terms of their built and natural environment, economic structures, socioeconomic compositions, and needs and expectations of tourism, sustainable tourism indicators / scales are expected to be subjective and tailored to particular situations of different communities (Johnson and Tyrrell 2005). It is thus important to examine how different indicators apply to different communities although few efforts have been made to test sustainable tourism indicators in varied and diverse settings. The few empirical studies examining residents' attitude regarding sustainable tourism development primarily focused on full time / local residents. As yet another key stakeholder, particularly in amenity rich, second home destinations, the attitudes of second homeowners' regarding sustainable tourism development, would appear to be equally important to that of full time residents.

Limited research to date has included second home property owners' opinions on the importance of sustainable practices in tourism development. This current research attempts to fill this gap by exploring and identifying factors that comprise property owners' attitude (both full time residents and second home property owners) toward sustainable actions in tourism development in an amenity-rich coastal community with a predominance of second home property owners. The assessment of sustainability factors will provide an initial insight into the underlying structure of property owners' understanding of, and support for, sustainable tourism development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sustainable tourism has been widely viewed as a vehicle by which the adverse effects of traditional mass tourism can be addressed and longer-time viability of a destination can be achieved. Bramwell and Lane (1993) enthusiastically suggest sustainable tourism is a positive scheme that will reduce the tension and friction resulting from the complicated interactions among the tourism industry, tourists, the environment, and host communities. The predominant focus of sustainable tourism research has been to identify how tourism destinations can be economically viable and profitably maintained while minimizing negative environmental effects and by doing so, preserving the natural and cultural resources and future generations of tourists (Dolnicar, Crouch, and Long 2008). Tosun (1998, p.596) and McIntyre (1993, p.11) define sustainable tourism as a form of tourism that improves, or at least, maintains "the quality of experiences for the visitors, life of host communities, and the environment [indefinitely] on which both the host community and the visitor depend." From a public policy and planning point of view, Sharply (2000) maintained that sustainable tourism implies integrated planning that attempts to balance the needs of three critical elements comprising tourism development: community members, visitors and tourism industry. In agreement of Sharpley, Hunter (1995) suggested that multiple stakeholders' participation should be required when the community is developing its vision, goals and objectives.

Assessing stakeholders' perceptions on sustainable tourism development is vital for establishing and developing tourism planning because their behavior and participation can greatly influence the destiny of the tourism industry. Realizing the urgency of research on

stakeholders' attitudes toward sustainable tourism development, Choi and Sirakaya (2005) developed the Sustainable Tourism Attitude Scale (SUS-TAS). Sirakaya, Ekinci and Kaya (2008) further validated the SUS-TAS in an empirical study using two data sets from Turkey and Cyprus. However, these two study areas are both in large metropolitan / urban settings. Sirakaya, Ekinci and Kaya (2008) suggested that further research be conducted to measure residents' attitudes toward sustainability practices within nature-based resources or national parks. Recognizing the paucity / scarcity of research on residents' attitudes toward sustainability practices in nature-based tourism communities, this research attempts to assess local and seasonal residents' perceptions on importance of sustainable actions in tourism development in a tourism dependent, amenity reach, second home dominant "Outer Banks" coastal county (Dare County) in North Carolina.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

The GIS Tax Records of Dare County provided a list of the county's housing stock from which a sample was selected of both permanent resident and second home property owners. In November 2008, 4,000 local residents and 4,000 second home property owners were randomly selected to receive a cover letter inviting them to visit the study's website, provide their participant code number, and complete the on-line questionnaire. A follow-up postcard was mailed three weeks after the initial mailing to everyone in the sample as either a thank you or a reminder to participate in the survey.

Respondents were asked on the questionnaire to provide their perceptions about the importance of a range of sustainable actions to the county's tourism economy as well as their satisfaction level with tourism development regarding community land use, the economy, service provision, cultural opportunities, infrastructure, the environment and general community life in Dare County. Sustainable action indicators were selected from those actions identified and promoted from many years by Sustainable Travel International<sup>1</sup> (STI). STI is an internationally recognized organization created to affect change in all aspects of sustainability within the tourism industry. Of the 8,000 surveys mailed, 858 were returned usable resulting in a response rate of 11%. Using the results from the questionnaire, factor and regression analyses were performed.

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Travel International (STI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, dedicated to providing education and outreach services that help travelers, travel providers and related organizations support environmental conservation and protect cultural heritage while promoting cross-cultural understanding and economic development.

