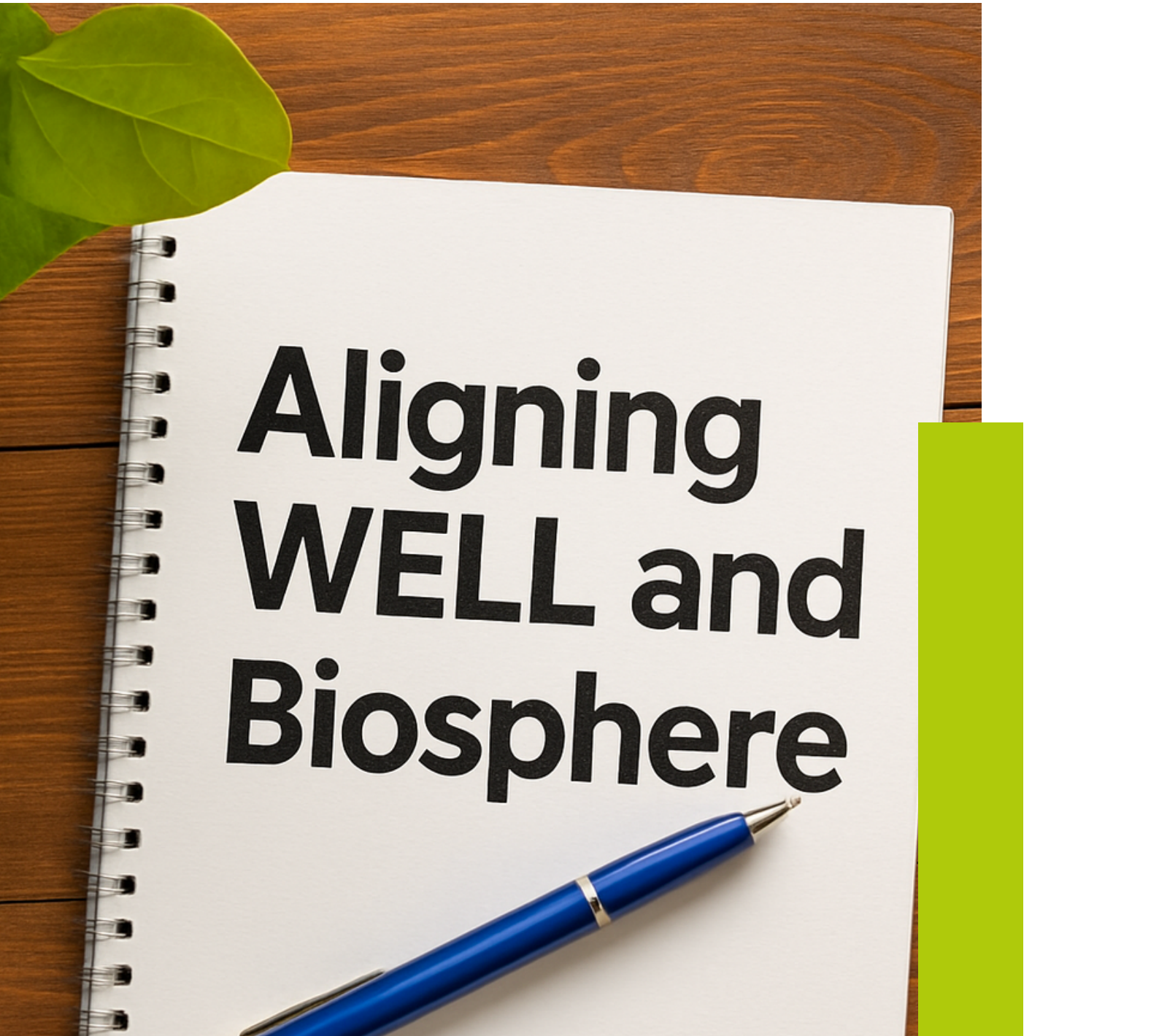


ALIGNING WELL AND BIOSPHERE

A UNIFIED APPROACH TO HEALTH, SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM



**Aligning
WELL and
Biosphere**

Executive Summary

Organisations in tourism, hospitality, and real estate are under growing pressure to demonstrate not only environmental responsibility but also social equity, health, and well-being. Two leading international frameworks that enable this transformation are the WELL Building Standard® (WELL) and the Biosphere certification system, which is structured around the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This white paper explores the alignment between WELL and Biosphere, presenting a thematic crosswalk between Biosphere's SDG-linked indicators and WELL's feature-based requirements. The analysis reveals that WELL can serve as a practical implementation tool for Biosphere's strategic sustainability principles. Conversely, Biosphere's integrated SDG narrative enhances the impact and value proposition of WELL-driven health and well-being strategies.

