

## The agency of students involved in the practice of School Participatory Budgeting<sup>1</sup>

### *Ação de estudantes envolvidos em práticas de Orçamento Participativo das Escolas*

### *Acción de los estudiantes involucrados en las prácticas de Presupuestos Participativos Escolares*

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**Abstract:** This article explores School Participatory Budgeting (SPB) as an important practice that provides students with opportunities to show their agency, or the ability to proactively influence social structures and institutions. The study explores the manifestations of agency among schoolchildren involved in SPB. The empirical base of the study includes the results of a survey of 670 students in grades 7-11, conducted from May to October 2023 in 32 regions of Russia. The survey contained questions about the specific practices in which schoolchildren participated. The level of agency was determined using a specially

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developed methodology that allows for the assessment of students' agency in various fields, such as family, education process, school life, interaction with peers, and income. The results showed that schoolchildren's level of agency is closely related to their involvement in SPB. The higher the level of agency, the higher the level of involvement in SPB. A high level of agency and the maximum degree of involvement are only typical for a small percentage of respondents. The main motives for schoolchildren's participation in SPB are personal development, the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, and social mobility. Participants in SPB with the highest level of agency often seek changes in existing practices and regulations and the implementation of socially significant projects aimed at improving the life of the school community.

**Keywords:** Educational policies; School Participatory Budgeting; Agency of schoolchildren.

**Resumo:** O artigo examina o Orçamento Participativo das Escolas (OPE) como uma prática importante que oferece aos alunos a oportunidade de mostrar seu papel de agente, ou seja, a capacidade de influenciar estruturas e instituições sociais. O objetivo do estudo é examinar as manifestações da ação dos alunos que participam do OPE. A base empírica do estudo inclui os resultados de uma pesquisa de 670 alunos das classes 7-11, realizada de maio a outubro de 2023 em 32 regiões da Rússia. O questionário continha perguntas sobre práticas específicas nas quais os alunos participaram. O nível de ação foi determinado usando uma metodologia especialmente desenvolvida para avaliar a ação dos alunos em diferentes áreas. Os resultados mostraram que o nível de ação dos alunos está intimamente relacionado ao seu envolvimento no OPE. Quanto maior o nível de ação, maior o grau de envolvimento no orçamento. No entanto, o alto nível de atuação e o grau máximo de envolvimento são característicos de apenas uma pequena porcentagem dos entrevistados. Os principais motivos para a participação dos alunos no OPE são o desenvolvimento pessoal, a aquisição de novas competências, conhecimentos e mobilidade social. Os participantes do OPE com o maior nível de ação muitas vezes procuram mudanças nas práticas e regulamentos existentes, bem como a implementação de projetos socialmente significativos destinados a melhorar a vida da comunidade escolar.

**Palavras-chave:** Políticas educacionais; Orçamento Participativo das Escolas; Ação de estudantes.

**Resumen:** Este artículo explora el presupuesto participativo escolar (PPE) como una práctica importante que brinda a los estudiantes la oportunidad de mostrar su role de agente o la capacidad de influir en las estructuras e instituciones sociales. El objetivo del estudio es examinar las manifestaciones de la acción de los escolares que participan en PPE. La base empírica del estudio incluye los resultados de una encuesta a 670 estudiantes en los grados 7-11, realizada de mayo a octubre de 2023 en 32 regiones de Rusia. El cuestionario contenía preguntas sobre las prácticas específicas en las que participaban los escolares. El nivel de acción se determinó utilizando una metodología especialmente desarrollada que permite evaluar la acción de los estudiantes en diversos ámbitos. Los resultados mostraron que el nivel de acción de los escolares está estrechamente relacionado con su participación en PPE. Cuanto mayor sea el nivel de acción, mayor será el grado de participación en la presupuestación. Un alto nivel de actuación y el máximo grado de participación son típicos solo para un pequeño porcentaje de encuestados. Los principales motivos para la participación de los escolares en PPE son el desarrollo personal, la adquisición de nuevas competencias, conocimientos y movilidad social. Los participantes en PPE con el más alto nivel de acción a menudo buscan cambios en las prácticas y regulaciones existentes y la implementación de proyectos socialmente significativos destinados a mejorar la vida de la comunidad escolar.

