

Forest Policy and Economics Education and Research – FOPER

Capacity building framework for improving capacities in forest governance, policy and economics in Western Balkan Region

A STORY OF FOPER

The FOPER story started in 2003, when a consortium of forestry faculties and research institutes decided to bring to life Ilpo Tikkanen's idea to establish an innovative capacity building program in the Western Balkan region for forest policy and economics. This consortium of organizations led by European Forest Institute developed a project proposal for the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA). In 2004, this proposal was approved and FOPER I - *Strengthening Capacities of Education and Training for Forest Policy and Economics Development in Western Balkan Region* was officially launched. From that day on, FOPER is writing its own story.

The idea of FOPER had both innovative and pioneer elements.

Europe and the world were about to get their first human and institutional capacity building program, which combined Forest Policy and Forest Economics graduate education and research. Herein lies the innovativeness of FOPER idea.

The collapse of Yugoslavia and the intensity of the 1990s wars divided researchers, teachers, students, universities, and research institutes in a previously strongly interconnected region. The FOPER project reconnected and rebuilt a regional network focused on research and education in forest policy and education. Over the eight years of the project, forest governance became the interlinking framework for how political, economic, and civil society worked together for the sustainability and management of forests. Thus, the FOPER education and research incorporated this focus, as it is a critical element of the reforms needed for EU accession.

The importance of forest policy and economics to the region was clear. Since late 1980s, Europe placed sustainable forest management high on the political agenda. At the same time, the Western Balkans was struggling to recover from the collapse of Yugoslavia. There were many issues on the agenda of decision makers, but forestry and natural resources were not among them. In the Western Balkan Region, the forestry sector, both state and private organizations and actors, were faced with the challenge of adjusting to the new democratic society and a market economy. Furthermore, those challenges were complicated by the reforms required to meet the legal requirements of the EU accession process.

The Western Balkan region is known for its rich natural forests, but in its long history of forest management, it nonetheless lacked the capacity to tackle the forestry issues outside the forest in political agendas, market economics, and civil society.

FOPER had two phases - "Strengthening Capacities of Education and Training for Forest Policy and Economics Development in Western Balkan Region" (FOPER I) (2004-2009) and "Consolidation of the Human Capacities in Forest Policy and Economics Education and Research in South-East Europe" (FOPER II) (2009-2013). Both were designed to create human capacity in Western Balkan region in order to bring forestry to political agenda by implementing policy relevant research and increasing higher education capacity. Both projects were financed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and coordinated by the European Forest Institute. The following organizations in the Western Balkan region are or have participated in the project as full partners:

- Croatian Forest Research Institute, Jastrebarsko, Croatia
- Faculty of Forestry, Zagreb, Croatia (2004-2006)
- University of Belgrade, Faculty of Forestry, Belgrade, Serbia
- Institute of Forestry, Belgrade, Serbia
- Forest and Pasture Research Institute, Tirana (later Agency), Albania (2004-2011)
- Agricultural University of Tirana, Faculty of Forestry Sciences, Tirana, Albania
- University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Forestry, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Forestry, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Faculty of Forestry, Skopje, Macedonia
- Institute of Lowland Forestry and Environment, Novi Sad, Serbia

To achieve its goals, FOPER I and FOPER II (now simply FOPER) designed several capacity building frameworks each filled with innovative approaches. During the first part of the project, the main goal was to strengthen human capacities. During this period, FOPER designed and implemented a brand new International Master Program in Forest Policy and Economics (MSc FOPER), Professional Training in Forest Policy and Economics, and research focused on the Science Policy Interface. In the second phase, the project focused on consolidation of these gains and the components included: the second generation of the International Master Program in Forest Policy and Economics, increased training of university teachers, expanded training for regional researchers, the creation of six Collaborative Regional Research Teams, and a Doctoral College to support FOPER MSc students working on a doctoral degree.

International Master Degree Program

International Master Degree Program in Forest Policy and Economics was developed by a FOPER Program Design Team that included a consortium of international experts led by BOKU University in Vienna, Austria. FOPER II supported a second generation of the MSc curriculum. The experience of these two offerings supported the application of the FOPER Forestry Faculty partners to apply for international accreditation (it is already accredited by the regional countries) by the European Accreditation Agency for the Life Sciences (EAALS).

