

## THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS ON THE ERECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCHES, RELIGIOUS ORDER COMMUNITIES AND RELIGIOUS NAMES GIVEN TO PUBLIC SPACE IN POLAND. CASE STUDY GDYNIA

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**Abstract:** *The Influence of Politics on the Erection and Development of Churches, Religious order Communities and Religious Names Given to Public Space in Poland. Case study Gdynia.* The article is to illustrate, on the example of a city in northern Poland, the impact of politics on the erection and development of churches, religious orders and religious names given to public space. The history of religious communities in the Baltic city Gdynia, which dates back to the twenties of the previous century, shows that various factors influenced the establishment and development of religious communities. Apart from the natural environment (coastal location of Gdynia) and economic aspects (financial capacity of religious communities) the political environment, especially after the domination of the socialist system in 1945, is considered to be one of the most important factors. In terms of numbers, the development of Roman Catholic churches and order communities as well as places of worship of other religious communities is related to the political events in 1957 and in the eighties. A significant growth in the number of places of worship was noted in Gdynia following political transformations in Eastern Europe in 1989.

**Key words:** history of Gdynia, churches and politics, religious orders, religious minorities

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### Introduction

The impact of various factors on the history of religious communities can be noted in the coastal city of Gdynia, which dates back to the twenties of the last century. Apart from the natural environment (coastal location of Gdynia) and economic factors (financial capacity of religious communities) political conditions are clearly of key significance particularly after 1945 when the socialist system started to dominate in Poland.

The article firstly shows factors affecting the development of churches and religious orders in Gdynia up to 1945. This is followed by a description of the political impact after World War II on the number of parishes and religious orders of the Roman Catholic churches, places of worship of other religions and the use of religion related names for the city's streets, squares, roundabouts and districts such as e.g. St. Peters (św. Piotra).

## **Factors Affecting the Development of Churches and Religious Orders in Gdynia before 1945**

The history of religious communities in Gdynia up to the twenties of XX century concentrates on the oldest Roman Catholic parishes in Pomerania: Oksywska and Oliwska parishes. Nevertheless, the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Gdynia, starting with the reformation period intertwines with the history of protestant churches. The settlement Mały Kack housed followers of Luther and a protestant congregation from the beginning of XVI century to World War II.

A ban was binding for protestants to settle on church owned property. In Mały Kack on the Kacza River mills and paper works were constructed which employed German settlers of Lutheran faith.

Up to mid 1926 Gdynia belonged to the Oksywie parish dedicated to St. Archangel Michael, one of the oldest in Pomerania erected as early as in 1253. Several months following the day of granting city rights to the city on February 10 1926, the first parish was formed on the territory of the former village Gdynia. Several years later, in 1933, the number of parishes rose to 11 resulting in establishing of Gdynia deanery.

The years between the two world wars showed dynamic development of the Roman Catholic parish system and that of religious orders in the growing city. It is characteristic that the underlying motivation for the development of religious order houses in Gdynia at the beginning of the thirties was its coastal location. The first to move in to Gdynia were the Sisters of Mercy in 1910. At the end of the twenties also Wielkopolskie służeńniczki (Sisters of the Congregatio Sororum Ancillarum ab Immaculata Conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis) decided to come to the new city. The greatest number of religious order houses, i.e. 6 was opened in the thirties. After the war only two of them were not revived. Apart from benefiting from the health and leisure aspects of the coastal location friars contributed to infrastructural development of the rapidly growing city. For example: Sisters of Charity built and worked in a hospital and similarly as the Sisters of St Elizabeth worked with kindergarten children, Ursuline nuns opened a school for girls, and Sisters of Congregatio Sororum Ancillarum a nursery, kindergarten and an orphanage.

The extent of the changes in pre-war Gdynia deserves underlining: in the years 1922–1945 the city spread tenfold to 65,8km<sup>2</sup> whereas the population grew from 1300 residents in 1921 to 114 000 in 1937 (*Gdynia Statistics Yearbook 1996*, 1996). Gdynia port in 1934 was the leader among Baltic ports in terms of cargo handled. Some of the buildings built in that period are considered today to be the pearls of European modernism (A. J. Koseski, 1994).