**Palabras clave:** Políticas educativas; Presupuestos Participativos Escolares; acción de escolares.

## Introduction

The growing role of the BRICS member states in the international arena is largely ensured by the new education policy, where education is focused on achieving sustainable development goals, aimed at forming a proactive position in the younger generation and the ability to constructively transform the surrounding social reality.

While in earlier years educational outcomes were traditionally associated with "social adaptation skills", "cognitive skills" or "subjective well-being", i.e. the prerequisites

for individual success, in recent decades, more emphasis has been placed on competencies related to individual responsibility for the social environment, schools, local communities, the country, and the whole world. The essence of these targets are the concepts of “responsibility” and “contribution to the development of society, the economy, and the environment” (P21, 2016). Achieving these educational objectives requires the development of school democracy manifested in the involvement of students in school governance, the updating of students’ civic position, and helping students make responsible choices. These vectors are consistent with School Participatory Budgeting (SPB), the ideas of which largely implement the pedagogical views of Paolo Freire (DA MOTA, DOS SANTOS SILVA, 2021).

The starting point of this study is the hypothesis that SPB allows students to exercise their agency in terms of the impact on financial expenditures in the development of the school environment. The concept of agency means the ability of a person to proactively influence the environment and social structures, transforming existing and creating new forms of interaction in various spheres of public life (CAVAZZONI et al., 2021; HOPWOOD & SANNINO, 2023; SOROKIN, 2023). Agency can be considered as an umbrella concept combining such constructs as subjectivity, autonomy, independence, initiative, self-determination, self-regulation, proactive behavior, social impact, and cooperation (UDEHN, 2002; SOROKIN, FRUMIN, 2022; CAVAZZONI et al., 2021). Despite the growing interest in the problem of agency, its manifestations related to financial resources are still poorly understood, especially in relation to schoolchildren. Meanwhile, the activity of schoolchildren in studying their social environment and intervening in solving problems through decision-making (RODRÍGUEZ & BROWN, 2018) in the field of finance, offers young people the opportunity to gain experience in expanding their own capacities and becoming a driving force of the necessary changes.

### **SPB as an element of the social and educational landscape**

SPB (Portuguese for “Orçamento Participativo das Escolas”) is a modification of participatory budgeting that originated in 1989 in Porto Allegri, Brazil. Today, this practice covers thousands of schools around the world. In accordance with the ideas of Freire, SPB performs primarily the following functions:

- ensures student involvement in the local community, directs student activity to

transform and improve the environment (community life), and helps the development of society;

- emancipates the student and transforms relationships at school, so that "the teacher, while performing teaching, is being educated, and the student, while learning, educates"; provides for dialogue, problematization, the student's search for answers; and a system of relations is built so that the student is heard;

- provides not only the discussion of budget documents by students, but also their preparation and application; overcomes the consumer orientations of society, bureaucracy, and authoritarianism in school life (BARTLETT, SCHUGURENSKY, 2021; DA MOTA, DOS SANTOS SILVA, 2021).

In the case of Porto Alegre, the key elements of the pedagogical model were combined, namely the civic school proposed by Freire with the instrument of civic participation and municipal participatory budgeting. This gave an impetus to the development of SPB (BARTLETT, SCHUGURENSKY, 2021).

The experience of SPB has been analyzed by a wide range of researchers (NOVELLA CAMARA et al., 2022; BARTLETT, SCHUGURENSKY, 2021, 2023; DA MOTA, DOS SANTOS SILVA, 2021; ESTEBAN et al., 2022; GIBBS et al., 2021; GOLDFRANK, SCHUGURENSKY, 2019; LEHTONEN, RADZIK-MARUSZAK, 2023; PARDO-BENEYTO, ABELLÁN-LÓPEZ, 2023). The analysis of publications on this subject did not reveal any fundamental differences in definitions, interpretations, or approaches to SPB. This allowed us to highlight a number of important points, i.e. to consider participatory budgeting as an innovation in education, to position SPB as a tool for developing school democracy and as a pedagogical means of civic education, to label SPB practice as being in line with humanistic education, and to determine the place of these practices outside of school lessons.