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Samples of Full Time Residents and Second Home Property Owners**

Characteristics	Full Time Residents	Second Home owners
Sample size (n)	466	392
Male persons	59.9%	66.7%
Percentage Caucasian	93.4%	92.5%
Age Distribution		
25 and under	0.7%	0%
26-44 years	16.7%	5.6%
45-64 years	55.3%	64.7%
65 and older	25.5%	26.5%
Income Distribution		
Less than \$14,999	1.1%	0%
\$15,000 - \$49,999	23.3%	2.9%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	48.7%	23.4%
More than \$100,000	27.6%	57.1%
Education (Bachelor's degree or higher)	53.7%	71.8%

The descriptive statistics for each sample (full time residents and second home property owners) are illustrated in Table 1. Of the 858 respondents the majority are in the 45-74 age range (89% of second home owners and 75% of full-time residents) with the largest number of respondents falling into the 45-64 age category (65% of second home owners and 55% of full-time residents). Over 92% of the comparison groups are Caucasian and over 60% of each group is male. 53.7% of the resident home owners and 71.8% of the second home owners have at least a college degree. Over 76% of full time and 80% of second home property owners have annual median household income above \$50,000 with the second home property owners showing greater annual household income beginning at the \$100,000 level.

Furthermore, the degree to which the sample was representative of the resident population was investigated by using the census demographic categories of the population. The median age for Dare County listed in the 2000 US Census is 40.4 years; 55.3% of our sample falls in the age range of 45 to 64 years. The racial composition of Dare County is predominantly White (94.7% in 2008); 93.4% of the respondents in our full time residents sample are Caucasians. Percent male population in Dare County in 2008 is 50.1%; 59.9% of our full time residents sample is male. The median household income for Dare County in 2007 is \$51,748<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 50% of our full time residents respondents falls in the income range of \$50,000 to \$99,999. 27.7% of the population in Dare County has a Bachelor's or higher degree; 53.7% of our full time residents sample has a Bachelor's degree or higher. As demonstrated in these statistics, although the response rate is modest, the sample reasonably represents the Dare County full time resident population. However, we recognize that the sample for full time residents had higher age and male groupings, as well as education level than Dare County's population in general.

<sup>2</sup> The racial composition, gender, median household income, and education information is from Dare County QuickFacts from the UNC Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov>).

It is difficult to assess how representative of the sample for second home property owners compared to the general second home property owners population in Dare County as neither the US Census nor other local and state agencies maintain the demographic characteristics information for this group of “residents”. The only way to evaluate the representation of the sample to the second home property owner population in Dare County is to compare the distribution of their primary residency. Table 2 shows that approximately 85% of the second home property owners have their primary residency located in four states: Virginia (42%), North Carolina (32%), Maryland (6%), and Pennsylvania (5%). In our sample, about 85% of the second home property owner respondents have their primary residency in the same four states with a bit different distribution: Virginia (55%), North Carolina (11%), Maryland (9%), and Pennsylvania (5%). Although with only modest response rate, we can still say that our sample represent the second home property owner population in Dare County from the view of the location of their primary residency.

