

**PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AS A FIELD OF STUDY:
DIVERGENCE OR CONVERGENCE IN THE LIGHT OF
‘EUROPEANIZATION’?**

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Abstract. As an academic field Public Administration retains its complex identity as a subject that cannot be observed within clearly defined boundaries independent from other disciplines. Despite this the Europeanization of public administration as a profession provides opportunities for the convergence of the study. The article analyses several factors which impact upon both the national orientation to the study of Public Administration and the difficulty in designing a ‘European’ model for Public Administration education. The different state traditions within Europe are discussed leading to various identities of the study of Public Administration and different approaches to its disciplinary, multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary character. While a limited number of previous studies on the state of the discipline of Public Administration have addressed American and Western European approaches, this discussion contributes to the debate by discussing developments in public administration in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Public Administration education, Europeanization, comparative public administration

1. Introduction

Although acknowledgement of Public Administration as a field of study acquired attention in the work of Christian Wolff already during the 1730s, it was Woodrow Wilson’s essay “The Study of Administration” (1887) that consolidated the subject in the center of scholarly interest. Mosher (1982:27) doubts that there is any element in an evolving administrative culture more significant for the nature of the public service than the education system, both formal and informal, by which are transmitted public service ethos, frames of reference, and knowledge. Therefore, the nature and quality of the public service heavily depends upon the nature and quality of the system of education. While education determines, augments, and limits the

potential of public administration; public policy to a great extent determines, augments, and limits the potential of education. The education system has to respond to the demands of public administration while shaping the nature of that administration. Therefore, the drive towards Europeanization of public administration as a profession should be reflected in academic programs and more generally, how the study of Public Administration is identified in various national contexts. In addition, the creation of new Public Administration programs in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) could give the discipline a further impetus to develop its own identity and approach. These developments have created a momentum for the design of academic programs of a European character, which could eventually lead to the promotion of a specific strand of public administration teaching and research, based on European realities, and thus contributing to the development of a common European Administrative Space.

However, it is difficult, if at all possible, to speak of a unified 'model' of the study of Public Administration. In regard to the existence of a well-developed European concept of public administration, it is still primarily a national undertaking and also conceptualized as such (Rutgers, Schreurs 2000:621). Public Administration programs tend to be generally inward looking, concentrating on local, regional and national administrative systems (Toonen, Verheijen 1999). Authors of the subject agree (e.g. Raadschelders, Rutgers 1999:32) that there is no European study of Public Administration, as there is only a multitude of national studies of Public Administration due to the varying historical and cultural developments of individual countries and the historically rooted differences in the concept of state.

The aim of this discussion is to analyze the dilemma between divergence and convergence of the study of Public Administration in the light of Europeanization. For that, different state traditions within Europe are discussed leading to various identities of the study of Public Administration and different approaches to its disciplinary, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary character. Although elements of the study of Public Administration are also taught in such pan-European settings as Colleges of Europe in Brugge and Natolin, Poland, and the European University Institute in Florence, this paper focuses on the national programs and developments in Public Administration. While a limited number of previous studies on the state of the discipline of Public Administration have addressed American and Western European approaches, this paper contributes to the field by adding a focus on the development of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe.

2. Different concepts of Public Administration

Despite Christian Wolff's recognition of the study of 'state art' at the beginning of the 18th century and the development of elements of modern Public Administration programs by Cameralists during the same period, Public Administration is still generally perceived to be a young discipline. It has been noted that "in Western Europe, the 'resurrection' of administrative sciences dates mainly from the post-war

expansion of the welfare states, and hence, it is a relatively young field of science” (Kickert, Stillman 1999:5). Western European countries have institutionalized the academic field of Public Administration during the past five decades (e.g. in Italy, Finland, Germany, Belgium and the UK, new programs in Public Administration were established between 1955 and 1970), although in some European states Public Administration does not (yet) exist as an independent institutionalized field of study, and it is taught as a specialization under Law, Political Science, Economics or Business Administration programs (see Toonen, Verheijen 1999, Verheijen, Connaughton 2003).