SPB is the involvement of students in the solving of significant everyday school problems and in the management of a part of the school budget. In SPB, the vector of public activity shifts towards convention and unification, which does not exclude heated debates and the competition of ideas (initiative projects) for the compliance with the interests of the community. In addition, the involvement of schoolchildren in democratic processes is justified by the need to provide them with the opportunity to express their interests and voice their opinions as a social group that is legally infringed. Therefore, the researchers appeal to the provisions of the "Convention on the Rights of Children"

(ESTEBAN et al., 2022).

Experts describe the SPB algorithm as a sequence of procedures that includes informing potential participants, putting forward initiatives by students to improve the life of the school community and forming project teams, converting initiatives by students into initiative projects (by determining the costs, deadlines, risks, etc.), the public discussion and evaluation of initiative projects, the selection of initiative projects for financing based on the results of the general vote, the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of initiative projects, and public presentation of completed projects.

The movement towards the transformation of SPB social technology into educational technology is hard to overlook. For example, the propagandized "principle of progressive autonomy" (ESTEBAN et al., 2022) is the pedagogical support for the development of the independence of SPB participants.

### **SPB as a source of personal and social change**

Researchers use various terminology to interpret the changes that occur in the personality of participants in SPB (BARTLETT, SCHUGURENSKY, 2021; 2023; GIBBS et al., 2021). We have attempted to find common ground for a typology by identifying several areas:

- the student's social position as a generalized attitude to the surrounding reality ("active life position", "civic position");

- social competencies as the readiness for effective interaction in society (knowledge of participatory democracy; financial, budgetary, electoral, legal literacy; citizen competencies; experience in interacting with specialists of local governments; knowledge of the basics of local government);

- communicative competencies ("the development of communicative abilities") is the readiness for effective approaches to communicative tasks (conducting negotiations, discussions, public presentation of a product);

- organizational competencies is the readiness to effectively solve organizational tasks (decision-making, working with the project team, cooperating, understanding the needs of others, showing leadership qualities, campaigning for projects);

- cognitive competencies is the readiness to effectively tackle cognitive tasks such as critical thinking and analysis;

- self-awareness is the student's self-perception (self-confidence, independence).

Participation in SPB is positively associated with learning outcomes among schoolchildren (CRUM & FAYDASM, 2018).

The main social effect of this practice is the democratization of the school. Based on the theory of A. Bandura (2018), researchers formulated two criteria for evaluating SPB in terms of democracy, "the internal dimension (belief in one's own abilities or the ability of one's group to influence the system), and the external dimension (the openness of the system to change)." In SPB, students are recognized as agents of social change and have the power to transform the reality around them. Students feel that their ideas are being heard, so they are more willing to work on school improvement projects and are more likely to participate in school management decisions. SPB is fundamentally concerned with improving the functioning of the local school community and the lives of all those involved in school life.

SPB helps strengthen the partnership between children and adults, creates a sense of community in the school, promotes mutual trust between those involved in educational relations, and improves student relations with teachers and peers. Schoolchildren are involved in the direct physical transformation of the environment and students are often invited to take part in the implementation of the project. In a number of cities in different countries (NOVELLA CAMARA et al., 2022; BARTLETT, SCHUGURENSKY, 2021, 2023; GIBBS et al., 2021; GOLDFRANK, SCHUGURENSKY, 2019; PARDO-BENEYTO, ABELLÁN-LÓPEZ, 2023; PEARSE, 2022, 2023), students participated in SPB with the involvement of the population of the city.

## **Agency and SPB**

There are a variety of approaches to defining the concept of agency. This is due to the fact that agency is a fundamental sociological category and the topic of discussion in the social sciences and humanities (SOROKIN, 2023). The problem of agency refers to metaphysical, philosophical, and ethical issues such as free will, individuality, subjective rights, and moral responsibility. Despite the multidimensional nature of the discourse on agency, the starting point is always action and the ability to set and achieve goals. The characteristics of agency include the ability of a person to act as an independent agent and to make informed and free choices, and to proactively influence the environment and

social structures, including the transformation of existing and the creation of new forms of interaction in various spheres of public life (UDEHN, 2002; SOROKIN, 2023).