The establishment of the first and following parishes was strictly connected with the construction of the port in Gdynia in the twenties. This huge economic investment project resulted in population growth of the village and later the young city due to immigration to the new municipal and port centre. The city population grew also in result of new territories adjoined to the municipality as the city developed. The two phenomena, demographic and territorial growth, resulted in establishment of numerous Roman Catholic parishes in Gdynia. The two-way development of the parish system on the territory of Gdynia in the interwar period was underlined by J. Marcinek (1996) who noted that on one hand new parishes emerged in the city area and adjoined areas, and on the other hand, settlements and locations were absorbed which already boasted a parish.

The dynamically growing city also experienced the presence of other religions. The church census issued in 1938 (*Ordo et Elenchus pro 1938*, 1938) reads that Gdynia numbered 110 000 inhabitants with 96,7% Catholics, 0,3% Greek Catholics, 0,4% Orthodox Catholics, 0,7% Protestants, 1,8% Jews and 0,1% believers of other faith <sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The order of listed religions as in the original.

Apart from the protestant church in Mały Kack (today district Orłowo) non Roman Catholic religious communities did not have any places of worship in Gdynia in the period between the wars, renting various facilities and meeting in private houses. The Swedish Church was an exception with a chapel in "Szwedzki Dom Marynarza" opened in 1935 and functioning to this day.

The influence on the smaller number of other than Roman Catholic religious communities both in the past and today, apart from the smaller number of believers, had the proximity of the city of Gdańsk, an older and bigger settlement, a more developed religious centre drawing believers from neighbouring towns and villages, including those from Gdynia.

The years of World War II in church history feature huge loss in the number of clergymen deported to labour camps or murdered in the Piaśnica Woods near Wejherowo. A memory plaque on the elevation of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus lists the names of clergymen and the unnamed Jesuits and Franciscans murdered for their faith and for demonstrating Polish identity.

All religious order houses, except for Sisters of St Elizabeth, were abandoned in December 1939 under pressure of German authorities. During the war Sisters of St Elizabeth took care of the sick and wounded to the end of 1943 when they were ordered to definitely leave the convent because of not signing the nationalistic list.

During the occupation in the years 1939–1945 the city did not suffer severe devastation. The church of Saint Mary the Queen of Poland was converted by the occupants in 1939 to a protestant church dedicated to Martin Luther (J. Więckowiak, 2000). The Franciscan Monastery was occupied by the Germans who converted it to a police school with the chapel serving as the school gym.

After the war all religious communities started to reconstruct their communities and sacred facilities. The situation of the Roman Catholic Church was better because of a well developed system of parishes predominantly established in the interwar period and organised into the Gdynia deanery. The year which brought an end to the war also brought changes in the city's parish structure: two decrees on church construction were annulled, a protestant church in Orłowo was passed on to the Catholic Church and a catholic parish was there established. By the end of 1945 there were altogether 9 parishes.

