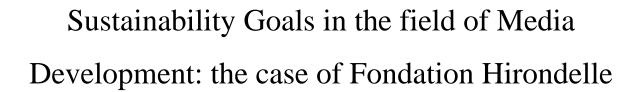
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### **Sustainability Goals in the field of Media development:**

#### the case of Fondation Hirondelle

#### Introduction

Although there is no consensus on a single definition of the concept, both scholars and practitioners have long conventionally problematized so-called "Media Development" as international interventions in a sparse or poor *media environment*. The concept dates back to the Cold War period and includes from the outset a goal of social change.

Nevertheless, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) has set a milestone by defining it as "an object (an 'ecology') rather than an activity. In this rendition, such an object would not necessarily hinge on 'media development' intervention activity, and this is a welcome step to freeing 'media development' from being treated as only those outcomes that result from external interventions" (Berger, 2010:551).

Media development is both a means and an end, a mix of external evolutions and inside changes, as the Center for International Media Assistance sums it up: this "evolution can be stimulated by donor support, private investment, or indigenous processes of change led by media owners, managers, journalists, or other players such as media industry associations, or other collective efforts" (Cima, 2015).

This paper does not position itself on what Martin Scott (2014:93) calls "blurred boundaries between media development and [media for development]", where media is seen as "a tool or instrument in pursuit of specific development objectives such as modified health behaviors". It will consider development media in both CIMA and OECD's broadest sense, which includes traditional media development projects, development communication, infrastructure provision and even some areas of public diplomacy (Cauhapé-Cazeaux, & Kalathil, 2015:7)<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of this study is to analyse one of the leading development aid projects in the field of the media, Lausanne-based *Fondation Hirondelle* (FH), from a communication perspective: It will first be conceptualized in a broader socio-cultural and political sense, in relation to the paradigm of sustainable development and its dedicated goal. It will then be placed in relation to the problematic aspects of the concept of sustainability in the field of media development,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Media development projects are the ones whose "main purpose [...] is to strengthen the quality, sustainability and/or independence of the news media", communication for development is "the employment of media and communication in order to promote or facilitate development goals", "Public diplomacy is the promotion of a country's foreign policy interests" and media infrastructure includes support for broadcasting infrastructure, as well as provision of basic equipment".

from a critical perspective. Finally, the potentials and challenges of the collaboration within the organization will be discussed, especially through a cross-sector communicative dimension.

## **Background of the project**

Established in 1995 by three journalists from the Swiss public service broadcaster<sup>2</sup>, FH is a non-profit organization whose aim is to "provide useful, impartial and independent information to populations deprived of it by conflict, crisis, disaster or any situation where the right to information is violated" (FH, 2008:article 2.1).

Its (French) name, which means "swallow" in English, comes from the Kinyarwanda name of the first radio station taken over by the organization, "*Agatashya*", set up in 1994 by the Swiss section of Reporters Without Borders on the Congolese (then Zairean) frontier with Rwanda to offer an alternative to the hate media.

The FH today produces and broadcasts information and dialogue programmes in eight countries<sup>3</sup>. It operates a radio in the Central African Republic (CAR), *Radio Ndeke Luka* (RNL, "The Bird of Good Fortune") and between 2002 and 2014, it also contributed to the establishment and development of *Radio Okapi*, the radio station of the United Nations mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It created and/or operated a number of other stations and production studios as well, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa.

As mentioned on their website (FH, 2014a), it "creates or supports independent, public service media and contributes to their sustainable development in complex situations" (emphasis in original). From the outset this organization has chosen to place sustainability at the center of its projects. It is one of the few in the media development sector to have had a so-called "sustainability officer" at its headquarters until 2016, in the person of its first director, Jean-Pierre Husi, an agricultural engineer by training.

Since 2013, FH has been a strategic partner of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), which provides it with almost a quarter of its budget<sup>4</sup>. FH is a member of several advocacy organizations in the sector such as the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), which brings together more than 190 bodies in 100 countries or the *Forum Medien* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jean-Marie Etter, Philippe Dahinden and François Gross

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Mali, Myanmar and Niger

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> In addition to the mandates FH has also been awarded by SDC since 2015

und Entwicklung (Fome, Forum Media and Development), the German platform for international media development initiatives.

## Focus on different communicative challenges

In terms of a communicative practice, FH places the radio medium as the heart of its activities. Hansen (2019[2010]:154) points out "the continued resilience of radio news" according to the latest audience barometers and this is all the more noteworthy in developing countries where the digital transition is not yet fully in place.