The MSc program is the joint effort of five regional faculties: Faculty of Forestry ó University of Banja Luka; Faculty of Forestry ó University of Belgrade; Faculty of Forestry ó University of Sarajevo; Faculty of Forestry ó Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and Faculty of Forest Sciences ó University of Tirana. The FOPER MSc courses are developed according to European Bologna Rules and are fully organized by a FOPER MSc Coordination Team. Thus, the courses are taught by teams of senior and junior professors specifically contracted by the FOPER MSc team.

The FOPER MSc Coordination Team includes the Deans and designated Program Coordinator from the Faculty of Forestry in Belgrade and Sarajevo, as the courses are physically offered at these Faculty facilities, the FOPER Coordinator, and student representatives. Students begin in Sarajevo and spend 1,5 semesters there before moving to Belgrade for the next 1,5 semesters. While the students are officially enrolled at these Faculties and they provide the student services, facilities, and other infrastructure, all courses are taught by highly qualified teams of senior university professors from Europe and the USA along with regional university professors. The teaching program is fully conducted in English. In both generations of FOPER, the students represented the five partner countries and were supported by a scholarship fund from the MFA grant. In the future, we expect to open this program to applications from anywhere in the world, as it is the only International MSc program on Forest Policy and Economics in Europe and is taught by the many experts in this field from Europe.

To improve teaching capacity of regional academics, FOPER I developed a "Teacher Twinning" approach that connected regional teachers with the distinguished international teachers from the same field. With this approach the Master Program achieved dual goals: (1) students were able to learn from the top teachers in the field of Forest Policy, Economics, and Governance in Europe, and (2) regional teachers had excellent opportunity to learn about modern teaching and learning approaches both in working with these international experts and by visiting them at their home universities. As an innovative and successful model, the twinning approach was expanded in FOPER II with some important additions: (1) international teachers also included mid-career teachers with excellent references and experience in order to ensure long term teaching capacity; (2) number of regional teacher per course was increased for teacher training; and (3) introduction of Teaching Trainees ó young researchers who are doctoral students. The goals of the second FOPER MSc generation were (1) to ensure long-term cooperation between international teachers and their peers from the region, and (2) to provide opportunities to a larger number of regional teachers and teacher trainees to participate in teaching process together with their international colleagues.

The main idea of the education program is to educate future professionals in the field of forest policy and economics, who will be the assets of forestry and related sectors in the Western Balkan region. Education and continuous learning are the necessary to create the framework for continuous capacity building. These young and well-educated people will be able to tackle both local and global challenges, such as ensuring sustainable growth, tackling climate change,

preparing for a new bio-economy, ensuring sustainable multifunctional forest management, improving forest governance, and creating stronger connections between policies, economies, and society.

The FOPER International Master Program serves as an impetus of change in terms of forest policy and economics education and research in the region.

International Accreditation

The process of **international accreditation** started in 2011. The FOPER Project Management Team facilitated submission of an application for international accreditation of the FOPER International Master Program in Forest Policy and Economics to European Accreditation Agency for the Life Sciences (EAALS). We received conditional accreditation in July 2012 and expect final accreditation by the end of year 2012.

FOPER MSc program created a regional and international education network

The FOPER International MSc Program has enrolled 45 students in two generations. Over 85% of students from first generation are employed or continuing their education. One third of the 21 students from the second generation have successfully defended their thesis and all others will do so by early 2013.

In the first one and a half semesters taught in Sarajevo, 16 international, 7 regional, and 8 teacher trainees were engaged in teaching the field and classroom courses. During the one and a half semesters taught in Belgrade, 17 international, 12 regional, and 13 teacher trainees were engaged in offering the courses. In addition, over 50 regional professionals in the forestry sector in the Western Balkan region contributed to the courses and education of the master's students. Since rebuilding regional capacity and awareness remains an important goal of the FOPER program, the MSc students join in regional and international week-long excursions where they visit a large variety of forestry sector sites.

The relationships developed throughout the FOPER MSc program created the new regional collaborative capacity to organize in research teams.

