

The Role of Libraries in the Improvement of Urban Competitiveness.

The Contribution of the "Carol I" Central University Library to the Development of Bucharest

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Abstract: *The public libraries are logically indispensable partners in the local initiatives of urban development that focus on people and the quality of life. The libraries are, many times, available for all the inhabitants of a city, being considered as public institutions that provide a wide range of information and support services. During this age of economic transformations, the problem of public libraries is once more brought to discussion. The public access to digital information and information technology represents a new trend for libraries. The power of the new digital collections, the available technology and the training programs used make from libraries some essential partners for the local communities, in their attempts to pass from an economy based on the manufacturing and service industry to an economy based on knowledge. In its attempt to emphasise the essential role that the public libraries receive in the modern society, this paper presents the manner in which the info-documentary structures contribute to the economic development of the communities they serve by ensuring the free access to culture and knowledge, as well as to the creation of vibrant cultural spaces, which represent true urban attractions. The overcoming of Romanian libraries of inertia is one of the critical factors on which their survival shall depend within the informational society. Thus, the study supports the experts in libraries, by indicating several directions that may be considered by libraries in their attempt to get actively involved in the improvement of urban competitiveness.*

Keywords: *culture, public libraries, urban development, strategic economic development, urban competitiveness, urban attractions.*

JEL: *M14, M37, R00.*

Introduction

Local economies are nowadays undergoing a process of rapid transition, from a manufacturing industry and an economy based on services to an economy based on knowledge. As Zamfir et al. (2011, 2332) state, the knowledge-based society is characterized by the focus on knowledge, people, and virtual networks.

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Within the knowledge-based economy there is a strong correlation between knowledge, education, information and communication technologies, economic growth and regional development. The new economic growth models are connected now to other more dynamic factors, as: human capital, knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship (Zamfir et al., 2011, 2331). Together with these transformations of economy, a series of radical changes occur related to the professional skills required on the labor market, the business models and the services practiced, the local networks that tend to become global and the perceptions on the aspects that make a place "attractive". Considering these changes, the communities reevaluate their development strategies in order to identify the actions that need to be implemented to succeed in the new economic context.

The strategies adopted by the public libraries receive new values in the context of informational society and knowledge-based economy (Burlacu, 2011, 115). Thus, the strategies based on the development of the labor force are very important, because the work places created by the new type of economy require a labor force with a high level of education and with a superior technical qualification. The strategies meant to encourage the small businesses are equally important, because these traditionally play an essential role in the creation of work places locally. The urban development strategies are no longer based on the fiscal discounts and the incentives granted to companies, instead they focus on a mix of residential, commercial and cultural activities, which may create vibrant cities, with high level of the quality of life.

The public libraries are logically indispensable partners in the local initiatives of urban development that focus on people and the quality of life. The libraries are, many times, available for all the inhabitants of a city, being considered as public institutions that provide a wide range of information and support services. During this age of economic transformations, the problem of public libraries is once more brought to discussion. The public access to digital information and information technology represents a new trend for libraries. The power of the new digital collections, the available technology and the training programs used make from libraries some essential partners for the local communities, in their attempts to pass from an economy based on the manufacturing and service industry to an economy based on knowledge.

At a European level, the majority of the states have understood that public libraries, together with other cultural institutions, must adapt their managerial policies to the requirements of the knowledge society, which is in full development. This aspect was debated during the "Pulman Conference" from Oeiras, Portugal, 13-14 March 2003, having as theme "*the Public Libraries, Museums and Archives Cooperating within an e-Europe*" in which 41 states took part. They agreed on **four roles** that a public library must fulfill in the context of the new informational society (Fall, 2009):

1. Democracy and civic spirit – the public libraries must contribute to the building of a civil, democratic society, which takes into account the needs of the entire community, which offers free access to culture and knowledge, which fights the social exclusion, making available attractive spaces available for the people. Moreover, it has to face and satisfy the needs of the disabled persons, of the teenagers, of the elder, of the unemployed and of those living in rural areas, it has to develop services for e-government, e-commerce, e-health, by offering the free, objective and friendly access to Internet and the training on the use of the electronic resources;

2. Permanent education – the attraction of children by offering a stimulating and amusing environment for school activities and for spending the free time, cooperating with schools and other educational institutions, the development of the role of centres for non-institutionalised informal education, offering the necessary support for permanent education in all the stages of life, the promotion of a functional informational society;

3. The economic and social development – supports the fight against the digital illiterateness, by ensuring access points to the Internet and the necessary training on its use by the public, the cooperation with the local community of business people and other local factors that offer informational services in order to support the development of a European economy based on knowledge;

4. Cultural diversity – the support of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, of the cultural identity and social integrations, the preservation and the promotion of cultural values for future generations.

