

# Targeting In Mexico, A Worrisome Effect Of Social Policies On The Immediate Links

Abigail Martínez-Mendoza<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD in Social Studies in the line of Political Processes from Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Mexico) and professor-researcher at the same university in the Lerma unit. Contact: [a.martinez@correo.ler.uam.mx](mailto:a.martinez@correo.ler.uam.mx). <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7028-7121>

## Abstract

The adoption is analyzed of targeting in the design of social policies in Mexico. Targeting brought about a new style in the design and implementation of public policies, and it was observed that it dispensed with the social framework as a dependent variable. Reference is made to two impact evaluations in two municipalities. The findings reveal that targeting possesses relevant effects on social relations with respect to whether or not the supports for social programs are received. The main conclusion is that targeting is perceived of as a perverse factor of governments, while it modifies social relations in communities in which social policies are implemented.

**Key words:** targeting, public policies, evaluation, Mexico.

## Introduction

The text entertains as its objective to expose the manner in which the targeting methods adopted by public policies have been perceived in social matters. The point of departure is the conceptualization of this type of policy and of the meanings of targeting and its methods. In a second section, we analyze the adoption of targeting on the design of social policies in Mexico, and make reference to impact evaluations, whose findings reveal that targeting exerts relevant effects on social relations. Finally, we reflect upon the methodological complexity that implies determining the effects of targeting methods. Transversally, we approach the practice of interdisciplinary work in the analysis of social policies.

In order to delimit the referential context of what is presented later, it is necessary to point

out why impact evaluation is understood as that assessment that allows to determine the effects of a program on the population benefitted, and whether these effects are related directly or indirectly with the implementation of the program (Gertler, Martínez, S., et al., 2017; Cardozo, 2015).

The methodological aspects include the following: 1) This type of evaluation demands more time and a greater cost in terms of its development with respect to the other types of evaluation (CONEVAL, 2019); 2) Qualitative and quantitative surveys with representative samples, verification and comparison of hypotheses, and experimental designs, or quasi-experiments, experimental groups with determined characteristics, direct observations and participants, open and structured interviews, or case studies (Cardozo, 2015),

and 3) Determine the negative and positive impacts, foreseeable and non-foreseeable, respectively (Navarro, 2005).

### **Social policies and targeting**

Generally, the different conceptualizations of public policies consider that the latter refer to courses of action characterized by targeting a determined sector of the society or a geographic space with the aim of resolving a public and specific problem through the efficient use of resources (Meny and Thoenig, 1992; Aguilar, 2010; Canto, 2002; Lahera, 2004; Larrue, 2002).

On confronting this, social policies will be the tools to regulate, assist, or complement development through the diverse services, such as education, health, social security, employment, and housing (Montagut, 2000; Ortiz, 2007).

At present, when addressing social policies, it is inevitable to make reference to the methods of targeting. However, prior to the 1990s, the term targeting did not form part of public-policy terminology (Raczynski, 1995). Therefore, targeting is a relatively modern expression, and from this the first meanings arise; according to Brodersohn (1999), in the definition it is possible to observe that targeting can be understood in a strictly technical sense, in broad fashion, or even in the ideological sense.

Targeting, in the strict sense of the word, seeks to identify, provide a dimension for, and localize the population that is the objective of the policies (Brodersohn, 1999). From that focus, it is possible to identify certain meanings:

1. Mechanisms to determine the subjects with access to the basic services granted to them as part of public subsidies (Candia,

1998).

2. An instrument to detect social groups lacking in minimal well-being (Pérez, 2007).
3. Instruments to identify and localize population groups and to implement actions according to the characteristics of the recipients (Brawerman and Minujin, 1991).
4. The methodology for the selection of the beneficiaries (Arzate, 2006:144).

On the other hand, in the broad sense, targeting consists of identifying the conditions of the population-under-study (Brodersohn, 1999); that is, these are questioned and responded to with *ex profeso* measures applied to a population. From this it can be observed that targeting is focusing on identifying the specific characteristics of a group or territory (Hernández, Orozco y Vásquez, 2008:105). In the same sense, targeting is precisely identifying homes in a condition of poverty (Orozco y Hubert, 2005:14).