The paper concludes with practical recommendations for projects that wish to leverage these synergies and position themselves as both health-promoting and sustainability-leading destinations.

Key findings

- There is strong synergy between Biosphere indicators and WELL features across key areas such as healthy food systems, local sourcing, physical activity, mental health, emergency preparedness, accessibility, climate action, and responsible governance.
- Joint adoption can streamline compliance efforts, eliminate duplication, and articulate a compelling ESG narrative to stakeholders.
- Properties implementing both standards are better positioned to become resilient, health-promoting, and sustainability-leading destinations.

2. About the Frameworks

2.1 Biosphere Certification

Biosphere is a globally recognised certification system developed by the Responsible Tourism Institute (RTI), aligned with the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It provides a holistic sustainability management methodology specifically adapted for destinations, tourism companies, and buildings such as hotels, resorts, and tourism facilities.

What sets Biosphere apart is its comprehensive approach: it evaluates environmental, social, economic, and cultural dimensions of sustainability. Each criterion is explicitly linked to an SDG and translated into concrete operational actions. Biosphere enables organisations to systematically measure, manage, and improve their sustainability performance across key domains including:

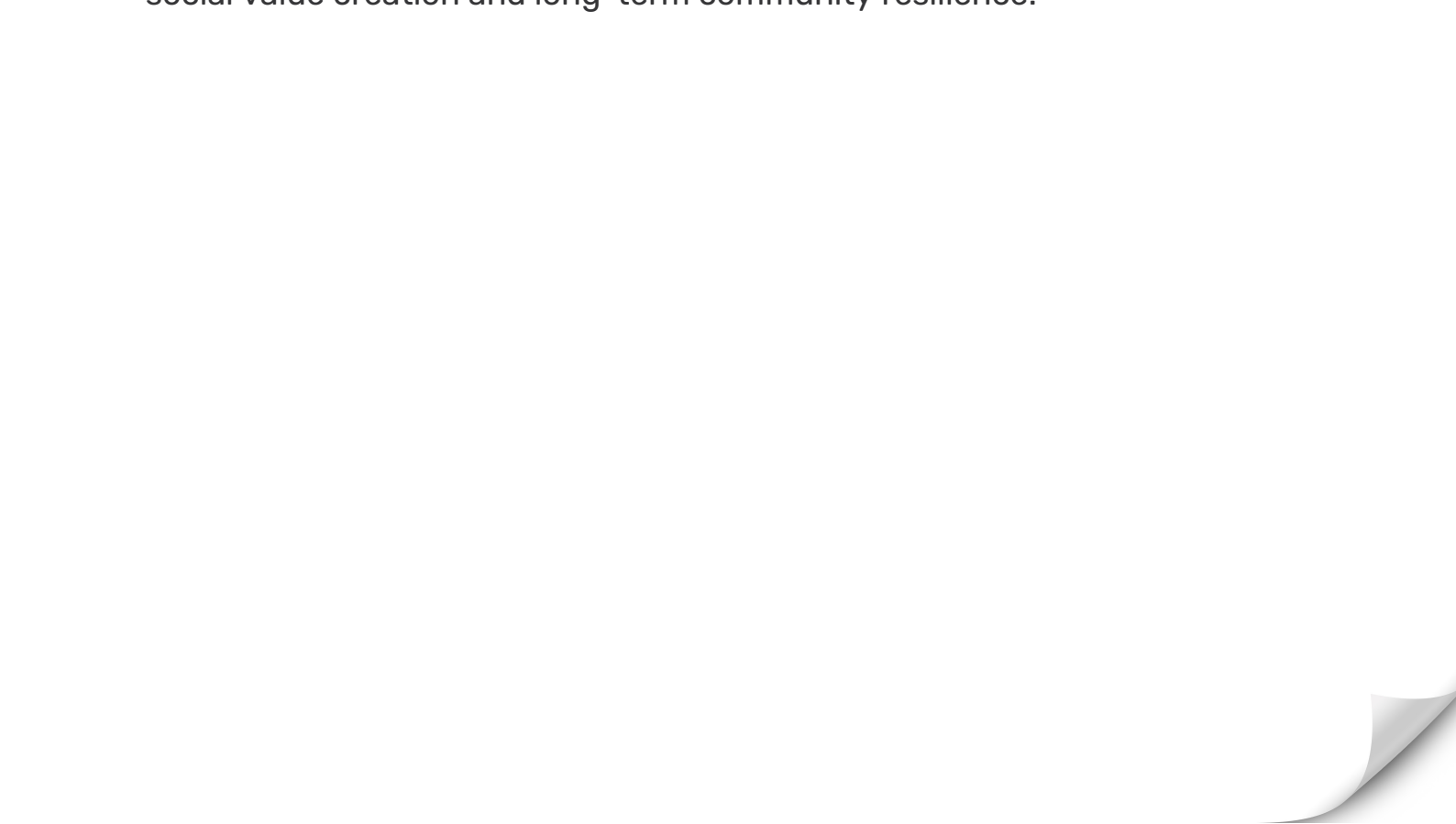
- Environmental responsibility (e.g., climate action, circular economy, sustainable water, and energy use).
- Social inclusion (e.g., gender equality, decent work, accessibility).
- Cultural preservation (e.g., heritage promotion, support for local identity).
- Economic sustainability (e.g., support for local SMEs, responsible procurement).
- Governance and transparency (e.g., stakeholder engagement, ethical management).