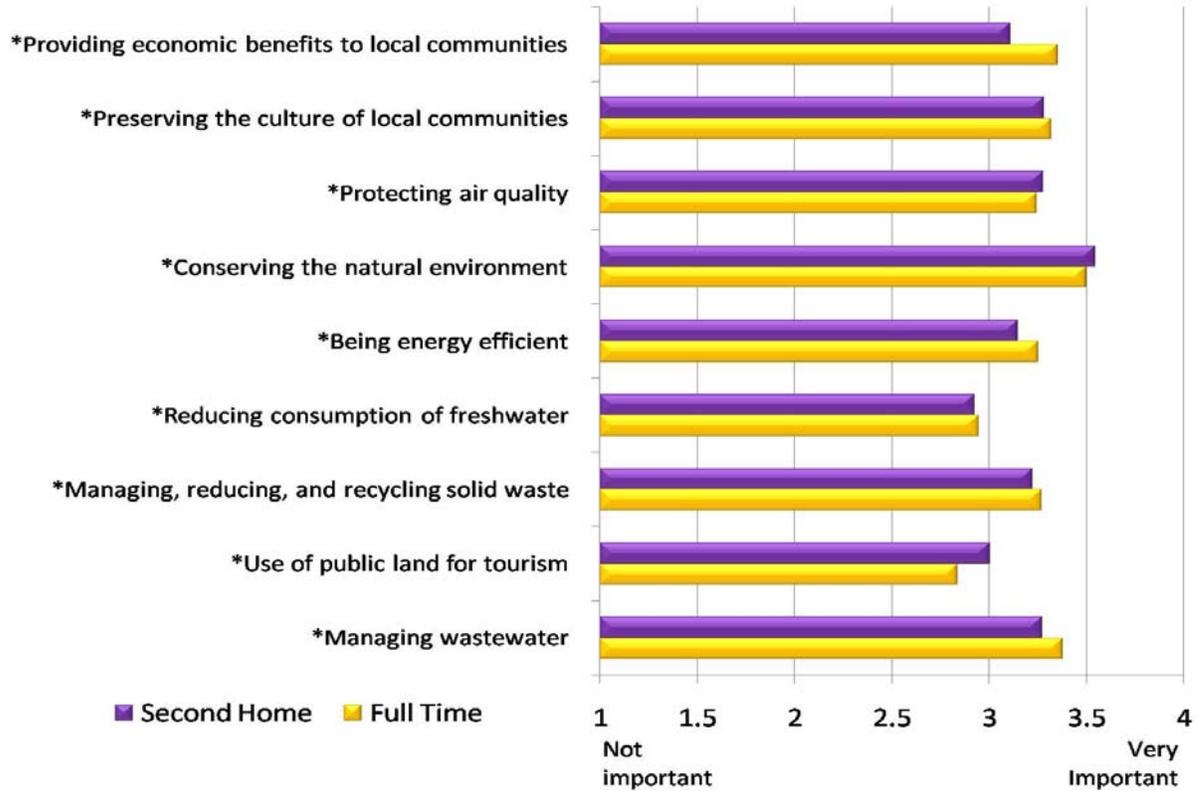
**Table 2 Distribution of Second Home Property Owners’ Primary Residency for Dare County and Sample**

States	Dare County	Sample
Virginia	41.5%	55.1%
North Carolina	32.1%	11.2%
Maryland	6.4%	8.9%
Pennsylvania	4.8%	10%
Total	84.9%	85.2%

**Dependent variable**

Knowing the rapidly growing importance of integrating sustainability within the tourism industry as well as the propensity of increasing numbers of individuals to do the same within everyday life, survey participants were asked their opinion of the importance of thirteen sustainable actions to the future economic success of the County’s tourism industry. Such sustainable actions are being implemented in many competing tourist destinations so are emerging in importance to a destination’s branding as being socially and environmentally responsible. In addition, such actions are providing savings on operating costs and protect the destination’s natural resources. Study participants were asked to indicate the level of importance of 13 categories of sustainable actions to the future economic success of Dare County. Of the thirteen items, both groups were in strong agreement on four, including training and educating clients and employees, purchasing from companies with green certified practices, reducing noise, and reducing and managing greenhouse gas emissions but not at a statistically significant level. On the nine other questions, as shown in Figure 1, there was a statistically significant difference between the views expressed by full time resident property owners and second home owners. On the issues of economic benefits to local communities, preserving local culture, being energy efficient, reducing consumption of freshwater, managing waste and management of waste water, full time resident home owners indicated a greater level of importance of such actions to future economic success. On the issues of protecting air quality, conserving the environment and use of public land for tourism, second home owners indicated a greater level of importance.

**Figure 1 Comparison of Attitudes toward Sustainable Tourism between Full Time and Second Home Property Owners**



\* indicates a significant relationship at 0.05 level

Property owners’ attitude toward sustainable tourism development, the dependent variable, was measured by respondents’ perceptions about the importance of 13 sustainable actions / practices to the long-term viability of Dare County’s tourism economy. Exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis was performed on the 13 sustainable action items. 12 items loaded highly on one factor (loadings ranges from (0.578 to 0.804) named “sustainable actions”, which explained 53% of the variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin (KMO) statistic was .922 and the Bartlett’s test was significant ( $p=.000$ ), suggesting that the principal component analysis was necessary and appropriate. The one item that has low loading on the factor was then discarded from the analysis. Reliability analysis was conducted on the 12 items. The high value of Cronbach’s Alpha (.914) further confirmed the validity of factor analysis. A summed scale was then created for this sustainable actions factor.