Unfortunately, the emphasis on research on environmental mediated communication—that Hansen (Ibid:179) tells it "has contributed considerably to our understanding of why some environmental issues are successfully constructed as issues for public concern while others quickly vanish from the media agenda and from public view"—is not transposable to the field of research on mediated post-crisis communication: what influences the media coverage, which practices, routines or values are at work are still poorly documented.

It will nevertheless make sense to see to what extent Downs' "issue-attention cycle" could apply in the matter and explain the cyclical phases of media coverage. Hansen (Ibid:27) highlights another dimension of sustainable communication that is particularly relevant to the FH project:

"The key achievement of the constructionist perspective on social problems lies in the recognition that problems do not become recognized or defined by society as problems by some simple objective existence, but only when someone makes claims in public about them. The construction of a problem as a 'social problem' is then largely a rhetorical or discursive achievement, the enactment of which is perpetrated by claims-makers, takes place in certain settings or public arenas and proceeds through a number of phases."

These claims-makers, and moreover the claims-making process itself, are at the very heart of the FH's approach which promotes a "responsible, independent, accurate journalism" whose news "provide the public with a better understanding of the context in which they live and the issues they face" (FH, 2014c). This example, picked up on the FH's website clearly show to what extent a discourse can construct a public arena:

"In April 2015, an accidental fire was started in a camp for displaced people in Bambari (centereast of the [CAR]). The outcome would have been much worse if inhabitants had not informed *Radio Ndeke Luka* right away. A news bulletin on the radio brought an intervention from the government and the United Nations to stop the fire, heal the injured, provide tents and food to the affected population." (FH, 2014b)

Language (news are presented in both French and Sango), technology (7 FM transmitters throughout the country reaching two thirds of the population and live on-line streaming) and

interactions with the audience (two telephone lines are open and listeners are regularly on air) allows the radio to be the most listened to in the country with more than 2 million listeners.

This position allows it to "reserve the right to disseminate or not to disseminate the information and to choose the angle of treatment of this information" (RNL, 2018). In CAR, claim-making process often falls under the "brown envelope journalism", monetary inducement given to journalists to make them write... or not write. RNL has built its claim-making process in the opposite direction, asserting that information "is free of charge on *Ndeke Luka*. Press releases and invitations to press conferences are not charged, even the transport costs" (*idem*).

In 2013, in order to address the above-mentioned lack of information on the impact in the sector, a Unesco initiative called "Knowledge-Driven Media Development" promoted a research-driven and "context-sensitive" media development approach, that takes into account "the challenges and opportunities of the media environment". It will later be associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set in 2015 and intended to be achieved by 2030<sup>5</sup>.

Even if the goals are interdependent, the Media Development-related one is Goal 16<sup>6</sup> and its associated Target 10<sup>7</sup> with Indicators 16.10.1 ("number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months") and 16.10.2<sup>8</sup> ("number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information").

In this area, the FH contributes more to the target than to the indicators, by training and mentoring teams of journalists in the field and by promoting media networks which enable them to fulfil their mission of informing the public and creating space for dialogue. Towards what Maeseele and Raeijmaekers call "a sustainable future" (Berglez, & al., 2017:115) where the "neoliberal order" is the lack of regulation and unbridled competition within the media ecosystem—may the latter be distorted by the state of emergency, vulnerability or prevailing corruption.

To a certain extent, the FH claim-making process can be related to this "journalism of hope" depicted by Berglez and Van Leuven (2016:669) as one of the highest expectation of a "global"

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> UN Resolution 70/1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Unesco is the custodian agency for Indicator 16.10.2

journalism"—"a practice that is supposed to be democratic, unbiased, multicultural, ethical and cosmopolitan all at once". On the ground, FH operationalizes this "global journalism" both on its production process and on its media "products" with transnational newsgathering practice<sup>9</sup> and a "global outlook" that "seeks to understand and explain how economic, political, social and ecological practices, processes and problems in different parts of the world affect each other, are interlocked, or share commonalities" (Berglez, 2008:847).

### Media for change vs. media for development

This FH's emancipatory project is inseparable from the ambiguities of social construction of "media development" as a paradigm and in particular from the meaning it has taken since the 1990s, when the organization was created. In the period leading up to it, the Cold War background froze positions about the intent of this endeavour. The construction of a shared identity took place within a multilateral framework, Unesco.

In 1980, the UN institution established one of the first tool, based on voluntary contributions from industrialized countries to support media in developing countries: the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), whose two main donors during the first 20 years have been Denmark and Norway.