For hotels and tourism buildings, Biosphere creates a bridge between daily operational decisions and global sustainability goals. Its indicators promote continuous improvement through action plans, stakeholder involvement, and public reporting. Practical examples include:

- Promoting local and seasonal food systems.
- Ensuring health and safety for staff and guests.
- Supporting universal accessibility and inclusive policies.
- Measuring and offsetting carbon footprint.
- Engaging in educational, social, or health-related partnerships.

This all-encompassing structure makes Biosphere uniquely suited for tourism businesses seeking not only environmental excellence but also social value creation and long-term community resilience.



2.2 WELL Building Standard

The WELL Building Standard® is a globally recognised certification that focuses on how the built environment can promote human health, comfort, and well-being. Developed by the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), it is organised into ten core concepts: Air, Water, Nourishment, Light, Movement, Thermal Comfort, Sound, Materials, Mind, and Community.

Unlike typical green building certifications, WELL puts human experience at the centre. It requires detailed assessments and policies that promote:

- Superior air and water quality.
- Healthy nutrition and responsible food environments.
- Supportive lighting and acoustics.
- Opportunities for movement and ergonomics.
- Mental well-being and psychological safety.
- Social connection and equity in the workplace.

In hospitality and tourism, WELL is applicable to hotels, resorts, guest lodgings, and conference centres where occupant experience is critical to success. WELL certification signals to guests, staff, and investors that a property is not only environmentally responsible but also health-conscious and people-first. This is essential not only for protecting health, but also for differentiating properties in a competitive market: WELL certification provides a credible, third party-verified signal that a tourism asset is designed and managed around the needs of people, guests, staff and local communities, thereby strengthening brand value, occupancy appeal and long-term resilience.

2.3 Relationship between Biosphere and WELL

While Biosphere and WELL serve different functions, they are complementary. Biosphere sets a macro-level sustainability narrative rooted in the SDGs, tailored to tourism contexts. WELL, in contrast, provides the micro-level, operational detail required to translate these goals into tangible health-promoting spaces.

When implemented together: Biosphere provides the strategic framework, positioning the asset as part of a broader social and environmental agenda. WELL delivers technical rigour, ensuring that the building's design and operations enhance health, comfort, and safety.

This dual application allows tourism assets to articulate a credible, measurable, and narrative-rich sustainability and health story to guests, staff, and ESG-conscious investors.