**Table 3 Principal Component Analysis for Property Owners**

<b>Factored Items</b>	<b>Factor Loadings</b>
Reducing and managing greenhouse gas emission	0.734
Managing , reducing, and recycling solid waste	0.782
Reducing consumption of freshwater	0.765
Managing waste water	0.748
Being energy efficient	0.826
Conserving the natural environment	0.660
Protecting air quality	0.784
Reducing noise	0.587
Preserving the culture of local communities	0.603
Providing economic benefits to local communities	0.578
Purchasing from companies with certified green practices	0.768
Training and educating employees and clients on sustainability	0.804

**Independent variables**

Independent variables include: 1) socio-demographic factors (gender, annual household income, level of formal education, and age); 2) length of residence; 3) political involvement (registered to vote or not); 4) respondents' general attitude toward tourism in the community (dummy variable); and 5) respondents' satisfaction level with the impact of tourism in the community, measured by a range of items. A series of Principal Component Analyses were performed to reduce the number of variables and determine the latent structure of the set of items measuring respondents' satisfaction level with the impact of tourism in the community. Five tourism impact factors including land use, economy, service provision and culture opportunities, infrastructure, and quality of life, were generated and validated based on their loading values. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) values were high (over 0.6) and the Bartlett's test was significant ( $p=.0000$ ) for all five factors, suggesting that the principal component analysis was necessary and appropriate. A summed scale was then created for the five community-related factors based on the results of principle component analysis.

**Table 4 Principal Component Analysis for Full Time and Second Home Property Owners**

Dimension and Factored Items	Factor Loading	
	Full Time	Second Home
<b>Land Use Factor</b>		
The amount of tourism commercial development	.827	.889
The amount of non-tourism commercial development	.836	.830
The amount of residential development	.818	.822
<b>KMO &amp; Variance Explained</b>	KMO = .698 (sig. = .000) VE = 68%	KMO = .686 (sig. = .000) VE = 72%
<b>Economy Factor</b>		
Retail price compared to other coastal resort communities	.695	.532
Sales tax compared to other coastal resort communities	.569	.465
Availability of employment opportunities	.762	.801
Stability of Dare County tourism economy	.577	.656
Affordability of full time resident housing	.793	.790
Availability of full time resident housing	.661	.755
Programs that support job and business creation	.665	.762
<b>KMO &amp; Variance Explained</b>	KMO = .796 (sig. = .000) VE = 46%	KMO = .700 (sig. = .000) VE = 48%
<b>Service Provision and Culture Opportunities Factor</b>		
Quality of the local public educational system	.568	.657
Educational offerings for adults	.619	.683
Crime prevention compared to other resort areas	.579	.571
Fire and emergency services	.582	.695
Cleanliness and upkeep of the community	.495	.679
Mix of cultural offerings	.784	.785
Number of cultural offerings	.771	.795
Relationship between international workers/visitors and local residents	.545	.586
Entertainment opportunities compared to other resort area	.753	.747
Recreational opportunities for young people	.533	.763
<b>KMO &amp; Variance Explained</b>	KMO = .788 (sig. = .000) VE = 40%	KMO = .821 (sig. = .000) VE = 50%
<b>Infrastructure Factor</b>		
Access to and from Dare County during tourism season	.798	.698
Public transportation within Dare County for seasonal workers, visitors, and residents	.704	.820
Presence of parks, greenways, and bike lanes throughout Dare County	.526	.675
Management of traffic generated by tourists	.732	.728
<b>KMO &amp; Variance Explained</b>	KMO = .674 (sig. = .000) VE = 47%	KMO = .675 (sig. = .000) VE = 54%
<b>Quality of Life Factor</b>		
The range of housing styles, designs, and affordability	.540	.502
Availability of health care facilities	.835	.826
Quality of health care services	.814	.802
Air quality	.505	.630
Water quality	.581	.610
<b>KMO &amp; Variance Explained</b>	KMO = .629 (sig. = .000) VE = 45%	KMO = .605 (sig. = .000) VE = 47%

Note: \*VE means Variance Explained; KMO means Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

## Research Questions

The research questions identified for this study specific to property owners' attitudes towards sustainable actions included:

1. What factors contribute to predicting local resident property owners' perceptions on the importance of sustainable actions in tourism development?
2. What factors contribute to predicting second home property owners' perceptions on the importance of sustainable actions in tourism development?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Regression Analysis --- Full Time Residents

The results show that only 11.5 percent of the variance in the dependent variable, local residents' perceptions on the importance of sustainable actions in tourism development, is explained by the predictor variables. Only Gender and Infrastructure have statistically significant relationship with local residents' perceptions on sustainable actions in tourism development. Gender is positively related to sustainable perceptions, in other words, male respondents consider sustainable tourism development to be more important than female respondents. Infrastructure factor is negatively associated with sustainable perceptions. That is, respondents who are more satisfied with the area's infrastructure are less likely to view sustainable practices as being important in tourism development. A possible reason for this relationship could be that respondents are quite satisfied with the current infrastructure conditions and do not see the need for change.