Professional Training

Professional training is designed as an essential part of continuous education and lifelong learning of forestry professionals aimed at human resource development and meeting the changing needs of labor market demands.

The strategic target was to develop and improve institutional educational and research structures in the forest sector in the Western Balkan countries. The institutional educational structures and activities to be developed should support structural reforms and the integration process of these countries towards the European Union in the framework of sustainable development. This process should improve good governance and increase democratic development in these societies, including gender status. FOPER should aim at permanent development impacts and

create concrete, measurable results through the processes. The approach provided direct and indirect support for local development measures, improved human capacities, and increased local commitment by encouraging local forestry professionals to improve their performance through improved knowledge and skills through educational.

The main objective was to improve professional performance in forest sector reform through continuous education, with particular emphasis being the core activities of FOPER - forest related economics and policies. The approach had to be holistic as the problems to be solved, originating from the working life and labor market development, are increasingly complex and dynamic by nature.

The Faculty of Forestry / University of Banja Luka along with the forestry faculties in Skopje and Tirana took the responsibility to organize and coordinate Professional Training. The Professional Training component was designed as a pyramid starting with general courses and ending with national courses.

First level - General courses English were developed to educate a group of professional training Coordinators (five per country). One course was offered in local language to broaden this group of trainers for the future. This course was organized in each country by the professional training coordinators from that country.

Second level ó Regional courses were held in English on topics of interest for the region. Each topic invited an international expert to present the course. These courses took place in each of the five countries.

Third level ó National courses were organized by the country coordinators and future trainers. These courses were a replication of regional courses in local languages. They were designed for professionals from forest companies, NGOs, and state officials from forestry sector.

The total number of forestry experts and professionals involved in this component exceeded 300. Furthermore, replication of the national courses continued after the FOPER professional training funding ended. Independent continuation of professional training by local organizations was an important goal of this program component.

Teachers training

During the implementation of the FOPER project, **teacher training for university professors and assistants** was integrated into both the International FOPER MSc Program and Doctoral College. The project invested in current and future university faculty in order to develop sufficient regional capacity to be able to offer a significant number of the courses for the next FOPER MSc generation. Furthermore, Doctoral College events created opportunities for mentoring and learning by the whole FOPER Team. In these events, graduate students have the opportunity to interact with the international teachers during the teaching process and thereby learn by doing. Regional teachers were actively involved in these events as they provided

education in theory and methodology as well as in approaches for mentoring young researchers and doctoral students.

Science policy interface and researchers training

Research in FOPER I focused on topics related to the **science-policy interface** in order to strengthening forest policy and economics research and most importantly, develop recognition in the region that such research was important and directly useful to policy makers, forest managers, and other actors in the forest sector (Progress report 8 of FOPER).

In FOPER I, five small research projects were led by eminent international researchers from the field of forest policy and economics focused on forestry conflicts in Western Balkan region. These projects led to several Master theses and articles in peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, in close cooperation with FOPER I, *Research into the Organization of Private Forest Owners' Interest*

Associations in the Western Balkan Region ó PRIFORTö project focused on the extent to which private forest owners were ready to form forest owner associations. The project resulted in several PhD theses, Master theses, and publications in peer reviewed journals (FOPER I Progress reports (2006-2008) and PRIFORT Research proposal (2007)).

Researchers training component of within the FOPER II project was one of the most complex and highly successful components of the project.

The FOPER I research projects were all designed and led by external researchers and the regional researchers simply implemented the project. Thus, the regional research capacity to design and carry out a research project remained very weak. Thus, FOPER II focused at the beginning on developing research capacity through organizing, designing, and implementing regional research is the basis for education in forest policy and economics.

FOPER II began with the *Forest Governance, Policy and Economics Research Agenda* for Western Balkan region developed under FOPER I by the stakeholders around the region. The team identified the top 20 critical research topics and framed them into 6 regional research projects as the basis for organizing Collaborative Regional Research Teams (CRRT). Each CRRT is coordinated by regional FOPER Focal Point.