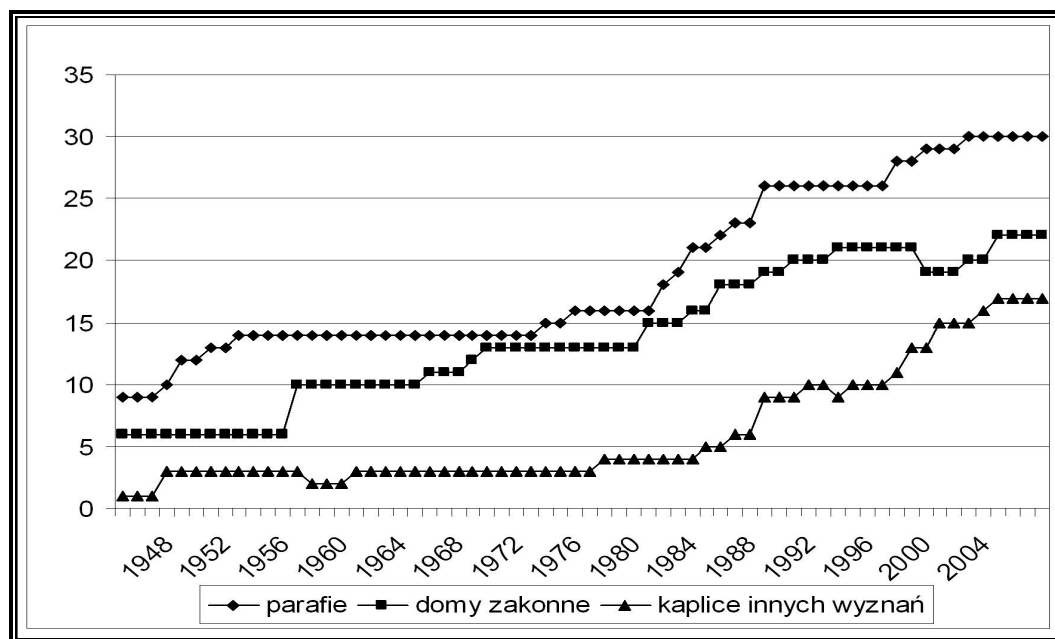
Summing up the development of places of worship in Gdynia to the end of XVIII, we see the influence of landowner policies which hampered the settlement of Protestants and made it in fact impossible. The fundamental factor conditioning other intermediary factors (demographic and spatial development of the new city) was the political and economic decision of Poland to built the sea port of Gdynia, which triggered urban development and the related migration processes and growing urban structure. The participants of the project "city from sea and dreams", as Gdynia was called, included clergymen, friars and nuns whereas factors modifying the scale of church involvement in the process were conditioned by financial capability of particular religious communities. We must not forget about the natural environment factor (the sea, beaches, salty air) which from the beginning of XX century had a growing impact on the decisions of various religious orders to locate their houses in coastal Gdynia.

### **Parish Churches**

Starting from the second half of the twenties the young city of Gdynia boasted 2 Roman Catholic parish churches whereas in 2008 their number rose to 30. The development of pastoral units in Gdynia can be divided into two consecutive periods of growth and stagnation (Fig. 1).

After the increase from 9 parishes in the mid forties to 14 in 1953 the situation remained unchanged for two decades. During the next fifteen years the system of parishes grew further, this time almost twofold, from 14 to 26, and starting 1989 the number of

parishes remained stable up to the end of XX century and the beginning of the next century when 4 new ones were established. It should be emphasised that the Church introduced changes in its territorial structure in the eighties, which resulted in the greatest transformation of the Gdynia parish system during a single decade. In the years 1982–1989 10 parishes were erected. The uneven development of the parish system in Gdynia, particularly the long period in the years 1952–1973 when no parishes were established was conditioned by the political situation adversely affecting the activity of the Roman Catholic Church at the time.



**Figure 1.** Parishes and religious order houses of the Catholic Church and places of worship of other religions in Gdynia in the years 1945–2008

**Source:** own studies based on *Schematyzm Archidiecezji Gdańskiej 2006* (2006) and L. Przybylska (2008)

Extension of Gdynia's administrative borders, and it should be noted the city doubled its territorial range twofold after the war, had a minor impact on further development of parish organisations in the post war period (contrary to the situation before the war) as for example Wielki Kack, which was incorporated by the city in 1953, had its own parish.

Apart from parish churches and chapels of religious orders in Gdynia today we can also discern 25 various types of Catholic chapels: 15 parish chapels, 5 cemetery chapels, three hospital chapels and two in facilities for the disabled. It is characteristic that the latter two types were established in the last decade of XX century. This is closely connected with political changes after 1989 and the possibility of arranging places of worship even in public space such as hospitals and homes for the disabled.

### Religious Order Houses

In 2008, there were 22 religious order houses in Gdynia; 17 convents for women which belonged to 12 orders and 5 monasteries for men which belonged to 5 orders and congregations. With one exception all had their own public or private chapels.

In the years 1945–2006 the number of religious order members in Gdynia grew two and a half fold, from 72 to 173. In 1945, members of male orders constituted 1/5 of the

order state in the city, whereas today this is 1/3. In Gdynia, similarly as in the Catholic Church worldwide there are more nuns than friars. The most numerous group in 2006 were the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth – 26 sisters and Jesuits with 25 friars. Contrary to the Jesuits, the nuns lived in four religious order houses in various locations in Gdynia, with 15 nuns in the biggest house. The two orders with the biggest number of persons in Gdynia are involved in running educational centres: gymnasia and lyceums in case of the Jesuits and kindergartens in case of sisters. Smaller communities numbering 4 or fewer members include one male and as many as 10 female religious order houses.