In sociology, agency is usually considered in the context of the concepts of social action and actors and is discussed as part of the personality—structure, micro—macro, and individualism—holism dichotomies. The manifestation of agency is determined by two components (CAVAZZONI et al., 2021). These are personal characteristics such as self-efficacy, perceived autonomy, optimism, and self-esteem. These qualities determine the inner potential of a person and the ability to take proactive productive action. On the other hand, the structural possibilities and limitations that affect the manifestation of agency are important. These include the social, economic, and cultural conditions in which a person lives, and the availability of resources and infrastructure to implement their ideas and initiatives (MANYUKHINA, 2022; ABEBE, 2019; VERONESE et al., 2019). Thus, agency depends on both the internal qualities of a person and on the external conditions in which it is realized.

In the modern sociological discourse, agency is understood as the active participation of people in shaping their social lives. Individuals are considered as strategic figures capable of taking purposeful actions that lead to changes in the world around them. People become active participants and creators of their social environment, influencing and changing it in accordance with their strategic goals and actions (OSWELL, 2013; ARCHER, 2013; FLIGSTEIN & MCADAM, 2011). From the point of view of rational choice theory, agency is the ability of an agent to freely choose a desired goal and the way to achieve that goal, including its actual achievement. Thus, agency is manifested in the continuous interaction between freedom of choice and the possibility of changing the world around us.

The dual nature of agency, which means the ability of individuals to make independent decisions and influence the reality surrounding them, and the ability to transform and change this reality in accordance with their preferences and values, is reflected in the concept of agency developed by P. Hogget (2001), who noted that agency can be manifested at different levels. The manifestation by individuals of creativity, flexibility, and the ability to achieve goals within given conditions and rules, constitutes, according to Hoggett, "changes of the first order." The implementation of "second-order changes" is aimed at transforming the very rules and norms that determine individual behavior, going beyond the boundaries of a given behavior. It is obvious that the second

form of agency is a variant of the most risky behavior associated with danger, since it implies the possibility of breaking habitual social ties and destroying or modifying established social structures. However, in this form we see the manifestation of agency as transformative agency (SOROKIN, FROUMIN, 2022). From the standpoint of Sorokin (2023), applying the notion of agency to the phenomena of the "changes of the first order" according to Hogget (2021) might be not adequate, because it does not imply actual transformation of the social structure driven by the individual – only changes in the individual position within a given social setting.

The role of education in developing transformative agency is extremely important. A number of studies emphasize the need to create educational opportunities for students to develop independence and proactivity, which means their participation in decision-making, cooperation, and shared responsibility with adults (BØRHAUG & WEYRINGER, 2019). In relation to education, agency can be understood as the ability of students to influence their learning process and the context in which it is implemented, to transform their own and others' learning experiences, and to expand educational opportunities (Cook-Sather, 2019). Agency is manifested not only in the fact that students feel that they are important and listened to, but also in the fact that they have the opportunity to influence decision-making in schools (COOK-SATHER, 2006). However, what is most important is the practical implementation of this capacity (SOROKIN, 2023).

Returning to the issue of student participation in SPB practices, it can be concluded that their aim might be related to "second-level changes"—transformations in school rules and regulations aimed at improving the life of the school community. However, research shows that the activities of SPB participants are heterogeneous in terms of initial motivation and the degree of involvement. For example, that schoolchildren participating in SPB practices can be divided into three groups: "Enthusiasts", who create ideas for initiative projects, leaders, and active participants in project groups; "Assistants", who help "Enthusiasts", who participate in the work of project associations with varying regularity, and "The public", i.e. participants who are simply attend events and take part in voting (KUPRIYANOV, 2023).