1. Theoretical aspects regarding the contribution of public libraries to the economic development of cities

A. The economic impact of public libraries

Now, a larger number of economic research tools is used in order to measure the public values of libraries, including the cost-benefit analysis and the profitability of investments. In the USA, several studies were performed revealing the positive economic impact of libraries at a national, state and local level:

- At a national level, Liu (2004) examined the causal relations between the public libraries, the level of training and the economic productivity (measured through the gross domestic product per capita) with the help of *the regression models*. This study revealed that the libraries contribute to the long-term productivity of economy, mainly through the training programs.

- The studies performed at the level of the American states (Barron, 2005; McClure et al., 2000) emphasized the significant economic benefits of the public libraries, including *the profitability of the public investments* and the contribution to *the gross domestic product* regionally;

- A major positive impact may be noticed at the level of the cities. A study performed by Carnegie Mellon University's Center for Economic Development (CMU) for Carnegie Library from Pittsburgh declared the library as being "the most valuable asset of the region" because it attracts more visitors than the Carnegie Scientific Centre and the Pittsburgh Steelers (the local American football team) together. The CMU researcher believed that the Carnegie Library from Pittsburgh generated an approx. 91 mil. USD profit and ensured more than 700 work places. The public library from Seattle brought substantial economic benefits to the city and the local businesses together with the elevation of the new head office in the centre of the urban area. The net contributions to the local economy were of approximately 16 million dollars in 2004, the year when the new head office became operational (Berk and Associates, 2005). As presented in table 1, this indicator of the estimated economic impact is composed of two elements: the visitors coming to Seattle with the main reason to visit the library and the ones for whom the library is an important factor in their decision to visit Seattle.

Table 1. Estimated expenses of the visitors of the Public Library from Seattle

	The purpose of the visit		
	Use	Visit	All
Seattle residents			
Main reason	16\$	31\$	17\$
Important	14\$	N/A*	14\$
Non-resident			
Main reason	10\$	90\$	58\$
Important	50\$	160\$	129\$

Source: <http://www.spl.org/>

Study *Making Cities stronger: Public Library contributions to local economic development* performed by Urban Libraries Council from the USA (2007), tried to identify a connection between the libraries and the economic development of the cities. At the same time, the study took into account the manner in which the programs and the activities unfolded by the libraries crossed the unfolding urban development strategies.

The special programs unfolded by the public libraries have more and more supported the economic development of the cities in the last few years. The public libraries are now cooperating with the local schools in order to create an integrated set of services for the children (Sanders, 2001), are coordinating their activity with the employment agencies in order to ensure informational services on the work places and career development (Durrance, 1994) and are cooperating with the local chambers of commerce in order to improve their informational services offered to small and medium sized companies (Wilson & Train, 2002).

These special programs have the role of extending the impact of informational resources held by the library through the creation of cooperation and collaboration networks with the other groups of the community.

B. Economic benefits brought by the public libraries

Through the resources, the programs and the services offered, the public libraries (especially the ones from the metropolitan areas) bring economic benefits that contribute to the economic development and the competitiveness of the cities:

- the public libraries offer their users advantageous services from the point of view of the costs. We may speak in this case of benefits such as the type of savings achieved by the readers (the public libraries practising smaller fees than the private libraries), as well as the benefits directly experienced by the users (such as the comfort within the libraries and the access to the work stations: the internet access points, the online catalogue access points, etc.).

- the libraries are involved in the degree of labour force employment, the level of wages, the purchase of furniture and materials, the connection to services, the building of new offices and, even, the encouragement of the hucksters by increasing the pedestrian traffic around the libraries. A study on the economic impact of public libraries in South Carolina (Barron et al., 2005) revealed that the libraries contribute with approx. 126 mil. USD to the local expenses through the amounts distributed for wages, purchases of furniture and books, building new offices, etc.