The innovative approach is a horizontal and vertical integration strategy within and across Collaborative Regional Research Teams. Horizontal integration focuses on cooperation between peers across different teams. This means cooperation between doctoral students in different teams, between master students, and between senior researchers and faculty. The objective of this strategy was that sharing experiences between peers would create a stronger network, especially among early stage researchers. Vertical integration focused on knowledge transfer from senior researchers towards their young colleagues. The objective of this strategy is to increase the long-term positive impact of these capacity building processes by supporting young researchers to

qualify for employment in the region. Nearly all of the FOPER master and doctoral students are part of one or more of the Collaborative Regional Research Teams. These projects are ongoing and while the current students will finalize their theses and dissertations in 2013, the topics remain of critical policy importance in the region. For this reason, the focus of FOPER II has been on creating the capacity to develop and manage research within the regional actors so as to support the long-term sustainability of forest policy, economics, governance and social science research in the Western Balkan region.

Researchers education was the purpose of the FOPER Doctoral workshops. These methodological and theoretical workshops were open to all members of Collaborative Regional Research Teams.

Ongoing FOPER II Research Projects are:

- The adaptation of national forest policy systems in South-East European countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia) to new modes of international forest governance ó GOVOR ó led by Faculty of Forestry in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Governance assessment in managing protected areas in SEE region ó PAGOVA ó led by Institute of Forestry, Serbia.
- Hunters' attitudes, motivation and behavior related to participation in hunting in South-East Europe ó HUNTING ó led by Faculty of Forestry, Serbia.
- Entrepreneurship, Markets and Marketing of NTFPs ó NTFP ó led by Faculty of Forestry, Macedonia.
- Opportunities for Wood Energy Production from Small Scale Forests in the SEE Region ó WESSPROFOR ó led by Faculty of Forestry Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Citizens and urban forest governance in SEE: case studies in selected cities ó FORCITY ó led by Croatian Forest Research Institute, Croatia.

The adaptation of national forest policy systems in South-East European countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia) to new modes of international forest governance ó GOVOR

The main research objective is to explore whether and how the forest policy actors in SEE countries understand the emerging modes of international forest governance and to what extent the national forest sectors have adopted them within their forest policy systems. Although the research is basically inductive and exploratory, the concepts of a political system, social networks along with the theories of system dynamics and resilience were used in designing an integrative theoretical and conceptual framework. As the research will cover all SEE countries, the national forestry sectors will be treated as the units of analysis. Methodologically, it is multiple case study using survey questionnaires and personal interviews as well as documentary analysis.

In order to understand (1) how the new concepts of governance concept are perceived and understood as well as (2) how they are implemented in practice (legislation, forest management, etc.), forest policy actors in SEE countries will be interviewed (snow-ball technique will be applied) and strategic national forest policy documents will be analyzed by using appropriate methods, such as discourse analysis.

This research is the first research in the field of new modes of governance in SEE forestry sector, and thus will provide basis policy reform and future research. In addition, this research project is directly applying the new common framework for governance assessment developed by in the World Bank and FAO in 2012, thus supporting the integration of the Western Balkan research network within the larger European and international context.

Governance assessment in managing protected areas in SEE region ó PAGOV

Protected areas are internationally recognized as regions set aside primarily for nature and biodiversity conservation and are a major tool in managing species and ecosystems, which provide a range of goods and services essential to sustainable use of natural resources.

The overall goal of this research is to analyze the effectiveness of the governance regimes for protected areas in the South East Europe region, identify management problems and opportunities, and develop institutional, management, legal and other reform proposals in order to improve the effectiveness of governance for protected areas in the region. This includes exploring current legislation and involvement of relevant stakeholders in order to obtain the picture in which governance and its elements play in national framework an important role.

Significance of this research is the identification of problems and opportunities for improving governance of protected areas. In addition to basic research results, the project expects to develop options and proposals for improving governance. This will have an impact on the forest sector as well as institutional development. In addition, a general result will be a better understanding of the current legislation system and the cross-sectoral connections through capacity building and information sharing.