Finally, in the ideological sense, targeting is linked with the role of the State, in terms of how the public expenditure should be maximized in order for it to be effective in specific areas (Brodersohn, 1999). In this manner, according to The Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) (1995), targeting consists of concentrating the available resources on a population of potential beneficiaries, which is clearly identified. It can also be about the effectiveness of the social expenditure assigned to the neediest groups (Larrañaga, 2005). Similarly, targeting is to break with the dispersion of resources, which implies re/legitimizing the State and in turn breaking with the associated clientelism (Lacabana y Maingon, 1997); thus, it is a method of public intervention (Telias, 2010:1).

However, the gamma of meanings concerned with targeting is lacking in sense due to a lack of context. At the worldwide level, the principal reasons that led to the use of methods of targeting were as follows: 1) The change of the economic method in the 1980s, which impacted social policy, deteriorating the quality and coverage of the social services offered by the State; 2) The fiscal crisis led to reapproaching the strategies of the efficacy and efficiency in order for the public expenditure to maximize the resources assigned to the diminution of poverty, and 3) Due to adjustments in the new economic model, the State redefined its activity in the face of the public sector, taking steps toward

the privatization of enterprises and public organisms, and a new form of administrating social policy (Brodersohn, 1999; Cardozo, 2015; Candia, 1998; Hernández, Orozco y Vázquez, 2008; Lacabana y Maingon, 1997).

In this way, targeting is held up as a methodological strategy for encountering new challenges of the State, in particular, the growth of poverty; that is, this is about the ideological sense described by Brodersohn (1999). To this should be added that there exist various types of targeting that interact without being exclusive, in that some methods center on the person, or on their conditions, or on their zone of residence.

**Table 1: Methods of targeting**

Targeting	Characteristic
<b>Geographic</b>	Utilized methods of geo-referencing. The geographic residence determines eligibility for obtaining supports.
<b>Indirect or administrative</b>	Defines eligibility in terms of individual or familial characteristics (gender, age, employment market, educative level, housing) that are easy to observe, difficult to skew, and that are correlated with poverty.
	This is carried out one by one, home by home, independently of whether the applicant covered the eligibility criteria, verified by: 1. Means check earning a living; 2. Home visits to verify livelihoods; 3. Substitute proof of earning a living: collecting information on observable characteristics; 4. Determine a score for socioeconomic status.
<b>Direct or Communitary</b>	Eligibility is established at the local and territorial level, a local authority can participate, a social assistant who has knowledge of the circumstances. Local knowledge on the living conditions could be more accurate than proof of earning a living.
<b>Self-Targeting</b>	The subject applies to be a beneficiary. The design includes the following: 1. Location of modules of difficult access 2. Reception of documents with the need to wait in long lines 3. Benefits low in quality or amount.

fountain: Own elaboration, based on Brodersohn, 1999; Hernández, Orozco y Vázquez, 2008; Telias, 2010.

### **Targeting in Mexico**

In the case of Mexico, the targeting methods were instituted from the year 1997. Prior to

their use, social policies were characterized by and were understood to be in the administrative or universal sense (Barajas,

2002b), and from the inception of their use, the social policies incorporated a criterion of rationality in the distribution of goods and services.

Briefly and for contextualization, from 1970 to 1994, social policies were characterized by operating from the demands of organized social groups (Barajas, 2002); from 1995 to 2018, the implementation of these policies was through different, previously cited targeting methods, and from 2019, social policy in Mexico is termed non-targeting:

1. During the period of 1970-1976, there arose the first programs for attention to marginalized zones. In 1972, the Programa de Inversiones para el Desarrollo Rural (Program of Investments for Rural Development, PIDER) was implemented with the objective of promoting agricultural, livestock, mining, fishing, and industrial production, as well as health and housing services. This program is recognized as the first administrative mechanism that established its functioning on the coordination and cooperation of state and federal offices (Barajas, 2002b).

2. From 1976-1982, PIDER demonstrated continuity, as did the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (Mexican Alimentary System, SAM), as well as the Coordinación General del Plan Nacional de Zonas Deprimidas y Grupos Marginados (General Coordination of the National Plan of Depressed Zones and Marginalized Groups, COPLAMAR). SAM was a program that embraced commercial, industrial, and basic-food-consumption and livestock-policy goals and actions, and one that identified “the differentiated food needs of the poorest population of the country” (DOF, 1980). On the other hand, COPLAMAR assumed the care of depressed zones and marginated groups through the coordination of actions among the public administration

offices or entities (DOF, 1977).