The development of Public Administration as a scholarly field in CEE, however, was embarked upon at the beginning of the 1990s without the ‘traps and bindings’ of old traditions and presumptions. Therefore, it is interesting to observe the identity of Public Administration as a discipline in the development of new Public Administration curricula in CEE countries. During the Communist era, all social sciences were severely underdeveloped and Public Administration education and scholarship did not exist in the Soviet Union and most Eastern European countries. Since the commencement of the 1990s, much effort has been employed by CEE states to establish new democratic structures, including the development of a responsive, transparent, professional and efficient public service. Following the political changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was necessary to fortify and build the legal, political and economic structures required by new democratic and independent states. In this respect, the development of those countries that belonged to the Soviet Union was different from the other CEE countries that already possessed the attributes of independent statehood (Randma 2001). The process of state building required know-how and experience that was not in existence within these states and as a consequence the education of public servants became imperative.

Against this background, it becomes apparent that the approach taken to the field of Public Administration varies within Europe. The difference in public administration practice and education is dependent on various factors. Below three fundamental issues are identified that form a basis for the understanding of the discipline of Public Administration, and which have either directly or indirectly influenced the study of Public Administration in individual European countries.

2.1. Concept of the state / state traditions

Within each European nation, the state is the defining source for the scope and substance of Public Administration. Public administration in Western Europe is rooted in a strong state tradition, contrary to public administration in the United States. Just as the concept of the state provides unity as a basis for social integration, it provides a framework for conceptualizing the academic discipline of Public Administration (Rutgers 2001:228). Public Administration in Continental Europe used theory as the starting point, while in Britain and America it used practice as the starting point for the organization of the discipline (Raadschelders 1999). European scholars usually adopt a deductive approach, organizing the

discipline around and developing it from a theory or one or a few core concepts and then position 'administrative reality' into it. In Anglo-American literature, on the other hand, the inductive approach prevails in an attempt to create an encompassing framework on the basis of every concept in use (*ibid.*). Within Europe, the distinction between Ireland and the United Kingdom, on the one hand, and the Continental tradition, on the other, is also explained by the conceptual differences between the so-called 'Common Law and Civil Law countries' which form the very basis of public administration in each national setting (Verheijen, Connaughton 2003:836). Although authors writing on the subject have often tended to use idealized types of state traditions in order to emphasize differences, it is recognized that such ideal types do not exist in practice. Each administrative system is unique but it must be noted that its characteristics remain closely linked with those of administrative systems that share intellectual and historical roots (Peters 2003:10).

Hence, in order to understand the 'European' approach to Public Administration one has to address the development of the study of Public Administration in relation to the development of the state. However, the diversity of Western Europe in terms of tradition illustrates Stillman's comments (1999:252) that "while a definition of state is indispensable to comprehending European Public Administration, there is no one type of European state that defines uniformly its administrative sciences." This inevitably results in considerable differences among the national styles of Public Administration thought. This is also reflected in Western European states individual orientation to public sector reform which is frequently path-dependent and shaped by core characteristics of the national system.

CEE countries in turn are in a different position due to limited state traditions and short experience of democratic governance. In CEE, any state matter, and particularly public administration, usually suffers from the legacy of a justifiably bad reputation of the state in the Communist regime. Drechsler (2000:267) argues that "the fundamental challenge to Central and Eastern Europe is still a restoration or (re)creation of the positive concept of the state". The missing positive concept of the state and the insufficient state identification on the part of citizens leads to serious problems, which include implementation gap, unattractiveness of the civil service career, the lack of loyalty of the citizens to the government or true respect for legal or administrative decisions.

2.2. The identity of Public Administration as a discipline

The identity crisis of the academic discipline of Public Administration has been discussed on both sides of the Atlantic since World War II. The question is whether Public Administration is an independent discipline among others or sub-discipline within Political Science, Law, Economics, Business Administration or any other discipline. From an academic point of view the crisis concerns the question: is Public Administration a unified, coherent study sufficiently independent from other studies? Given Public Administration as a study must draw upon a

variety of approaches to understand public administration, then Public Administration cannot be anything but a differentiated study and that continuous crisis is, in fact, its identity (Raadschelders 1999:282). Denhardt (1990), writing on the state of the discipline, indicates that Public Administration theory draws its greatest strength and its most serious limitation from this diversity. On the one hand, Public Administration scholars are required to understand a broad range of perspectives relevant to their theory building task. On the other hand, the diversity of Public Administration often means that the field lacks a sense of identity (Denhardt 1990:43). Raadschelders (1999:285) in turn notes that in organizing the study of Public Administration we ought to consider what government is and reflect about its core functions (the governance of society). It is from this basis that we can start to develop a coherent study of Public Administration.