The research uses a case study approach across the Western Balkan in the following National Parks (NP) and Protected Areas (PA) by regional research teams:

NP Galicica, PA Matka, NP Pelister, NP Mavrovo ó Macedonia (2 researchers)

NP Medvednica, PA Drava-Mura and other PAs ó Croatia (4 researchers)

NP Kozara ó Bosnia and Herzegovina (2 researchers)

NP Una ó Bosnia and Herzegovina (6 researchers)

NP Tara, PA Golija, NP Kopaonik and other PAs ó Serbia (8 researchers)

NP Korca ó Albania (2 researchers)

Regional research Teams are supported by 3 foreign advisers.

Hunters' attitudes, motivation and behavior related to participation in hunting in South-East Europe ó Hunting

This project focuses on three countries in Western Balkan region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia). The aim of this study is to analyze hunters' motivations toward hunting, their opinions on changes in the hunting sector and wildlife management issues as well as to collect their socio-economic characteristics. This research will create a better understanding of the relationships between hunters' socioeconomic characteristics and their attitudes or opinions toward changes in the hunting sector, national hunting legislation, activities of Hunting Associations, and their motivations for hunting. These findings could help decision-makers and be useful instrument for modeling development of hunting sector in Western Balkan region. This research will provide the basis for decision and policy makers to adjust programs and strategies. Another contribution of this research project is the education in social science methods and theoretical approaches can be used for other socio-economic research in the forestry sector.

Entrepreneurship, markets and marketing of Non-Wood Forest Products (NTFP) in the Western Balkan region ó NTFP

The overall goal of this research is to analyze the organization and cooperation within the value chain of NTFP's and their commercialization in the Western Balkan region. In order to achieve this, the study has the following objectives:

- To clarify the legal and regulatory frameworks governing NTFP commercialization, and the institutional delivery structures;
- To enhance the link between international and regional regulations concerning NTFPs;
- To determine the importance of key individuals in developing entrepreneurship capacity in the market for NTFPs;
- To determine the extent of the organization of the actors within the value chain of NTFPs.

Of particular interest is to explore the extent of cooperation among the actors within the value chain of NTFPs in order to better understand how they are organized and what kinds of improvements might result in greater economic contribution to the national economy and the forest sector. This research will establish a basis for future research on NTFP. Results of this project will enable decision makers and entrepreneurs to improve their activities. This project is the first study of this topic and has both created the regional capacity to join a new EU project ó STAR TREE ó focused on non-timber forest products in Europe as well as to better understand the research needs within the region.

Opportunities for Wood Energy Production from Small Scale Forests in SEE region ó WESSPROFOR

The purpose of this research is to investigate the potential for the utilization of woody biomass for energy production within a prospective local wood-based bio-energy industry in the Western Balkan region. In addition, the research aims to describe the characteristics of private forest landowners who might be willing to supply wood biomass energy feedstock for local heating plants, and the factors affecting their decision to supply this material. The objectives of the project are to analyze:

- Primary energy production in the Western Balkan countries: current situation and Renewable Energy Sources;
- Potentials of the private forest owners in Western Balkan countries for the production of energy-generating products based on woody biomass;
- Better understanding of the current and potential market for wood based energy-generating products in the selected Western Balkan countries current situation.

This project will provide results to decision makers and private forest owners related to the possibilities of wood energy production from private forests. This will enable decision makers to create suitable environment for the wood energy production. Also, private owners will learn about another option for economic income from their forest.

Citizens and urban forest governance in Western Balkan cities: FORCITY

This research aims to analyze the relationship between the residents in urban areas in the countries in the Western Balkan region and the urban forests within them. Insight into this relationship will provide a better understanding of the management regimes of different types of urban forests, determine the needs of different social groups regarding urban forests, and provide guidelines to their future management in the context of multiple uses and achieving social optimum.

Research on urban forests in the Western Balkan region will contribute to managers, urban planners, and citizens. Managers will get data on human use patterns, urban planners will receive information on users' preferences regarding the distance to and size of the urban forests, and citizens will benefit from better management and urban planning strategies. As this research will cover basic human behavioral patterns and uses of urban forests, future research activities will have significant data for continuing the research in more specific areas within urban forestry.

FOPER Doctoral College

FOPER II Doctoral College is designed to support graduate education and to increase research and teaching capacity in the Western Balkan region. There are several support activities available for doctoral students, including a mobility grant program, doctoral education scholarships, internship support, and some tuition support.