3. Between 1982 and 1988, after a 1982 economic crisis, the policies were restructured. The Immediate Program of Economic Reordering (PIRE) for controlling inflation and raising production and employment was implemented. COPLAMAR was repealed and its actions were delegated to the Secretarías de Programación y Presupuesto, de Energía, Minas e Industria Paraestatal, de Comercio y Fomento Industrial, de Comunicaciones y Transportes, de Educación Pública y de la Reforma Agraria (Secretaries of Programming and Budget, Mines and Parastate Mines and Industry, Commerce Development, Communications and Transport, Public Education, and of the Agrarian Reform (DOF, 20-04-1983).

4. From 1988-1994, the National Program of Solidarity (PRONASOL), known as Solidaridad (Solidarity), was implemented; it focused on the indigenous and peasant/farming population and on social groups organized by the poor. Its objective was to cover food, land holding, housing, education, health, and animal-husbandry and livestock infrastructure (DOF, 06-12-1988).

The strategy of the Solidarity Program was to determine the rubrics and the establishment of the Beneficiary Committees to capture demands and carry out actions in basic works of infrastructure, in rehabilitation and the maintenance of educative, sports, health installations, in the delivery of economic support for productive and ecological projects, and to facilitate support for the improvement of housing and regional development programs (Barajas, 2002a).

5. From 1994 to the year 2000, el Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación (Program of Education, Health and Alimentation,

PROGRESA) was implemented, which would promote “intersectorial actions for the education, health, and feeding of families in the situation of extreme poverty” (DOF, 08-08-1997:1). For the first time in Mexico, social actions were characterized by monetary transfers and rights–obligations between the beneficiaries and the government. Children should attend school; the family should attend the medical service available and not accept any other federal subsidy. The government would deliver educative scholarships and a support for school supplies, a basic health package, talks on nutrition and hygiene, food supplements for children and pregnant or breast-feeding women, and a complementary economic support for familial income (DOF, 08-08-1997). Such a mechanism for monetary transfers and co-responsibilities implemented targeting as an equity principle for access to determined supports: by virtue of that the resources, however abundant, might be and would always necessarily fall short of combating poverty, it is indispensable to ensure that they benefit those who most in need of them (DOF, 26-02-1999:6).

6. During the following years, from 2000 to 2014, El Programa de Desarrollo Humano Oportunidades (Program of Human Development Opportunities) was in operation; the actions of the program were similar to those safeguarded in PROGRESA; health, education, and the economy remained; it included and had as its objective, employment, income, and savings (DOF, 06-03-2002:10). As part of the implementation strategies, targeting was applied as follows:

The criteria for identifying the zones of attention in which the incorporation of beneficiary families of the Program that will be carried out in the Program are based on a process of geographic targeting, by

means of which localities or geographic groups of concentrations of homes in conditions of extreme poverty are selected (DOF: 08-05-2003:35).

7. During the period from 2012 to 2018, el Prospera Programa de Inclusión Social (The Prosper Program of Social Inclusion) was implemented, centering on attending to the intergenerational cycle of poverty through food, health, education, and other dimensions of well-being (DOF, 30-12-2014). For this program, el Sistema de Focalización para el Desarrollo (the System of Targeting Development, SIFODE) was developed and implemented, which systematized more than 800 variables of socioeconomic/information variables (DOF, 30-12-2014). For 2015, SIFODE registered 4.1 million homes, which represent 13.6 million persons, and it shared information with 23 programs (SEGOB, 2015).<sup>2</sup>

8. More recently, between 2019 and 2022, the PROSPERA Program was substituted for by the Programa de Becas Benito Juárez (Benito Juárez Scholarship Program). Representing the former national coordinator of PROSPERA, now in charge of the scholarship program, her person-in-charge declared “that the program [PROSPERA], which grants conditioned supports in health, food, and education, will not be transformed. It will now maintain only the educative rubric, and scholarships, and the remaining rubrics will disappear”<sup>3</sup>.