This programme aimed to "increase co-operation and assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and to reduce the gap between various countries in the communication field" (Unesco, 1980)<sup>10</sup>. This IPDC was to be implemented by a Council composed of thirty-five Member States, on the basis of equitable geographical distribution<sup>11</sup>. The overall objective was "the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order"<sup>12</sup>.

This undefined "information and communication order" is a tacit reference to the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), promoted by a Unesco panel chaired by both Nobel and Lenin Peace Prize Seán MacBride from Ireland, and previously spurred by non-

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The first project, *Radio Agatashya*, is aimed at Rwandan refugees in Zaire (today the DRC). The production team is made up of Rwandans and Zairians. A collaboration is set up with Studio Ijambo in Burundi, initiated by the American NGO Search for Common Ground. In November 1995, *Radio Agatashya* began producing transnational information for and from the Kivus, Rwanda and Burundi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Based on the Director-General's report and proposals at the Intergovernmental Conference for Co-operation on Activities, Needs and Programmes for Communication Development, 3 September 1980

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Canada, China, Cuba, Democratic Yemen, Egypt, France, Gabon, German Democratic Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Mexico, Mozambique, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Republic of Cameroon, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Venezuela, Yugoslavia and Zaire

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The expression is taken directly from the subtitle of the MacBride report

aligned nations and the communist bloc throughout the 1970s<sup>13</sup>. Suggested by the United States of America (USA) and other nations, this "International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems" has been set up in 1977 and led to the publication of *Many Voices One World*, known as the MacBride report, in 1980. However, the USA later drifted away from the conclusions of this report and more broadly—albeit for more complex reasons—of the UN institution itself.

In the Cold War context, NWICO pinpointed "imbalances and inequalities" in the ownership, production and distribution of communication and denounced a communication imperialism whereas the USA and the UK accused the latter of being promoters of censorship and curbing the free flow of information.

To try and build some consensus, the focus was put on the technology transfer rather than the central role of the media to the democratic process—which will become more important after the fall of the Soviet Union, in the 1990s, with the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and the Rwandan genocide (1994). It is therefore not surprising that many of the operators that define themselves as media development implementers were established in this decade: Fojo Media Institute in 1991, FH and the European branch of US International Research & Exchanges Board (Irex) in 1995, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in 1998 and BBC Media Action (then "World Service Trust") in 1999<sup>14</sup>.

The terms used by the promoters of the IPDC when it was launched reflect both the balance that had to be negotiated in order to reach a consensus and the importance given from the outset to the objective of sustainability—even though the wording does not yet mention the term itself in favour of the phrase "spirit of self-reliance":

"Practical assistance was urgently needed to improve the capacity of developing countries to create and transmit their own messages. This was a necessary pre-condition of a free flow and a wider and better balanced exchange of information and ideas. It was also agreed that while the IPDC sought the assistance of the industrialized world to facilitate the growth of communication in the developing world, the spirit of self-reliance and technical co-operation among developing countries too were to be harnessed in its efforts. The objective of operational activities should be to promote the capacity of developing countries to develop and to acquire technology of their own choice which is most suitable to their own circumstances and able to assist them in their self-development." (Unesco, 1983)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> From the Algiers meeting in 1973 to the New Delhi Ministerial Conference in 1976

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> At least three exceptions of previous creations are worth mentioning: the Catholic Media Council (Cameco) — which assesses projects funded by various Catholic, mainly German, donors—in 1969, US-based Internews in 1982 and Panos London, initially an environmental organization, in 1986. A few will come later: International Media Support (IMS) from Denmark in 2001, US Search for Common Grounds in 2003, Deutsche Welle Akademie and Berlin-based Media in Cooperation and Transition (MICT, then "Media in Cooperation") in 2004 and Canal France International in 2010.

As Berger stated, "[a]t the same time as the 'media development' paradigm is associated with democratic thinking, it also conventionally includes activities that focus on the strengthening of media *qua* business institutions." (Berger, 2010:549) The latter includes local, regional or international bodies that focus on skills advancement and business sustainability.

The same consensual *credo* spread during the 1990s, particularly in Africa<sup>15</sup>. A scholar of African political thought and media and formerly a director of Panos Southern Africa, an organization dedicated to communication and sustainable development, Fackson Banda recalls that: "In 1991, Unesco called for a gathering of media practitioners and press-freedom organizations in Namibia on May 3. This conference culminated in the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press. [...] The declaration repudiated state ownership of media institutions and justified the doctrine of media liberalization and privatization." (Banda, 2008)

Media development operators have therefore aligned with this strategy by moving away from public institutions deemed irreformable to favour the support of so-called "independent" media, be they commercial or community-based. Somehow, FH has taken the opposite side of this liberal doctrine by supporting public service media of national or trans-national scope.