However, with rare exceptions, SPB practices have not been taken into account in academic research (COOK-SATHER, 2019; ESTEBAN et al., 2022) in relation to the manifestation of agency by schoolchildren. Although there is no universally recognized tool for assessing agency, there is a debate about agency as a characteristic manifested



in different subject areas (WOODHEAD, 2008; GURDAL, SORBRING, 2018; Klementic, 2017). We have developed a methodology for evaluating it as a widely used characteristic. In this context, SPB can be considered simultaneously as a manifestation of agency in a specific domain, related to financial issues in school development. The literature does not empirically assess the level of agency in different fields for schoolchildren involved in SPB. However, the study of the relationship between the “general” agency (manifested across all areas of everyday life, including family, peers, school life, education process and income) and participation in SPB (as a specific type of agency available only for some schoolchildren) is advisable from the point of view of considering the factors that encourage students to engage in this activity. In addition, it is essential to take into account the level of its effects, i.e. the extent to which this practice is not formal in nature, but solves the real task of implementing initiative projects aimed at improving the life of the school community.

The purpose of this study is to investigate: first, the manifestations of general agency (across different subject fields) among schoolchildren participating in SPB practices, second, the motives and effects of this activity.

In accordance with the purpose, the following research questions were posed:

- How does the general agency of schoolchildren involved in SPB practices manifest itself? How is the level of general agency related to the degree of involvement in SPB?

- What motivates schoolchildren to engage in SPB and what factors are decisive for schoolchildren with a high level of general agency? What motives prevail in their activities – individualistic or orientation towards the common good?

- What do SPB participants see as the main effects of these practices? To what extent can this activity bring about real changes that improve the life of the school community? How does the level of expected or observed SPB effects relate to the level of general agency of schoolchildren?

## **Research methodology**

As an empirical basis for this study, the results of a survey of schoolchildren (grades 7 to 11, i.e. 13-18 years old) studying in schools with significant experience in SPB (N = 670) conducted from May to October 2023 in 32 regions of the Russian Federation (covering approximately 1 out of 3 Russian regions) were used. SPB participants were

selected from regional schools that have been included in SPB since 2017, as well as the winners of 3-4 All-Russian SPB 2021 and 2022 project competitions. The average age of the study participants was 14.89 years (SD = 1.34). Girls predominated among the respondents (57.0%).

The questionnaire consisted of 41 questions, including questions about the respondents' experience of participation in SPB, where it was obtained, specific practices in which the respondents participated, i.e. (development of the infrastructure of an educational organization: creation or repairment of facilities, material and technical equipment, landscaping), holding contests (competitions), organization of events on socially relevant topics, etc.), the frequency of involvement in SPB-related tasks, about the motives that motivate the respondents to engage in SPB; the results of this activity and the competencies, knowledge, skills that the respondents acquired through their participation in SPB; satisfaction with this activity, opportunities and obstacles to taking initiative when participating in SPB, about the availability of activities at school aimed at teaching SPB.

The questionnaire also included questions to assess the level of agency of respondents, the specifics of their work in the team, the nature of their interaction with a mentor and parents, questions about life planning, which activities related to SPB are the most important to the respondents, i.e. what they get from it now and what will be useful in the future, and the standard set of socio-demographic questions.