The program is characterized by not employing any targeting method, at least not in the technical or ideological sense, according to what Brodersohn (1999) cites; in any case, it will be of the direct type or carried out by self-targeting, thus considering that cited by Atria (2005). For this latter author, social

policies are discriminatory because they are directed toward groups with determined characteristics: a) specifically precise recipients, and b) generically identified recipients defined by precise and concrete social categories (Atria, 2005). In this manner, all social policy possesses a targeting effect, if and when it is directed toward determined sectors of the society.

In sum, prior to 1997, social policies were universal, they functioned according to the demands of social groups; later, in Mexico, targeting began to be used and this opened a new style of the design and implementation of public policies in social matters. Meanwhile, from 2019 on, targeting is no longer mentioned as an expenditure strategy in social policies, and it is noteworthy that it is indeed carried out through so-called self-targeting despite that the current government of López Obrador objects to this route, inscribed without doubt in the framework of neoliberalism and other political currents (Martínez y Morales: 2021:154).

In sum, targeting comes to build an axis for the design and implementation of policies, as noted by Candia (1988), on citing that targeting constitutes a central concept of the paradigm of the formulation of social policies.

### **Transcendence of targeting**

The use of methods of targeting was a strategy for the design and implementation of social policies that doubtlessly motivated the discussion of the effect of this novel paradigm; the first analyses explored the recovery of the method of targeting in the system of immediate social relations. That is, that social relations could be a dependent variable of the implementation of targeted social policies was discarded. It dispensed with the social framework in which the problem lies, because that did not limit the implementation of

determined actions of the policies (Candia, 1998).

In this respect, on the one hand, there is an inclusive system for accessing determined supports offered by the social policies and, in parallel fashion, on the other hand, the exclusive modality prevails that restricts the population on not possessing the characteristics cited for targeting (Brodersohn, 1999). Selectivity criteria act with a dual effect. In Mexico, such impacts were observed from the first implementation of targeting.

In 1997, an external evaluation was conducted on the PROGRESO Program, requested by the Mexican government (Cardozo, 2015). The evaluation was charged to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). In the final reports, the IFPRI indicated that targeting was effective for the selection of localities, but that it incurred a social cost for the communities, the persons, and “the PROGRESO strategy for identifying homes has been associated with certain communities in terms of asocial division” (Skoufias, 2000:16).

To this, the observations are added of those carried out by Adato (2000) during the impact evaluation at the community level; the IFPRI investigator mainly reported that the beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, promoters, and physicians held forth on the resentment, tensions, conflicts, and social divisions, due to their not forming part of the program: social tensions are more common than confrontation and imply resentment, envy, or gossip, the latter evidenced more frequently around the time that beneficiaries present to collect their supports (Adato, 2000:139-141).

On the other hand, Orozco and Hubert (2005:15) indicated that the PROGRESA Program incentivized the relations between

women beneficiaries but that, at the same time, abysses were created with those left out of the program. To this, Gertler, Martínez, and others (2017) indicate that the evaluation of the program contributed solid evidence that cannot be circumvented in subsequent decisions on policies.

In synthesis, the implementation of targeted social policies modifies social relations.

### **Two case studies**

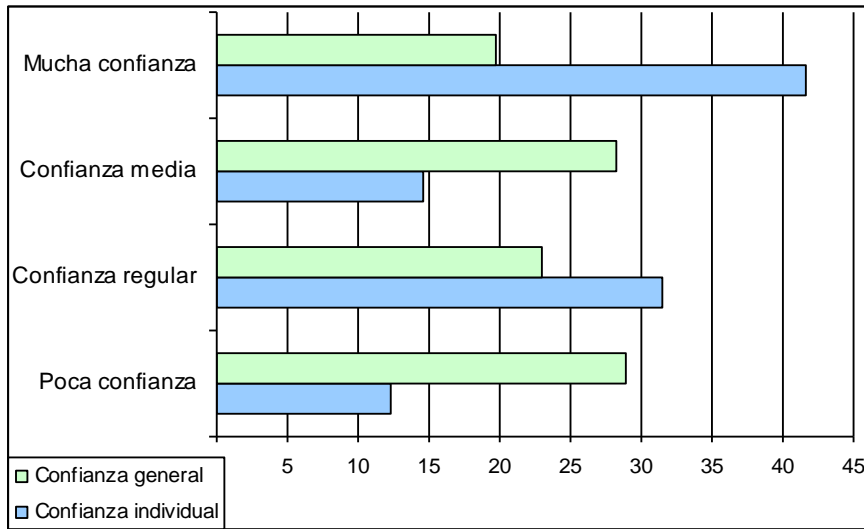
Here, two studies are referred that render the conclusions more robust with respect to the impact of targeting in social relations. The first study was carried out in the Cualác municipality in the entity of Guerrero, between the years 2004 and 2005, while the second study was performed in two municipalities of the state of Oaxaca, between 2010 and 2014. Both works employed the technique of observation in the field, rapport, and face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, accompanied by a mixed questionnaire. It is noteworthy that between the years 2004 and 2014, social policy continued to be targeted and implemented through the Oportunidades Program.