- the public libraries support programs that bring significant benefits to the communities they serve. Through these programs, the libraries have the possibility of supporting local strategies that try to consolidate the human capital, to reduce the costs of services and to amplify the cooperation with the partner organisation at a local level.

Through the programs supported, the libraries try to cover a wide range of problems within the local agenda, like the education success, the financial literacy, the public health, etc. The study performed by the Urban Libraries Council from the USA in 2007 emphasized three program areas in the centre of the local economic development strategies:

- **the early literacy:** comprising those initiatives that promote reading, prepare children for school and increase their level of education;

- **the labor force employment:** initiatives that aim at the improvement of the qualification level of the labor force, the increase of the labor force employment and the consultancy in choosing and developing the career;

- **the support of small businesses:** the strengthening of the sector of small companies by ensuring the necessary informational resources, the organization of workshops and the achievement of training programs for the owners of new companies on the market, as well as for the ones with experience.

2. The contribution of the "Carol I" Central University Library to the competitiveness development of Bucharest

2.1 The features of the institution

The "Carol I" Central University Library from Bucharest (BCU-B "Carol I") is a public library, of national importance, with a legal personality, in the subordination of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth and financed by it (BCU-B „Carol I”, 2009).

BCU-B "Carol I" has a complex organizational structure. It includes the Central Unit (formed of 13 specialized departments) and 15 branches situated in 17 locations. The Central Unit functions in 3 buildings: *Fundație* (Calea Victoriei, nr. 88), *Dacia* (Str. Boteanu nr.1) and *Boema* (Str. CA Rosetti, nr. 2-6).

BCU-B "Carol I" is a complex info-documentary structure, part of the National System of Libraries. It has a object of activity the purchase of documents on any kind of support and of various products of electronic information and documentation, their processing (the evidence, the cataloguing, the indexing) and organized storage, the traditional and electronic dissemination of the documents and the information through the means of a varied range of services, the education of users, as well as the performance of research and development activities in the field of libraries and information science.

Vision. BCU-B "Carol I" offers access to knowledge to the student community, the teachers and the researchers whom it serves as a priority. Thus, BCU-B "Carol I" supports the university world in its public mission. Through its role and history, BCU-B "Carol I" becomes a credible and efficient link between the past and the future, between the academic world and society as a whole (BCU-B „Carol I”, 2011).

Mission. The main role of BCU "Carol I" is to support the scientific and didactic activity of the university world. At the same time, BCU-B "Carol I" develops the role of elite cultural institution, inserting itself actively and coherently in the spiritual life of Romanian society and of the capital in particular (BCU-B „Carol I”, 2011).

2.2 The SWOT analysis

According to the theoretical aspects presented in the introductory chapter, the public libraries have four roles in the context of the informational society, such as democracy and civic spirit, permanent education, economic and social development, cultural diversity. Therefore, the activity of BCU-B "Carol I" shall be analysed as follows according to these roles, in order to capture the manner in which this institution influences the competitiveness of Bucharest. For this

purpose, the manner in which BCU contributes to the building of a new democratic society, in which the individuals enjoy the easy access to information, as well as the library's contribution to the local economy and to the cultural life of Bucharest, shall be taken into account.

Table 2. Strong and weak points of BCU-B "Carol I"