3. Methodology for the Alignment

The alignment analysis consisted of a detailed comparison between WELL v2 feature credits and the Biosphere Certification indicators, grouped by SDG. For each Biosphere theme, relevant WELL features were identified that either fully or partially support the intended outcome.

While the two systems differ in format, Biosphere being indicator-based and WELL being feature-based, there are strong synergies found. The alignment focused on areas of practical overlap, allowing for implementation efficiencies in dual-certified projects.

The result is a thematic mapping that highlights areas of strong synergy, rather than a strict equivalence between individual points or credits.

Some Biosphere indicators map directly to specific WELL features (for example, healthy menus in Biosphere and fruit and vegetable provision in WELL Nourishment). Others show a broader conceptual alignment where WELL's detailed requirements can be used to operationalize Biosphere's higher-level commitments, such as emergency preparedness, accessibility, social inclusion, and climate action.

4. Key Areas of Alignment

4.1 Responsible Food Systems

Biosphere strongly promotes local, seasonal, and healthy food procurement as part of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Through actions as the use of local products, the promotion of healthy menus for visitors and staff, and the reduction of waste through initiatives such as composting. These objectives align closely with the Nourishment features in the WELL Building Standard.

WELL Nourishment features encourage the provision of fresh fruits and vegetables, the limitation of added sugars and the promotion of whole grains. Further requirements support clear labelling of allergens and nutrition education for building occupants. WELL also promotes the use of locally sourced and responsibly produced food, directly reinforcing Biosphere's commitments to local agriculture and fisheries.

By designing menu policies, supplier requirements, and guest communication in line with WELL criteria, an organization can at the same time demonstrate compliance with the corresponding Biosphere indicators on healthy, local, and responsible food systems.

4.2 Health, Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Biosphere requires organizations to implement emergency, safety, and health protocols and to inform staff about occupational risks. It also encourages provision of vaccinations and health checks and requires ongoing training for emergency situations.

These expectations are mirrored in WELL's Health-Safety-focused features, which call for documented emergency preparedness plans, emergency resources, clear communication protocols, and regular drills. Additional WELL features support community immunity via vaccination campaigns and health promotion programs.

Using WELL as the technical backbone, organizations can move from generic statements about having emergency procedures to a robust, auditable system that provides compelling evidence for both WELL and Biosphere.

4.3 Movement and Healthy Lifestyle

Biosphere encourages sports, physical activity among staff and, where relevant, guests. It also calls for information and education on the harmful effects of unhealthy lifestyle habits.

WELL Movement features require the provision of indoor and outdoor activity spaces, support for active travel and programs that incentivize physical activity. WELL Mind and Nourishment features formalise these principles by requiring active design, ergonomic furniture, walking trails, and incentive programmes for fitness.

This combination enables organizations to translate Biosphere's commitment to physical activity and healthy living into concrete design interventions, programs and campaigns that can be measured and improved over time.

4.4 Mental Health and Substance Use

Biosphere includes indicators tied to preventing substance abuse, collaborating with specialist organizations, and informing employees and customers about the consequences of substance misuse.

WELL Mind features address these topics through requirements for tobacco cessation support, substance use education and mental health resources. They promote a culture of psychological safety and encourage employers to establish clear policies and communication channels around these issues.

Together, these create a framework for: psychological safety for staff, guest awareness on responsible behaviour, and partnerships with NGOs or health bodies to address mental well-being and addiction.

Biosphere and WELL go beyond conventional sustainability checklists by prioritising often-overlooked issues like mental health, substance-use prevention, and supportive workplace culture. When integrated, they embed policies, staff training, partnerships, and guest resources into daily operations. Tourism assets are well-placed to lead this shift given their large workforces and broad community impact. Widespread adoption can raise industry standards and create a ripple effect across destinations, fostering healthier workplaces and communities.

4.5 Accessibility and Inclusion

Universal accessibility and equity are cornerstone themes in Biosphere. Calling for universal accessibility, policies against abuse and exploitation and the promotion of social actions that involve staff, suppliers, and customers in sustainability efforts.

WELL Community and Mind features support these objectives by requiring accessibility and universal design strategies, stakeholder engagement processes, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) assessments, support systems and equitable hiring and salary practices. WELL also encourages consideration of healthy work hours and work-life balance.