**Table 5 Regression Analysis for Factors Associated with Full Time Residents Perceptions on Sustainable Tourism**

Factored Items	Beta	t-Statistics	p
Constant		3.682	
Economy Factor	-.006	-.064	.949
Service provision and Cultural	.169	1.703	.090
Infrastructure Factor	-.188	-2.049	.042
Quality of Life Factor	-.161	-1.592	.113
Land Use Factor	-.060	-.670	.504
Length of Residency	-.031	-.413	.680
General Tourism Attitude	.055	.653	.515
Age	-.126	-1.665	.098
Gender(a)	.224	2.865	.005
Education	-.023	-.296	.768
Political Involvement	.071	.930	.353
Income	-.041	-.519	.605

a. Dummy coded: 0 = female, 1 = male

### Regression Analysis --- Second Home Property Owners

The results show that 14.2 percent of the variance in the dependent variable, second home property owners' perceptions on the importance of sustainable actions in tourism development, is explained by the predictor variables. Only the Quality of Life factor is statistically significantly related to second home owners' sustainable tourism attitude. This relationship is in a negative direction. That is, second home owners who are satisfied with the current quality of life

condition are less likely to feel that sustainable practices are important in tourism development. One explanation to this relationship could be that those who are not satisfied with the current quality of life issues would like to see more sustainable actions within the community's tourism industry; hence feel sustainable tourism development is important.

**Table 6 Regression Analysis for Factors Associated with Second Home Property Owners Perceptions on Sustainable Tourism**

Factored Items	Beta	t-Statistics	p
Constant		2.731	.008
Economy Factor	.148	1.052	.296
Service provision and Cultural Factor	.169	1.395	.167
Infrastructure Factor	-.056	-.468	.641
Quality of Life Factor	-.301	-2.129	.036
Land Use Factor	.162	1.188	.238
Length of Time Owning Property	.010	.081	.936
General Tourism Attitude	-.194	-1.709	.091
Age	-.009	-.065	.948
Gender(a)	.129	1.177	.243
Education	.046	.419	.677
Political Involvement	-.135	-1.191	.237
Income	-.044	-.364	.717

a. Dummy coded: 0 = female, 1 = male

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify what factors contribute to property owners' (both full time and second home owners) perceptions about the importance of sustainable tourism development. Only gender and the satisfaction level with the resort community's infrastructure factor play a statistically significant role in explaining full time residents' attitude toward sustainable tourism development. Other socio-demographic factors (annual household income, level of formal education, and age), and respondents' satisfaction level with impact of tourism on economy, government and culture, quality of life, and land use did not predict attitudes toward sustainable actions in tourism development. For second home property owners, only satisfaction level with the community's quality of life factor helps predict second home property owners' attitude toward sustainable tourism development. Length of residence, political involvement, and general attitude toward tourism in the community did not predict attitudes toward sustainable tourism development for either local residents or second home property owners.

As popular tourism destinations evolve from the provision of general tourism products and services to also emerging as desirable second home destinations, important planning, policy and management issues must be addressed. Such destinations are typically desirable due to the degree and quality of natural amenities. It is important to note that the reasons reported why local residents chose to live in the study region and the reasons reported by second home owners as to why they chose this destination to purchase a second home reflected similar "values" regarding the natural environment, community amenities and the opportunity to pursue their common

recreational interests. Both groups indicate they visit or live in the region primarily because of these qualities not because of the potential economic gain of property ownership. Thus, both groups have good reason to protect the area's resources and the highly rated quality of life the region currently provides. Both groups should be keenly interested in policies and actions that maintain the area's economic and social well-being.

Stakeholder involvement, especially that of property owners, is a vital part of community tourism development and such involvement should be solicited as well in adopting sustainable practices. To increase property owners involvement, scholars, decision makers and planners must identify and evaluate what elements contribute to stakeholders' comprehension of sustainable tourism development. Such comprehension will in turn help public officials and planners better accommodate specific interests of property owners when planning and managing tourism with sustainable components. The results of this study should be continually reviewed for planning and policy implications for the region and discussion held at all levels to ensure broad citizen engagement in decisions about the future sustainability of the region. They can be used as a basis for assisting planners, developers and other community officials in accessing support for sustainable practices in their community's tourism development.

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