Strong points	Weak points:
The participation of the library to the economy of the city – BCU-B "Carol I" contributed in 2010 with 15,050,088 RON to the local expenses through the amounts distributed for wages, assets and services and capital.	The financial accessibility of the services is poor, most of the users considering the prices of BCU-B "Carol I" as being expensive (43%) or even very expensive (17%).
The activation of economic activities from its area by renting some spaces from the ground floor to partners such as the Informational and Documentary Centre of the European Commission in Romania, HVB – BANK and SC HELVETAN SA.	The active non-participation in the building of a democratic society; the library does not offer e-government, e-commerce and e-health services and does not organize training programs in the field of using internet and electronic resources.
The support of the business community by opening the "Robert Schuman" European Documentation Centre and the Administration and Business Library, as well as by offering a wide range of useful electronic database in the knowledge-based industries.	The proper non-usage of the potential it has as a cultural space - the library does not contribute significantly to the image and the attractiveness of the city.
Significant involvement in the field of labor force employment through the 281 work places created, as well as through the training and professional qualification programs supported (for instance, financial resources management courses).	The reduced frequency of users within the library.
The library functions as a non-institutionalized informal education centre, ensuring a competent labor force at the level of the capital (for this purpose, collaborating with the University of Bucharest).	The non-involvement in programs and workshops of entrepreneurial spirit development and of stimulating the small businesses.
The existence within " <i>The Managerial Strategy of the Central University Library of Bucharest 2011-2015</i> " of the following strategic objectives: the development of public-private partnerships to ensure the optimum implementation of the BCU objectives; the extension of the area of activity of BCU by offering training and professional qualification services; the	The insufficient promotion policy - the service range made available by BCU-B "Carol I" is less known by its users.

transformation of BCU in an attractive and modern cultural life pole, of national and international size; the increase of the degree of accessibility of the info-documentary fund for other communities (BCU-B „Carol I”, 2011).	
BCU-B "Carol I" is one of the attractive objectives of Bucharest, being an historic monument (created in a neoclassical style after the plans of the French architect Paul Gottereau). Moreover, the new building <i>Boema</i> , through the functionality and the aesthetic of the interior spaces contributes significantly to the comfort and the quality of life of the users and of the visitors.	The under usage of the services offered by BCU-B "Carol I" (very few users of the multimedia point, of the individual study booths and the seminar hall).
The involvement of the library in the cultural life of the capital by hosting artistic events, exhibitions (painting, sculpture, graphics, photography) and book launches.	The decreased number of volumes consulted (less than 60% from the total book fund is consulted by the users of the library).

Table 3. Opportunities and threats for BCU-B "Carol I"

Opportunities	Threats
The existence of the Economic Competitiveness Increase Operational Program - a role for the cultural and creative industries (according to which, in order to have a significant contribution to the European social development, culture must play "its lucky card" by proving the contribution to the national/international economy).	The restriction at a national level of the budget resources, fact which determined the reduction of the activity unfolded by BCU-B "Carol I" when more than 85% of its financial resources are ensured by the state budget.
The existence at a European level of Urban Knowledge Network whose member Romania is as well.	The modest financial situation of the users - most of them are students with an average monthly income of < than 5 mil. RON, this thing making the mission of the library difficult, meaning to build a democratic society that ensures the free access to culture and knowledge.
The setting by the National Council of Libraries from Education of criteria for financing the university libraries, in order to achieve a specialization program for their collections, by stimulating the library consortia.	Difficulties in maintaining the clients after the opening of the new office of the National Library of Romania that shall offer European services, which are very attractive for various categories of users.
The preservation of exceptional international	

exchange relationships (with libraries such as Bibliotheque Nationale de France, The Royal University Library Oslo, The British Library – London, etc.) and the diversification of the resources for donations necessary to complete the lost heritage during the fire of 1989.	
The set-up in 2007 of the Librarians' Association from Romania, which has as objective the promotion of the professional and scientific interests of libraries and librarians in the country.	
The extension of the Trial from Bologna through which the "European Space of Higher Education" is set up, fact that leads to the need for the increase of competitiveness of universities from the country and implicitly of the university libraries associated to them.	

3. Recommendations to improve the impact of BCU-B "Carol I" on the competitiveness of Bucharest

The future of the libraries in the European Union represents a theme of interest and, thus, substantial amounts are distributed, professional meetings and experience exchanges take place, where specialty themes are debated, helping the librarians in the understanding of the role, the info-documentary structures have on the knowledge-based economy. In this context, the situation of the libraries from our country is difficult, taking into account that the money distributed by the European Union that may be spent for the improvement of the services and for the endowment of the libraries with the technique required by a knowledge society in full development are insufficient. The crisis period undergone by our country did not spare the public libraries. Although their decentralization was attempted, to help them, the local administrations were not sufficiently encouraged to financially support the public libraries. There are still situations where the city hall decided to move the library from one building to another, usually to a building with worse conditions, not favoring the citizens of the community that public library serves.