After World War II, the internal policy of the state affected the development of religious order houses and the nature of their activity. Up to 1989 state authorities following the communist ideology hampered or even made it impossible to develop sacral architecture and conduct religious activity. Certain positive changes took place in the relations of State and Church in Gdynia during the October thaw of 1957, also following the 1970 events and after the strikes in the year 1980-1981<sup>2</sup>. The influence of political events in the country on the number of religious order houses in Gdynia in the years 1945-2008 is well illustrated in Fig 1.

In the years 1945–2008, the number of religious order houses in the city grew over threefold: from 6 to 22. It is characteristic that half of them were established before the beginning of the eighties and the second half in the years 1981–2008. On the basis of Fig. 1 we can identify three periods in the development of religious order houses in Gdynia in the post war period:

- twenty years after the war when the number of religious order houses rose rapidly in 1957 following an over ten year period of stagnation in establishment of new houses. After that date followed another year of stagnation, both unprecedented in the following decades;
- the years 1966–1998 noted a stable growth in the number of religious order houses with more intense growth in the last two decades;
- turn of the century noted liquidation of two religious order houses and establishment of three new ones.

The first new houses were established in Gdynia twelve years after the war in 1957. Some congregations met with difficulties in registering tenets in the borderland city in the fifties and the sixties. *Siostry od Aniołów i Sługi Jezusa* (Sisters of Congregatio Sororum Angelorum Ancillarum Iesu) a habit-less congregation concealed their number and notary acts on purchase of houses were drawn for private persons. Also *Serafitki* (Sisters of the Congregatio Sororum Beatissimae Mariae Virginis Addoloratae) encountered difficulties connected with reporting residence in Sopot, they lived in Gdynia and commuting to work to the neighbouring city. In 1957 the authorities refused to issue a permit for the Dominican Order to build a rest house on a land lot which belonged to the Order since 1930. It was only at the end of the eighties that the female Dominicans could start to construct a convent and kindergarten in Gdynia.

Other problems were encountered in the sixties in Gdynia by sisters who settled in the city before 1945. In 1968 Sisters of Congregatio Sororum Ancillarum and Ursuline nuns were forced to leave their pre-war houses, and used the received compensation to buy smaller single family houses. A few years after the end of World War II Sisters of Congregatio Sororum Ancillarum, Ursuline and Sisters of St Elizabeth were gradually excluded from their work with children and youth and Sisters of Mercy from their work with the sick. The year 1962 was the last year of service for the Sisters of Mercy in the hospital. The school run by Ursuline Sisters was closed in the same year. The sisters

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<sup>2</sup> Relations between the State and Church in Gdynia after World War II are described in detail by D. E. Klich (1994) in the paper on the Ursuline School and J. Jarmakowski, A. Rybicki (1979) in the paper on the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (*Najświętszego Serca Pana Jezusa*).

excluded for ideological reasons from performing their duties turned to caring for the sick in their parishes and in the homes of the sick.

The establishment of the Independent Trade Union *Solidarność* and the wave of strikes in 1980-1981 gave grounds for a gradual initially and later complete change of State policy to the Roman Catholic Church. The eighties saw the establishment of 6 new houses of religious orders in Gdynia i.e. more than in the two previous decades, what is shown in graphic form in Fig. 1.

Significant changes in the religious order houses took place in Gdynia in the last two decades: 5 new houses were opened and two were closed (one due to the falling number of callings, the other due to the costs needed to repair the building).

The new political environment in socialist countries after 1989 resulted in some of the church properties being returned to their former owners. Gdynia is a good example. In 1994, the pre-war house in Oksywie was returned to Sisters of Congregatio Sororum Ancillarum who moved back in and opened an orphanage for children of pre-school age.