The **Mobility Grant** program is designed to support doctoral student mobility. The purpose of the grant is to allow students to spend a minimum of 6 months at one or more universities outside the Western Balkan region. This is consistent with the European Bologna goal of greater mobility for advanced graduate students in Europe. This program allows Western Balkan doctoral students in forest policy, economics, and governance to acquire new knowledge and skills, and very importantly for future progress, experience how doctoral education is organized in other universities and develop new colleagues. This program also means that these students are contributing their experiences and knowledge of the FOPER region to other students in Europe.

There is the possibility of a **Doctoral Scholarship** for students not employed and not receiving other scholarships. To date, only two scholarships were granted, as generally doctoral students are employed in the faculties and research institutes in the FOPER partnership.

The **Internship Program** supports a graduate student's development of professional skills through experience in forestry organizations. FOPER II created internships and educational exchanges within and outside the Western Balkan region. Several FOPER II students have undertaken internships within Ministries, NGOs and research institutes in the Western Balkan region, others gained experience in international organizations, such as ETH Zurich and the Confederation of European Private Forest Owners (CEPF) in Brussels.

OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVES

Internally lack of trust, incompatible legislative frameworks, isolated state bureaucracies, to name a few barriers, were some of the problems FOPER addressed. Furthermore, coordination capacities and communication in the region needed substantial improvements.

Building trust between FOPER network members started from the first days of the project and was strongly supported by positive individual motives. Awareness of potential positive impacts of FOPER overcame a lack of trust and resulted in one of the most integrated research networks in the Western Balkan region and in Europe.

Innovativeness naturally collides with existing, often conflicting, legislative frameworks. New approaches for policy, economics, and governance require a new foundation in the legislative framework. At first, since FOPER was building something new, the support was not there. However, there was awareness that innovation has a high value.

Awareness of the importance of innovation was complemented with individual efforts of FOPER regional researchers together with the EFI Project Management Team and the result is a strong, collaborative, international research and education network. The willingness to work together in collaborative regional, self-organizing, research teams has increased tremendously regional communication and research capacity. Today, many regional teams organize to provide assessment (e.g., for the European Environment Agency) of conditions in the Western Balkan region for biodiversity and multifunctional forest management, analysis (e.g., Sustainable Forest Industries and Products ó Balkan Group, The Lviv Forum on Forests in a Green Economy), and

new research initiatives (e.g., new research and analysis teams supporting companies and governments confronting corruption and illegal logging). This self-organizing capacity at the regional level creates the long-term sustainability of the FOPER research and education network.

The main external drivers for FOPER are EU accession and a global forestry agenda focused on interdisciplinary, sustainable multi-functional forest management, and improved governance of forests. Successful participation and response to these processes required knowledge and capacities in forest governance, policy and economics. Our donor, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, recognized how this project would support its development strategy for the enlargement of the EU. Together the MFA, EFI, and regional partners provided the coordinated support necessary for success. Thus, the initial regional and international support and hopes for the FOPER project created the conditions for its long-term success. The long-term sustainability of the international FOPER research network is assured by the cooperative and collaborative relationships created through education and research.

LESSONS LEARNED

Looking back at the more than 8 years of FOPER, it is clear that the often heard statement "everything is possible" is an overarching slogan of each innovative effort. Aiming at the highest possible goals and setting up clear milestones is the way to go forward, and once started there is no looking back. FOPER is now an incubator of new ideas, opportunities, and visions as new young researchers join forestry faculties, research institutes, government ministries, state forest enterprises and private forest companies, and NGOs.

It takes courage to support innovation. Imagination is necessary to create innovation. Belief and commitment is essential to make innovation real. The commitment and belief from the deans and directors, from EFI, the MFA and absolutely most importantly, the MSc and doctoral students - created the potential for success of the FOPER project. But results are what supports long-term commitment and that is what FOPER did and it got results.

FOPER had what it takes to build its own story of success. This is the secret and no one gives you success, you must build and create it in order to sustain it.

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National Park Plitvice, Croatia: Field trip - Foper M.Sc. students

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