The work carried out in 2004, in Cualác, Guerrero, was entitled “Evaluación de la Satisfacción Residencial en Zonas de Alta Vulnerabilidad Social” (Evaluation of Residential Satisfaction in Zones of High

Vulnerability), and it has as its aim the objective of contributing to the study of the residential perception of populations in highly vulnerable social zones, centering the analysis on the residential satisfaction associated with the surrounding environment and the circumstances under which these residents live. Ninety-three validated interviews were obtained, and the field work was performed in 12 localities. With respect to the results, herein we mention those related with targeting, about which we can state that they constitute genuine findings, considering that the objective was addressed by means of another route and, at the same time, that the results engendered interest due to the public policies in social matters and to their impact on populations under situations of margination.

In Cualác, Guerrero, the results indicate that 41% expressed great confidence in neighbors to request some type of aid, at a ratio of 1:1 (individual confidence), while 28% mentioned fair or regular confidence, in a one-to-others ratio (general confidence). A total of 29% said that they would not request aid from neighbors due to a dearth of confidence. In terms of general confidence, when this involves a general confidence, the interviewees explained that they trusted women who were also beneficiaries of the Opportunities Program.

**Figure 1: Confidence in requesting aid.**

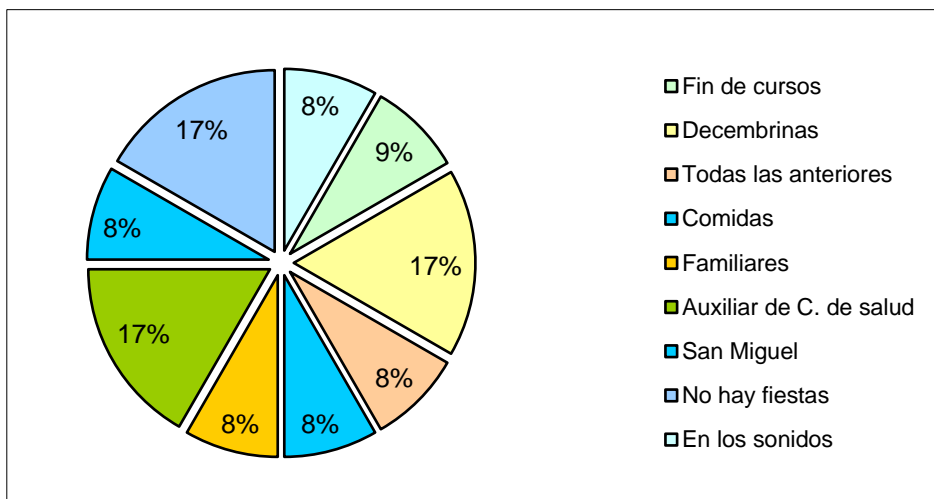


Fountain: Martínez M. A., 2005.

A total of 58% indicated that they enjoyed sharing festivities, and 17% enjoyed sharing festivities at the New Year. The remaining 17% only attended meetings for beneficiaries

of the Opportunities Program. On the other hand, 46% cited not attending meetings at the health center, because they were not beneficiaries of the Opportunities Program.