Summarising, political events in Poland had a big impact on both the presence and life of religious orders in Gdynia and social life of the city residents with environmental conditions contributing to the opening of houses in Gdynia designated for holiday stays for members of a given congregation. After 1945 the number of religious order houses in the city grew over threefold: Intensive social work of sisters and brothers can be noted in the nineties. In Gdynia there are three kindergartens run by sisters: from the Order of Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, Dominican sisters and Sisters of Congregatio Sororum Ancillarum and there is one secondary school run by the Jesuits with all of these educational centres established after 1989.

### **Other than Roman Catholic religious communities**

In comparison to the Roman Catholic Church other religious communities have a minor number of followers, less than 1% of Gdynia residents at the beginning of XXI century. The contemporary feature of other than Roman Catholic Churches in Gdynia is their Christian origin, predominantly protestant. Gdynia does not have a permanent place of worship for the most numerous religious minority in Poland, i.e. the Polish Orthodox Church (506 800 followers in 2005).

Fig 1 notes a considerable growth in the places of worship of other than Roman Catholic religious communities in the eighties similarly as in the case of Roman Catholic churches. In 1984, Gdynia housed only 4 permanent places of worship for religious minorities (Church of Sweden, Seventh-Day Adventists, Polish Catholic Church, New Catholic Church) and in 2008, 17 which belonged to 12 different religious communities (additionally: Baptist Union of Poland, Kościół Zborów Chrystusowych (The Church of Christ), Jehovah's Witnesses, Zbór Kościoła Pentakostalnego Jordan (Congregation of Pentacost Jordan), Pentecostal Church, Centrum Chrześcijańskie „Nowa Fala” (Christian Centre “New Wave”), Kościół Chrześcijański Słowo Wiary (*Word of Faith Christian Church*), Priestly Society of Saint Pius X and their growth in the recent three decades was connected with political transformations in Poland. For example in 1989 Jehovah's Witnesses, a religion present in Gdynia both before World War II and after 1945, registered officially in the city in 1989 opening its place of worship in three places simultaneously and ten years later in two other locations.

Earlier, in the years 1948-1957, there was a chapel of the Methodist Church in a private flat in the City Centre, and in the years 1992-1994 the International Society for Krishna Consciousness Shrine. The latter's extensive charity and cultural activity were described in literature (P. Jaźwiński, 1998).

It is difficult to carry out a comparative study with the number of Roman Catholic Church followers in terms of the number of followers of particular religious communities

in the post-war period as no source data is available. Among the post war Roman Catholic Church lists of church only one from 1947 includes information on the number of infidels in particular parishes: apart from 66604 Catholics there were 688 followers of other religious communities, including 620 Jehovah's Witnesses, 60 Protestants and 2 Orthodox Catholics (*Spis kościołów i duchowieństwa diecezji chełmińskiej*, 1947). Nevertheless, the information collected allows for approximation of the number of other than Catholic religious communities in Gdynia in half of the first decade of XXI century – approximately 1600 persons and we can assume that in the entire post-war period followers of other religions constituted less than 1% of the population of Gdynia. It should be noted that this figure is higher when we take into account those religions that do not have their houses of worship in Gdynia but in neighbouring gminas. Among the religious minorities in Gdynia the dominating one, both in terms of the number of chapels and followers, is the Jehovah's Witnesses community which has the biggest number of chapels (5) and followers (approximately 1000).

### Religious Names Given to Public Space

The Gdynia street plan was used to conduct an analysis of street and square names. Calling city areas after various saints, clergymen or using ordinary nouns which are associated with religion such as: St. Peter's Street, Church Street does not mean that these names stay forever like in the case of parishes and churches. The names of streets, hills, districts, etc. can change depending on the political situation of the country or the will of local clerks.

As early as in the first years after World War II, Poland experienced the development of a socialist system, which was clearly reflected, among others, in changes of street names. In Gdynia we note in the PRL period the absence of the streets Ignacego Krasickiego and Stanisława Okoniewskiego, which are listed in the street plan of the Guide *Przewodnik po Wybrzeżu* (1947). The street called after the poet and bishop Ignacy Krasicki was renamed in 1948 to Jana Krasickiego after the Secretary of the municipal konsomol in Liew in the years 1939–1942, and in case of the street named after the bishop Stanisław Okoniewski to Wincentego Pstrowskiego the name of a miner, labour competition initiator in the years following World War II. Both street names of the patrons were restored at the beginning of the nineties.