The development of Public Administration as an independent academic field of study in CEE countries in the 1990s has enabled scholars and professionals to undertake a fresh perspective of the identification of the discipline. Under the Communist regime two orientations prevailed, namely Marxist theory of 'scientific communism' and a continental law approach taught in law schools geared to state regulations. At the beginning of the 1990s, the term 'public administration' was quite unknown and had not been translated into several CEE languages (e.g. Estonian, Hungarian, Russian). This demonstrates that the introduction of Public Administration curricula has required much thought and explanation as to what the field of Public Administration actually is, and whether it is a serious scholarly field at all. It must be noted that it was often the case that the development of Public Administration programs in CEE was based on the enthusiasm of individual scholars as opposed to government policy, and thus the disciplinary backgrounds of new Public Administration faculty members influenced the identity of Public Administration as a field in these countries. It may be argued that to a certain extent this has also been a feature of the discipline in Western Europe.

As the new democratic countries in CEE have limited state traditions and retain several 'ingrown' features of public administrations, they have been more easily influenced by foreign practices in academia as well as in the civil service. This is particularly visible in the context of foreign aid which has been allocated for curriculum development and Public Administration faculty training in CEE. As the choice of foreign partners has often been haphazard depending on the availability of aid programs and projects, a certain supply-driven character can be noted in several Public Administration curricula within CEE countries. While the United States has had the biggest impact on the development of Public Administration programs in CEE (Verheijen, Connaughton 2003:839), the influence of the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries is also recognized.

The discipline of Public Administration, 'government in action', is academic and professional at the same time. This can easily raise the question whether Public Administration education should be more skill-based or 'technocratic' on the one hand, or addressing more fundamental values of public administration, on the other. Public sector goals can be conflicting by combining values which in their transfer to

concrete policy proposals may tend to be contradictory. For instance, several 'democratic' goals such as representativeness, transparency, equal opportunities, equal access to services, citizen participation in decision-making etc. may be conflicting with more 'technocratic' goals such as efficiency, effectiveness, value-for-money or fast decision-making. Such a conflict is also built into the principles of the *European Administrative Space* (see SIGMA 1998: 8–14). This kind of contradiction can be especially hard to understand in CEE countries, where the above-mentioned democratic principles are not as ingrained and broadly accepted as in countries with long democratic traditions, and where limited resources put pressure on governments to follow 'technocratic' goals. The dilemma of democratic versus technocratic goals may, in turn, affect the way the discipline of Public Administration is perceived and developed in particular societies. The question remains whether Public Administration education could and should counterbalance potential biases in the practice of public administration.

2.3. *Disciplinary, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary character*

Both public administration and the study of Public Administration are open to many (disciplinary) interpretations and, dependent upon topic, Public Administration scholars can draw upon a large body of disciplinary approaches. It is relevant to distinguish between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity. Both concepts refer to a certain degree of coherence within a body of knowledge, but neither constitutes an autonomous discipline. In the case of multidisciplinary, this coherence emerges only as a result of focus on the same research topic (e.g. sociology of government or the politics of government). Coherence in the case of interdisciplinarity is based on an exchange of insights: when the research in a study uses insights, concepts, and the theory of other related disciplines. Multidisciplinary is predominantly a problem of practical and methodological nature. What makes Public Administration distinct from other academic pursuits with an interest in government is the interdisciplinarity with which it can approach its core object of study: the what, who, why, and how of public decision-making about collective issues as approached from a variety of relevant bodies of knowledge in the attempt to acquire higher understanding (Raadschelders 1999:296).