Besides several notable achievements, the efforts of the Central University Library in order to increase the attractiveness and the economic vitality of Bucharest are still far away from what is expected from a modern library in the context of a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, we shall present several proposals that contribute to the improvement of the impact that the library has on the competitiveness of Bucharest by indicating several solutions able to eliminate or at the most reduce the identified weak points within the SWOT analysis.

A. Recommendations to increase the impact on the economic vitality of Bucharest

1. In order to increase the impact that BCU-B "Carol I" has on the economic vitality of Bucharest and, implicitly, on its competitiveness, a first important step could be *the active involvement in the career development of the residents and in the process of labor force employment*. The information connected to the labor market has the chance to be well spread through the means of the libraries than the labor force employment agencies, due to the trust and the reputation these institutions enjoy. Thus, we consider important the following:

- The set-up within the Central Unit of the *Career Informational, Counselling and Direction Centre*. The purpose of such a centre would be to make available information regarding the labour market and the evolution of employment. Thus, the Career Informational, Counselling and Direction Centre would help the users of the library by offering a large range of materials and databases regarding the labour market, as well as the presentation of the list with the labour offer existing in the capital, daily updated by the Municipal Agency for Labour Force Employment of Bucharest. Moreover, the information centre may have a personnel dedicated to such services and specialised personnel in career management, who could ensure together the following services: the evaluation of the users' personality in order to advise them in their careers; the development of the ability and self-confidence of the persons looking for a place to work in order to take a decision related to their own career; offering suggestions regarding the web-sites where employment opportunities may be identified; the organisation of workshops whose purpose is to teach the participants how to draw up a CV and to handle a job interview.

- The achievement on the web page of a special section dedicated to the labour force, which contains information regarding the existing offer in the capital, the European CV model, the cover letter model, instructions on the preparation for a job interview, techniques to use while looking for a place to work;

- The organisation of *training and PC skill development courses* and the assurance of *the access to the Internet*. One of the strategic objectives for 2011-2015 is the extension of the activities of BCU-B "Carol I" by offering training and professional qualification services (BCU-B „Carol I”, 2011). Thus, BCU-B "Carol I" may support the labour force by supporting several training courses which vary from the basic concepts regarding the use of computers, to complex application in Microsoft Office (formatting texts, using the table options, etc.). In addition, it is very important that BCU-B "Carol I" ensures the easy access to Internet, because the work stations of the library represent the only way available to send CVs for persons who have a difficult access to the "www" network. BCU-B "Carol I" may cooperate with the Municipal Agency for Labour Force Employment Bucharest in

order to make available trainer and the necessary curricula for the proper unfolding of the training programs.

2. Another important aspect taken into account by BCU-B "Carol I" in its attempt to significantly contribute to the increase of the economic vitality of Bucharest (and implicitly to its competitiveness) is *the active involvement in the development of small companies by encouraging the entrepreneurship spirit*. If we take into account the fact that most of the work places are created in the sector of the small companies, and *the information* represents the key elements in their success, we may say that BCU-B "Carol I" may have an important role in the development of local businesses. Thus, we propose the following:

- The set-up of a *Informational and Documentary Centre for Businesses*. The purpose of the centre would be the one to encourage the development of small companies, supplying information and services that ease the market entrance and, at the same time, which ensure the long-term feasibility. Thus, through this centre, the library makes available to the entrepreneurs a multitude of informational resources, like statistics and economic trends, reports and local regulations, governmental documents, newspapers and magazines that aim at various sectors of industry, reports on the activity of companies and the legislative index. Moreover, the library may subscribe to the electronic databases existing on the market in order to offer the entrepreneurs a wide range of information on the companies' profile, the brand of the companies, the classifications, the investment reports and the marketing researches. The achievement of considerable investments in such electronic databases would bring considerable benefits to the business community because its members would have access to information "24 hours a day, 7 days a week" (at the head office of companies, as well as at their own residence). The Information and Documentation Centre for Business shall cooperate with the Administration and Business Branch within the library during the process of purchasing the informational resources, as well as with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Bucharest;

- The organisation of *training courses and demonstrative workshops in order to develop the entrepreneurial spirit and the ability to launch a business*. The training programs for the small entrepreneurs, as well as its efforts of awareness of the importance of entrepreneurial spirit should be one of the objectives of BCU-B "Carol I". Thus, we consider that the organisation by the library of workshops that help the participants draw up a business plan, identify the suppliers and competing companies, take advantage of the existing opportunities, understand the consumers' behaviour, find and use the public registers and, last but not least, identify the trends from various industry sectors, would be very useful. These workshops would have as purpose the development of the managerial and entrepreneurial competences, as well as the promotion of entrepreneurial culture within the management personnel from small companies, of the entrepreneurs and of the persons wishing to set up an independent activity. Moreover, BCU-B "Carol

I" would support training courses in the business management, cooperating with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Bucharest.