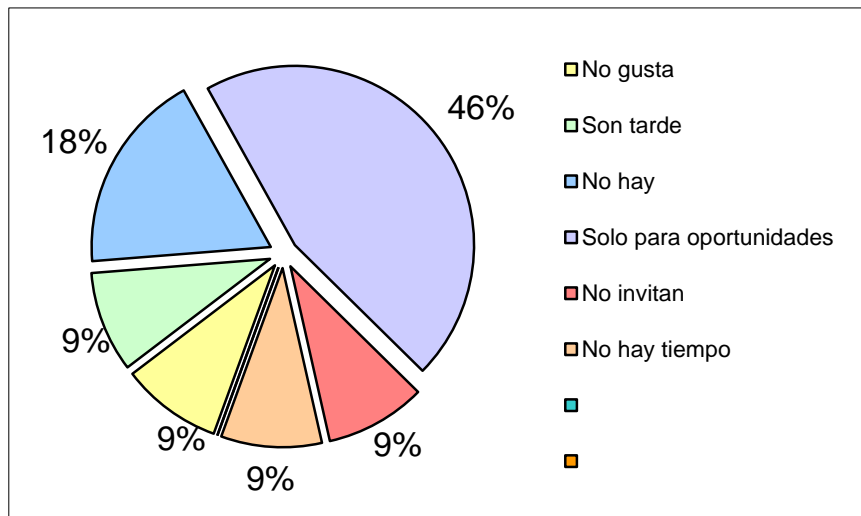
**Figure 2: Share some event with festivities with neighbors.**



Fountain: Martínez M. A., 2005.

**Figure 3: Other reasons for not attending some meeting/neighbor get-together.**





Fountain: Martínez M. A., 2005.

After these results, the second study was focused on four localities in Oaxaca between 2010 and 2014, the explicit object of which was to know the actions of the Opportunities Program that exert an influence on the development of social relations. It was observed that the targeted implementation of the Opportunities Program is organized on two networks of social relations, that is, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, in such a way that the immediate relations are restructured.

Additionally, it was also observed that both networks were characterized by their own style of communication, interaction, links, and participation. In the network of non-beneficiaries, non-hierarchical social relations prevailed, while in the network of beneficiaries, a vertical style prevailed. It is possible that the social relations were modified, but they were not interrupted entirely. Particularly, in the networks of non-beneficiaries, joint actions were consistent when the objective was to carry out improvements to the locality, or even religious or civic actions (Martínez, 2014).

In appearance, one population was divided and the bonds of communication were severed. However, after a follow-up involving two families, one beneficiary did and another did not receive supports throughout the 2 years after the study (between 2014 and 2016), it was observed that, despite their condition with regard to the program, they maintained links with their respective opposite numbers, because they shared territory, some ties of blood and friendship, and problems in common, as well as symbolic or civic actions of the locality. It is possible to observe that, independently of contexts, with targeting there predominated an effect on the social links, modifying these with respect to having or not having the supports offered by the social programs.

It is also able to be stated that the studies conducted in Guerrero and Oaxaca could even be framed within the perspective of the evaluation as an exercise in investigation that assists public policies, whenever they offer qualitative information for understanding the effects of social programs beyond the programmed goals, that is, achievement in the social ambit. As stated by Gertler and Martínez (2017:16), the qualitative data

comprise an essential complement of the quantitative evaluations of impact in that they contribute a complementary perspective on the performance of a program.

### In closing

Perception of the methods of targeting in the design and implementation of public policies in social matters can be understood in two ways. First, observed from the appreciation of decision makers, these methods comprise a rational strategy for distribution of the expenditure in social matters, as well as for the identification of the conditions and the beneficiary populations. Second, from the perspective of the beneficiaries, targeting is perceived as a perverse factor, while it modifies the social relations of the communities where the social policies are implemented.

Thus, it is necessary to design mechanisms of interaction between the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the programs, in that weak links or the absence of links would increase marginalization indexes, vulnerability, and a social gap, an undesired effect due to social policies.

Likewise, reflection with respect to the modification of social policies as an impact of a targeting intervention represents more than a justification for conducting investigative works, it is the ideal incentive for interdisciplinary collaboration because it favors methodological pluralism, and with that the validity of the findings becomes more robust. In this regard, interdisciplinary collaboration is a strategy that strengthens the work of the social sciences, lessens the theoretical-methodological differences, and, from diverse angles describes the decision making of public policymakers.

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