There are at least two reasons why the development of a unified body of theory is prohibited for Public Administration: its multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature and the continuous changing nature of government and government-society relations (Raadschelders 1999:298). The interdisciplinary and inter-professional approach is no longer a mere academic curio, an interesting but dilettantish experiment (Mosher 1982:237). On the contrary, it is deemed to be an absolute necessity, for no discipline or profession can handle even its own problems by itself. The interconnection of social problems and the interdependence of disciplines in dealing with them are two sides of the same coin. However, despite the growing specialization of Public Administration education, there remains the need for broader liberal arts curriculum analyzing the context within which each specialization operates (*ibid.*).

Public Administration in Continental Europe has predominantly been a legal study. This raises a substantial problem in the identification of the study of Public Administration often not addressed by the authors on the subject. In this paper, similarly to previous studies, we focus only on the programs that are called Public Administration. However, there are curricula which may be labeled differently (most notably Law or Public Law), and which prepare students for a civil service career, thus serving the same aim as Public Administration curricula. Such a problem is most visible in Germany where Law is regarded the most suitable background for civil service careers; to a lesser extent, this tendency is also notable in the cases of Austria, Greece, Hungary and Spain (Verheijen, Connaughton 2003:838–839).

Following World War II and the development of the welfare state, other disciplinary perspectives besides Law entered the study of Public Administration. The complexity of the demands of the welfare state and the diversity of policy to implement it required a variety of instruments and methodologies to supplement legislation. The French, Germans, Italians, Dutch and the Scandinavians developed a conception of Public Administration with its intellectual roots in Philosophy, Law, Sociology, Economics, Political Science, History and so forth. This marked a resurrection of the separate study of Public Administration in the form of a more social science oriented field of study. Thus interdisciplinary academic programs in Public Administration are programs in which Public Administration is studied from the integrated viewpoints of different disciplines, generally those of Political Science, Law, Economics and Sociology, with Public Administration being the core subject of the program (Verheijen, Connaughton 2003).

Since the 1970s, the ideas of *New Public Management* and the trend of ‘getting better value for money’ in government have become established, and many countries have included management and business administration perspectives to Public Administration education. For example, the British Public Administration has turned its attention more and more toward organization theory, policy analysis, state theory, rational choice and public management (Rhodes 1996). A quantitative analysis of European Public Administration programs (Hajnal 2003) indicates that the Nordic countries as well as the Netherlands and several post-communist countries have developed a stronger emphasis on business administration in Public Administration curricula.

In historical perspective, the study of Public Administration has been constructed as a study of the state, or *Staatswissenschaft* as it was called in the 19th century Germany (Raadschelders, Rutgers 1999:17). Drechsler (2001) relates the study of Public Administration to the future of the concept of *Staatswissenschaften*. *Staatswissenschaften* means that there are certain specific fields of scholarly inquiry and higher education that relate primarily to the state. By relating ‘primarily’, it is interpreted that this relation is so important that it is deemed sensible to group them together administratively and in terms of discipline according to this focus, or from different perspectives on the same issue in order to achieve a synergistic effect. For *Staatswissenschaften*, these disciplines usually include the core Public Administration, Public Law, Public Economics,

and Political Science (Drechsler 2001:106). The EU context is supposed to be horizontally integrated into all the above-mentioned fields. Moreover, according to Drechsler (*ibid.*), the study of the European Union belongs to the concept of *Staatswissenschaft* as well.

European countries, and even individual authors within a single country, have addressed the combination of the above-mentioned fields differently, by emphasizing different disciplines. It has even been argued that when an author claims that one particular feature or approach is more central to the study of Public Administration than another, we know more about the identity of the author (i.e. disciplinary background, outlook on science, ideological preferences) than about the identity of the study (Raadschelders 1999). However, Hajnal (2003) has attempted to distinguish between three different clusters (legal, public and corporate) based on the primary focus of Public Administration as a discipline in various countries. A number of Continental European countries are characterized by a broad and significant political science component, the Nordic countries put a stronger emphasis on business administration, and most Southern European countries, as well as a number of post-communist countries are distinguished by the predominance of law in their Public Administration curricula (*ibid.*). The analysis of Public Administration in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland demonstrates that the public administration culture characteristic of the former communist countries had a strong legal character, because the Continental public law approach was traditionally dominant during the Communist era (Newland et al. 1999). Consequently, there are two simultaneous processes taking place in the European Public Administration education: firstly, the gradual replacement of the traditional legalist administrative approach with a more interdisciplinary one, emphasizing the public and the political in Western and South European countries. Secondly, the radical and rapid switch in the newly independent post-communist states from the legalist to the corporate paradigm (Hajnal 2003:253). It is, however, difficult to make broader generalizations based on Hajnal's study (2003) because it excludes several countries representative of differing influences or traditions in Western Europe (Germany, UK, some Nordic countries).