- Launching the program called "***Business plans competition***". In order to stimulate and encourage the entrepreneurial spirit, we propose the launching of the program having as theme "*The Business plans competition*". The program means the organisation of a competition between the business plans of several potential entrepreneurs, following which the best plans should be rewarded.

B. Recommendations to increase the contribution of the library to the image and the identity of Bucharest

3. In order to contribute to the increase of the attractiveness of Bucharest, BCU-B "Carol I" must stand out as a ***component of the urban attraction network of the capital***. Thus, we consider important the following:

- ***The consolidation of the image of the library at the level of the capital*** through a re-branding campaign. The lack of a strong brand represents one of the main causes that slow down the process of consolidation of the image of BCU-B "Carol I" on a local level. It is well-known that building a brand image is a difficult, complex, sensitive process (Nistorescu & Barbu, 2008, 12), but the role of the brand is to stimulate the competitiveness of the enterprise, so that this will resist to competition pressures (Barbu, Ogarcă, Barbu, 2010, 36);

- ***The use of the library's image in the Bucharest tourist guides*** One of the means through which BCU-B „Carol I” could promote as a basic component of the urban attractions network of the capital would be its integration in the Bucharest presentation guides. Thus, we propose the publication of tourist guides that integrate the image of the library, together with other attraction objectives of the capital such as the Palace of the Parliament, the Arch of Triumph, the Building of Romania's Savings Bank, etc.

- ***Opening a branch in a commercial centre, such as malls*** The libraries in the developed countries more and more turn to location strategies inside units such as commercial centres, due to the attractiveness and the large flow of visitors these units enjoy. Therefore, we propose opening a branch of BCU-B "Carol I" inside a mall ensuring, thus, the access to computers and more resources that are informational for those categories of users who would not normally visit a traditional library. Such a branch would offer a complete range of services, similar to a traditional library, or could constitute more as portal for BCU-B Carol I", taking advantage of the large flow of visitors from malls in order to redirect them towards the services offered within the Central Unit.

- ***The promotion of the library through the means of the audio-visual media within sections such as "places to visit"***. BCU-B "Carol I" could turn to the use of a TV advertisement as a mass means of communication. The presentation of

the library within cultural shows, in sections such as "places to visit", could lead to the significant increase of its number of visitors.

4. Another manner in which BCU-B "Carol I" could contribute to the increase of the attractiveness of Bucharest resides in its collaboration with the Romanian Athenaeum, The National Art Museum and the Palace Hall in order to create a *Cultural Centre of Bucharest*. Now, there are concerns for the creation of some cultural neighbourhoods that include spaces for shows, art galleries, museums, libraries, studios for artists, craft objects businesses, etc. Therefore, BCU-B "Carol I" may have an essential role in creating a cultural district right in the centre of Bucharest. Such an initiative may be described as an effort to transform the Revolution Square into a "place for all inhabitants of Bucharest", an artistic and cultural space that is pleasant for all those who visit it. BCU-B "Carol I", the Romanian Athenaeum, the Palace Hall and the National Art Museum may cooperate within this Cultural Centre of Bucharest, producing together banners for the promotion of cultural events, reductions in the parking fee, the sale of tickets and various promotions. Moreover, by the common organisation of shows in Revolution Square, these would contribute to the development of craft object businesses. The new cultural district would be an exponential attraction point, a space that deserves to be visited, a good space to spend the free time and a good environment for nightlife. Through its involvement in the new cultural centre, BCU-B "Carol I" would lead to the creation of a vibrant urban space and would directly contribute to the reputation of Bucharest as a thinking, learning, creativity and innovation space.

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