Though the number of streets and squares in Gdynia nearly doubled after the War, from over 500 in the forties to nearly 900 in 2006, religious names constituted less than 3%. Most probably it is one of the smallest group of thematic street names in Gdynia (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Streets and squares in Gdynia

**Source:** own study based on: Guide *Przewodnik po Wybrzeżu* (1947), City Street Plans *Plany „Trójmiasta”* (1957), City Street Plan *Plan Gdyni i Sopotu* (1969), *Gdynia*. City Street Plan *Plan Miasta* (1987), *Gdynia*. City Street Plan *Plan miasta* (1996), *Gdynia. Sopot*. City Street Plans *Plany miast* (2006).

| Streets and squares      | Gdynia City street plan – date of issue |      |      |      |      |      |
|--------------------------|---|------|------|------|------|------|
|                          | 1947                                    | 1957 | 1969 | 1987 | 1996 | 2006 |
| Relating to Christianity | 11                                      | 9    | 10   | 11   | 15   | 23   |
| Total                    | 515                                     | 531  | 602  | 721  | 783  | 870  |

The phenomenon of naming streets after parish priests who had lived and worked in Gdynia for many years is characteristic among the 23 contemporary Christianity related names of streets and squares of the second half of the nineties. This group includes among others the street named after Rev. Hilary Jastak, the parish provost in the years 1949–1984 of the city centre parish called the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an honorary citizen of Gdynia, who lived in the parish to the end of his days, as well as Rev. Stanisława Zawadzkiego (formerly ul. Boczna), parish provost of Matki Boskiej Bolesnej (Holy Sorrowful Mother) in Orłowo in the years 1973-1998, who worked in the parish since 1952.

These places located close to churches in which their patrons had been working for years contribute to the development of local bonds as well as parish and district identity.

Studying the religious names of places in Gdynia we should mention one city district and a railway station at the same time which carries the name of a Saint, i.e. Wzgórze św. Maksymiliana Kolbe (the hill of St Maximilian Kolbe). In 1990, the City Council approved the restoration of historical names in the city but certain exceptions do appear as in the case of this Hill. Before the War this Hill was named after Marshal Foch, after the war it was renamed Marcelego Nowotki. This was a tribute paid to Franciscans as the saint came from their order and the monastery has been situated on one of Gdynia's hills since the thirties of the last century.

Summarising, the religious names of streets, roundabouts, squares, districts and hills in Gdynia changed in the post-war period. Some of the pre-war names were changed in socialist times and restored again in the nineties. It is characteristic that the greatest number of religious related names of streets and squares appeared in the last two decades: from 11 in 1987 to 23 in 2006.

### Conclusion

The article is to show, on the example of a city in northern Poland, the impact of politics on the erection and development of churches, religious orders, and religious names given to public space. For several decades following World War II the development of places of worship was restricted. The significant growth in the number of churches and religious order houses of the Roman Catholic church as well places of cult of other religions and religious related names of public places in Gdynia is connected with political transformations in Eastern Europe after 1989, which reflected religious freedom in the country and growing influence of local society on the decisions of the country's administration.

In the years 1945-1988 the number of parishes increased from 9 to 23 and the number of religious order houses from 6 to 18. The growth in the years 1980-1988 is characteristic with 7 parishes and 6 religious order houses. In consecutive years 1989-2008 we can also note growth though less dynamic than in the single decade of the eighties: 7 parishes and 4 religious order houses in the 20 year period.

The situation is different in case of places of worship of religious minorities and religious related names given to public spaces, which shows a much bigger growth after 1989. In 1945 there was 1 chapel belonging to a religious minority, in 1980 there were 4 and merely 6 in 1988 but in 2008 their number rose to 17. The number of street and square names carrying religious related names after 1945 grew from 11 to 15 as late as in 1996 and jumped to 23 in 2006.

Politics also affected the activity of religious orders: at the beginning of 1960, nuns were eradicated from work in the school and hospital and the 4 education facilities run in Gdynia by religious persons were established after 1989, the year of political transformations in Poland and the entire Eastern Europe.

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