But how can one evaluate their outcome? Initiated in 2006 and officially launched in 2008, "Media Development Indicators" (MDI) are endorsed as "an important diagnostic tool for all stakeholders to assess media development in a given country and to thereby determine the areas in which assistance is most needed". They fall into five categories:

- Legal and regulatory framework governing media;
- Degree of plurality and diversity of the media;
- Capacity of media to function as a platform for democratic discourse;
- Professional capacities;
- Technical capacities.

In 2014, IPDC together with the Deutsche Welle Akademie developed draft "Media Viability Indicators" as well, which cover:

- Presence of a supportive economic and business environment;
- Structure of the media market;

<sup>15</sup> In 2003, Unesco General Conference redefined IPDC's aim, as to "contribute to sustainable development, democracy and good governance by fostering universal access to and distribution of information and knowledge by strengthening the capacities of the developing countries and countries in transition in the field of electronic media and the printed press". The highest priorities were given to the promotion of freedom of expression and media pluralism, the development of community media, human resources capacity building and international partnerships

 $<sup>^{16}</sup>$  These indicators have been discussed at a regional conference on media sustainability organized in Montevideo on 16 December 2014

- Media labor force;
- Financial operating conditions (advertisement...);
- Capital capacity for media development;
- Supportive organizational structures and resources for the financial sustainability;
- Contribution to national economy.

These criteria were supposed to be integrated into the existing MDI framework, but they are currently less elaborated than the others and due to a lack of funding, have not yet been integrated.

They do, however, reflect the debates that took place on the construction and meaning of the concept of sustainability (and more specifically on a tendency to narrow it down to its financial component alone) as can be seen tacitly in the current revised presentation of the purpose of the IPDC "to secure a *healthy environment* for the growth of free and pluralistic media" (Unesco, 2017, emphasis added). This trend, although it is denied by its promoters, is also reflected in the syntax change from "sustainability" to "viability". Hollifield and Schneider point out that this was done "in response to concerns that media sustainability suggests a concern only with media survival and not with media performance" (Berglez, & al., 2017:239).

Nevertheless, this evolution comes at a time when sustainability, whatever its name, is seen above all as a technical adjustment variable, which is reinforced by "capacity building" to generate more income, neglecting its more social and institutional dimensions—or even discussing the possible link between these increasing financial resources and the latter two.

## Sustainability and cross-sector partnerships

Cross-sector partnerships (XSPs) are common in the field of media development and FH itself regularly relies on external consultants in technical or specialized fields. It is argued that "the overall value of XSPs is not merely in connecting interested parties but, rather, in their ability to act—to substantially influence the people and issues within their problem domain" (Koschmann, & al., 2012:333).

In the case of FH, XSPs can include development, management, politics or humanitarian affairs. A former director and FH sustainability officer, Jean-Pierre Husi (2013:2) recalls that in the early days of the organization, "[the] people who joined us at headquarters were more like humanitarians. They knew Africa, had managed emergencies, spoke several languages and had a capacity for political analysis. They were true professionals, but not in the field of journalism, which was the core business of *Fondation Hirondelle*. I would say that one learned what has become the management profession specific to the field of journalism and media management in crisis zones by doing so."

FH has thus formalized a Charter as early as 2001, in what Koschmann, Kuhn and Pfarrer (2012:335) call a "collective agency": an "authoritative text, the trajectory of which has the capacity to impact subsequent efforts to marshal the willing consent of others so as to attract the necessary capital to be successful": "It's important that all these partners, as they commit themselves, know what we stand for, what is important to us and what we consider secondary; what are, in a word perhaps overused, the values we claim." (FH, 2009).

Sustainability is one of these values and it is also connected to the XSPs: "FH therefore works, as a rule, with local collaborators, apart from the project manager. FH designs its projects on the basis of this handover to local employees. [...] FH may be called upon to work on projects related to its media proper, to create the conditions for their sustainability: associations of publishers or independent journalists, advertising agencies, etc." (Ibid.)