CEE is not a homogeneous region as these countries have their peculiarities, although they share the common experience of imposed communism. Countries that already had sovereign statehood prior to the transition tend to belong to the legal cluster, and countries that gained their independence only in the transition process are biased towards the corporate cluster (Hajnal 2003:252). Predominance of the corporate paradigm can either be accidental – dependent on the individuals behind new curricula, or caused by insufficient development of social sciences or, the development of the corporate paradigm can be due to the missing positive concept of the state in the newly independent countries. Nevertheless, building upon the partnership with other disciplines has offered a challenge for both Public Administration academics and practitioners in most CEE countries. The Communist legacy is also visible here. Transfer from a one-sector economy to a multi-sector democratic society has encouraged new sectors and fields in society to emphasize their

particular identity and leave different partnerships in the shadow. The same concerns academia. During the Communist era in CEE a pervasive culture of extreme specialization was developed rather than broadly shared disciplines associated with entrepreneurial success in highly interconnected, complex social systems (Newland et al. 1999:221). As a consequence of the underdevelopment of social sciences and the lack of tradition of interdisciplinary studies, the newly created individual disciplines have often been developed into individual inward-looking 'kingdoms' with the aim to concentrate resources and build the identity of these new fields. In addition, the frequently reported lack of qualified Public Administration professors in CEE hinders the development of a balanced curriculum. That is why the true interdisciplinarity and collaboration between different sectors and fields is yet to be achieved in CEE countries.

3. 'Europeanization' of the study of Public Administration

Despite the national character of the study of Public Administration, 'European' matters increasingly influence the everyday duties of civil servants as a result of their participation in the EU policy process and the Europeanization of public policy in general. An ever-increasing number of civil servants must acquire the skills and knowledge to be able to deal competently with 'European' issues (Toonen, Verheijen 1999). Europeanization has been a fact of everyday life in Western European administrations for decades, and during the past years, it has also gained ground in CEE, even to the extent where Public Administration reforms in several CEE countries have been equated with the Europeanization of their administrations. The enlargement of the EU to CEE has made the European policy process even more complex, adding new states with different administrative cultures and approaches, and thus being a challenge for not only CEE countries but also for civil servants in old member states.

Although the Treaties of Rome, its subsequent revisions and EC secondary legislation do not provide a specific model of public administration to be set up by the EU member states, the issue of a common administrative law has been a matter of debate since the outset of the European Community. The link between European integration and Public Administration reform has become more prominent as member states must be capable of implementing EU policies and legislation – this problem was regularly mentioned in all Progress Reports of the candidate states since the end of the 1990s. The European Commission, contrary to the previous enlargements, strongly emphasized the importance of administrative capacity in the candidate states.

Long political evolution has led to some consensus in establishing principles for public administration shared by the EU member states with different legal traditions and different systems of governance. The main principles of the *European Administrative Space* (EAS) common to the EU Member States are discussed as follows: reliability and predictability, openness and transparency,

accountability, efficiency and effectiveness (SIGMA 1998:8–14). The EAS concerns basic institutional arrangements, processes, common administrative standards, civil service values and administrative culture. In addition, the extent to which the above-mentioned principles are present in the regulatory arrangements for public administration, and are respected and enforced in practical life, gives an idea about the capabilities of the new member states to implement and enforce the *acquis communautaire* in a reliable way. Hence, the EAS, albeit a metaphor, signifies a convergence and states the basic values of public administration as a practice and profession in Europe. However, how do such developments in Europe enable to interpret and develop Public Administration as a discipline?

Some light on the actual Europeanization of the field of Public Administration has been shed by the two inventories of Public Administration education in Europe, carried out by the SOCRATES-sponsored Thematic Network in Public Administration (Verheijen, Connaughton 1999, Verheijen, Nemeč 2000). The two inventories analyzed the general composition of Public Administration programs and to what extent the European dimension of Public Administration studies was included in core curricula and compulsory courses.