Together, WELL and Biosphere support a rights-based approach to the design and operation of tourism and hospitality assets. Ensuring that built environments meet physical, sensory, and cognitive accessibility needs. That employment practices reflect equity and inclusion. That social sustainability extends to suppliers and community partnerships.

Hotels are increasingly leading on accessibility and inclusion. Scandic Hotels, for example, has applied its own Accessibility Standard since 2003, based on the full guest journey and developed with input from disability organisations and guests with mobility needs. The Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa in Ireland, offers a sensory bedroom designed for guests with autism, ADHD, dementia, or sensory sensitivities, providing a calm, regulated environment that reflects evolving inclusivity standards.

4.6 Water, Climate and Low-Carbon

Water stewardship and climate resilience are essential dimensions of both the Biosphere and WELL frameworks, particularly in the context of tourism assets operating in resource-sensitive or high-impact regions.

Biosphere includes commitments to better water management through calculating the water footprint and implementation of water efficiency programmes. It also promotes energy efficiency programmes and initiatives. Including the promotion of public transport, low-emission vehicles and carbon footprint measurement and compensation.

WELL reinforces these priorities through technical features that target water quality, air pollution, thermal comfort, and energy management. WELL Water features focus on filtration, testing, and access, while Air and Thermal Comfort features ensure high-performance HVAC systems and thermal regulation. WELL also encourages high-efficiency fixtures and leak detection systems that align with Biosphere's water-saving goals.

By integrating these strategies, organizations can build a more coherent approach to water efficiency, climate mitigation and sustainable mobility that satisfies both WELL and Biosphere requirements. Together, these frameworks enable tourism properties to mitigate climate impacts, increase operational efficiency, and demonstrate environmental leadership aligned with SDGs 6 (Clean Water), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and 13 (Climate Action).

5. Leveraging Synergies

Pursuing WELL and Biosphere together offers a range of practical benefits for organizations in tourism, hospitality, and real estate. The main advantages include the following.

- Streamlined documentation: WELL policies and procedures (for example, for emergency preparedness, health and safety, accessibility, DEI, and carbon accounting) can often be submitted as evidence for Biosphere indicators.
- A stronger narrative: Biosphere's SDG framing helps explain WELL measures in a language understood by governments, tourism boards, and ESG investors, while WELL demonstrates that SDG-related commitments are backed by concrete, verifiable actions.
- Enhanced outcomes: WELL deepens the health and well-being dimension of sustainability strategies, while Biosphere broadens the focus to community, destination, and visitor experience.
- Market differentiation: Projects that hold both certifications can position themselves as leaders in healthy, sustainable, and responsible travel, appealing to guests, staff and investors who expect more than generic "green" labels.

6. Recommendations for Project Teams

For organizations considering, or already pursuing, both WELL and Biosphere, the following steps can help maximize synergies and manage certification efforts efficiently.

1. Conduct a joint gap analysis to identify where planned or existing WELL strategies already satisfy Biosphere indicators and where additional action is needed.
2. Develop integrated policies and procedures that explicitly reference both relevant WELL features and Biosphere SDG indicators, so that a single document can serve multiple purposes.
3. Use WELL metrics and documentation to enhance Biosphere reporting, particularly for health programs, carbon assessments, water management, and stakeholder engagement.
4. Engage staff, suppliers and guests in a unified story that explains how WELL and Biosphere work together to deliver healthier, more sustainable, and more equitable experiences.
5. Plan for continuous improvement by combining Biosphere's emphasis on ongoing progress with WELL's performance monitoring and recertification cycles.
6. Align timelines, data collection periods, and audit cycles early.

Conclusion

WELL and Biosphere are complementary frameworks that, when used together, help organizations move beyond generic sustainability claims towards integrated, SDG-aligned health and sustainability performance. Biosphere provides the strategic SDG framework and a broad sustainability narrative, while WELL delivers the technical depth and operational rigour needed to ensure that buildings and services genuinely support people's health, well-being, and equity.

By leveraging the alignments highlighted in this white paper, project teams can simplify their certification journeys, strengthen ESG and SDG reporting and offer healthier and more responsible experiences for occupants, staff, and visitors. The result is a more resilient and future-ready portfolio that aligns with global sustainability agendas and evolving expectations from guests, employees, and investors.

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