This search for a "trajectory" has enabled FH to establish a "stable and distinct identity" (Koschmann, & al., 2012:342). In the field of development NGOs, it is not unheard of. Many have experienced this transition from commitment to routine and service. The FH newsletter echoed the tensions that this can create in a special issue, in a kind of an academic validation as much as a conjuration:

"Professionalization is not the ultimate phase, but today it is considered the natural phase in Western societies. Concretely, we will try to set up procedures in which the division of labour will become increasingly complex and in which it will be considered that the initial ethic of conviction must be marginalized in favour of an ethic of responsibility. Thus, we are less inclined to believe that we are going to "change the world" than to believe that we are useful. This implies taking into account the system of constraint in which we find ourselves, i.e. there is an acceptance of a certain pragmatism and the need to find compromises in order to stay in the game. A great deal of energy is spent in order to stay in the game, because that is the only way to ensure that we can still work for the cause. If you don't stay in the game, the object you have invested in disappears." (Dauvin, 2013:3)

In 2018, a UN internal evaluation of the IPDC highlighted two shifts in donor priorities for media development: "donor funding becoming more target-specific in relation to media, for instance focusing on gender, health or environmental aspects, as distinct from targeting wider sector development" and "a government donor preference towards more visible—and voter friendly—target groups and impacts for their development investment" (Internal Oversight Service, 2018:47).

Debates on the scope of the narrative function of media development (and on the ability of development itself to overcome unchallenged inequalities as well) regained momentum with

the paradigm of the cultural diversity<sup>17</sup> which intends to take culture and communication out of the sole market sphere, as underpinned in particular by the World Trade Organization.

In this matter, it is possible to follow Diana Jacobsson (2019:25) in her analysis on how sustainable development discourse can be unsustainable: "The successful reshaping of responsibilities in the neoliberal regime, and shifts in what parts of an issue are given priority, are important as they affect the common-sense understandings of different political decisions and social conditions".

# **Concluding discussion**

How does one of the prominent media development implementers construct its sustainability discourse? The present paper provides examples of various attempts by FH to build "shared commonalities" and an original "trajectory" to the challenges of sustainability. As far as communication is concerned, two seem to be particularly important: the missionary aim and the mitigation of uncertainty.

There are numerous examples of a tendency for media development operators to see themselves as being driven by the sole "ethic of conviction" supposed to be deployed everywhere and for everyone. In the early 2000s, a book entitled: "The Media Missionaries", depicted the "myriad American efforts to develop and support journalism around the globe with fellowships, exchanges, training, grants, loans, equipment, infrastructure, staff, conferences and other means" (Hume, 2004:15). Sustainability was the second of 15 "commandments to media development" that have been identified: It was argued that "media in a conflict zone are rarely self-sustaining or fully independent. In a post-conflict or emerging democracy, however, media should be weaned from their dependence on donors as the civic and economic mechanisms develop. This transition could require at least a decade."

This article argues for a revision of the way media assistance is to be considered in an approach that Jessica Noske-Turner (2017:20) calls "post-media-missionary", considering a bottom-up process focusing more on social change, accountability and less on the top-down imposition of a single governance model. One of the key challenges, as far as sustainability is concerned should be to connect the efforts to "do good" (with communication as a tool for social change)

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 $<sup>^{17}</sup>$  In the framework of the negotiation of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

and those to "look good" (with narratives for public or even internal diplomacy) (Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018).

When the advertising income of a media outlet does not exceed between one tenth and one fifth, which is often the case in the case of developing countries, the FH *credo* is to "make international development NGOs aware of the need to provide specific budget lines to finance the broadcasting of institutional messages by independent news radio stations" (Husi, 2011). An ideal of looking good to do good.

A utilitarian vision of media development focuses on capacity or capabilities building. Instead, implementers like FH consider a holistic and cross-sectoral approach, where research is supposed to feed into the strategy. As a result, sustaining a media is gradually shifting towards managing uncertainties.

Andersson and Westholm, (2019:238) showed how "environmental research is seriously harmed by the ways in which conflicting images of the future are mediated by a research process that seeks to make stakeholders and researchers of different orientation "walk together" toward shared expectations". In the same way, in media development, this "ideal of coproduction can have a damaging effect on societal capacities to imagine futures and the capacity of the research process to bring forward potentially uncomfortable forms of knowledge".

In a sector that has not yet invested much in social impact measures, future scenarios are often limited to an allusive theory of change, if so. The FH Charter thus proclaims "FH intends to bring its know-how, its credit and its experience to the staff in the areas where it works, in order to help them build up over the long-term independent media over which they have full control. The FH therefore works, as a rule, with local collaborators, apart from the project manager. The FH designs its projects on the basis of this handover to local employees" (FH, 2009).

However, researchers focus mainly on the effectiveness and efficiency of the media object and less on its sustaining strategy. There are few documented examples of how the transfer—that of the media project itself and that of the donor's subsidies to manage this project as well—has taken place, is taking place or should take place.

Yet, it is precisely in this grey area that the greatest risks to the continuation of profits over time lie. And with them the very existence of the media.

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