The inventory of programs undertaken in the EU member states and Norway illustrated that the European dimension of Public Administration education is underdeveloped, and that very few universities have courses on European integration and comparative public administration in their core curriculum. Toonen and Verheijen (1999:396) argue that

“the number of universities and other higher education institutions in which Public Administration programs with a strong ‘European dimension’ are in place is very limited. Public Administration programs therefore seem to be ‘out of step’ with reality, or at least lagging behind only a short period of time after their establishment. In public administration institutions ‘Europeanization’ is an established fact, whereas the ‘Europeanization’ of Public Administration education has scarcely begun.”

In relation to the CEE countries, an inventory undertaken in cooperation with the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe (Verheijen, Nemeč 2000), indicates that since 1989 the development of Public Administration programs has stimulated a gradual reaction to the importance of the European dimension through the inclusion of a limited, though increasing, number of European and comparative courses in the curricula. Public Administration programs are increasingly impacted by EU expectations (Newland et al. 1999). The recognition of adequate administrative capacities as an important requirement for EU membership is likely to have been an essential rationale for the continuing development of the ‘European emphasis’ in the Public Administration programs in CEE. However, this evidence remains in contrast to the developments in the Public Administration curricula of the ‘old’ member states, particularly of Southern Europe, where the increasing influence of the European decisions is not adequately reflected in the Public Administration programs

(Toonen, Verheijen 1999, Verheijen, Connaughton 2003). Consequently, it remains to be seen whether European integration is a potential unifying measure also in the discipline of Public Administration.

4. Conclusion

The scope of interest of the study of Public Administration seems unlimited as various researchers from different countries approach the subject. As Kickert and Stillman (1999:4) reflect

“unlike the natural sciences, where the nationality of a researcher is irrelevant for his or her study, in administrative sciences the nationality of the research does matter. [...] The study of administration never can be detached from the particular national administration within a country.”

While a definition of state is indispensable to comprehending European Public Administration, there is no one type of European state that defines uniformly its public administration (Stillman 1999). Each European nation reflects distinctive state attributes that, in turn, contribute to considerable differences among the national styles of Public Administration thought. It is possible to draw a direct link between the practice of public administration and the study of Public Administration by arguing that the type of Public Administration education strongly correlates with the way public administration is practiced in the field (Hajnal 2003:253). On the other hand, the way Public Administration in a given administrative culture is taught influences the day-to-day reality of public administration, which in turn reinforces the already existing patterns in education.

Such differences in both the practice and study of Public Administration facilitate outlining conclusions for lesson-drawing between and beyond European countries. Arguments in this paper support the previous warnings against cross-border lesson-drawing in the design of administrative reforms or in the development of Public Administration curricula as long as the differences in European administrative systems continue to be fundamental. On the other hand, several authors (Newland et al. 1999:242, Connaughton, Verheijen 2000:332) have shown that there is evidence of significant influence of foreign partners (in particular from the US and to a much smaller degree from Western Europe) in the development of Public Administration curricula in several CEE countries. The question remains whether the need for Europeanization will have an impact on lesson-drawing between Western and Eastern Europe and within these regions as far as the study of Public Administration is concerned, or whether Anglo-American administrative thought continues to serve as a role model for post-communist countries which are still in the process of identifying the field of Public Administration in their particular countries and in academia.

Europeanization can be seen as a litmus test for (potential) converging of the field of Public Administration. To a certain degree, themes and topics of the Public Administration research are becoming similar simply because of European

legislation and policies. It will be seen if the Europeanization of public administration will substantially change not only how the public administrations work in member states but also the identity of the field of Public Administration as an academic discipline. If Public Administration wants to be in line, or ideally, ahead of the developments in public administration practice, it has to take into account the European context in the research and teaching of each sub-field within Public Administration. However, it seems that a lot of ground still has to be covered before the tensions between longstanding national differences and the impact of EU will result in a real European study of Public Administration. It may turn out to be easier to adopt to the need for Europeanization in CEE countries where the identity of the study of Public Administration is not as well established as in Western Europe.

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