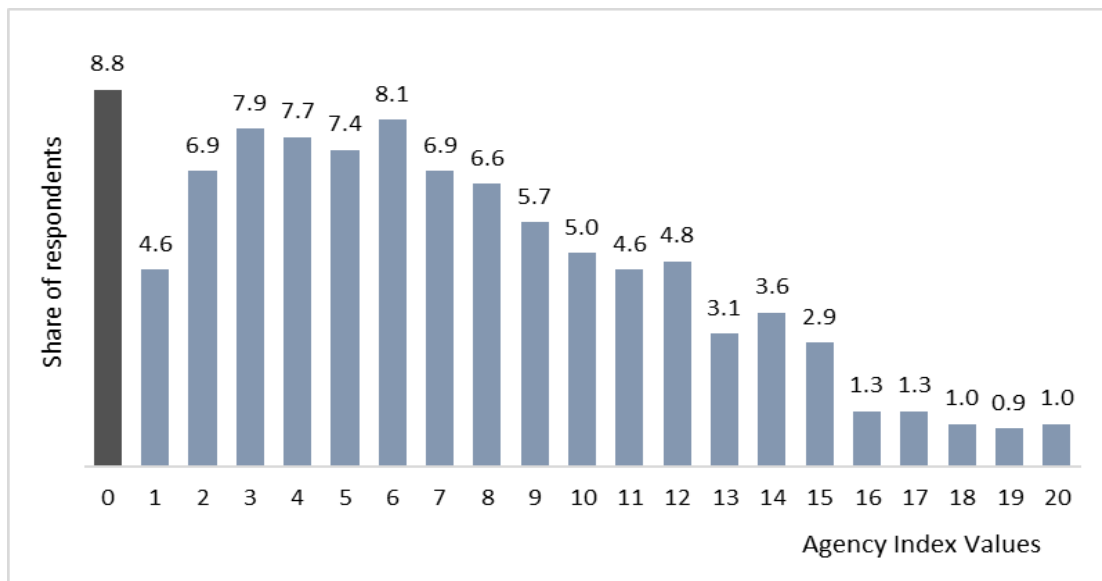
It should also be noted that not all students in the sample have experience of participating in SPB practices. Thus, 48.6% of the sample of SPB participants noted that they had no relevant experience. This may be due to the fact that not all schoolchildren have real opportunity to engage in SPB practices (i.e. they are "alienated") – even in schools, which formally participate in SPB. The formal criterion for getting into the sample of schools does not guarantee that all students have real relevant experience. Accordingly, those who do not have such experience can be considered as a control group for comparison with those who have experience of participating in SPB. The introduction of the "alienation" category significantly complemented the previous scheme for differentiating the participation of schoolchildren in participatory budgeting (KUPRIYANOV, 2023). Thus, the low level of student involvement in SPB (hereinafter referred to as the "public") is evidenced by occasional participation in activities ("one-time activities") because such students attend only public discussions of projects and

participate in voting. Schoolchildren assigned to the average level of involvement in SPB (hereinafter referred to as "assistants"), participate in relevant activities periodically except for voting and attending public presentations. They are also involved in the development of project documentation and implementation of supported projects. A sign of a high level of involvement of schoolchildren in participatory budgeting (hereinafter referred to as "enthusiasts") was regular (on an ongoing basis) participation in activities. This level of engagement was manifested in all possible types of activities (noted in the previous categories), but the marker was the promotion of project ideas and presentation and the defense of the projects.

The calculation of the general agency index was carried out on the basis of a methodology developed in 2023 and passed psychometric testing. The agency index was determined based on the respondents' answers to questions concerning the manifestation of agentic behavior in various fields: when interacting with parents in families; in the education system on issues related to the educational process; in the education system on other aspects of school life, among peers; in the field related to financial issues (five questions for each sphere).

Depending on the respondents' assessment of the frequency of the relevant situations from: "there have never been such situations" to "such situations happen very often (1 time a week or more often)", the answers were assigned from 0 to 4 points. Accordingly, the resulting "agency index" varies from 0 to 20 points ( $M = 6.7$ ;  $SD = 4.78$ ;  $Md/Mode = 6.00/0.00$ ) and demonstrates a distribution different from normal, with a pronounced bias towards low agency (asymmetry = 0.575, kurtosis = -0.360, Graphic 1). This approach to creating an integral index combining information about the manifestations of the key phenomenon under consideration in various subject areas is based on the existing practice of measuring complex constructs such as "well-being" or "quality of life" (see MICHALOS et al., 2014).

**Graphic 1 – Frequency distribution of the agency index, in %**



Source: survey of schoolchildren, 2023 (N = 670)

Furthermore, based on the calculated values of the agency index, expanded groups of respondents were identified in terms of a generalized "level of agency". Agency levels were allocated according to four quantiles reflecting the number of points scored by respondents, who divide the distribution of possible points scored into four equal parts of the same size. The respondents received 0 points, i.e. who had never shown agent behavior in any of the designated areas in their lives, were allocated to a separate cluster called "Lack of agency" (N = 111; 8.8%). The respondents who scored from 1 to 5 points were grouped into a group called "Low agency" (N = 435; 34.5%); The level of agency of those who scored from 6 to 10 points was identified as "Reduced agency" (N = 407; 32.3%). In the category of "Increased agency" (N = 240; 19%) and "High agency" (N = 69; 5.5%), the respondents who scored from 11 to 15 points and from 16 to 20 points, respectively, were combined.

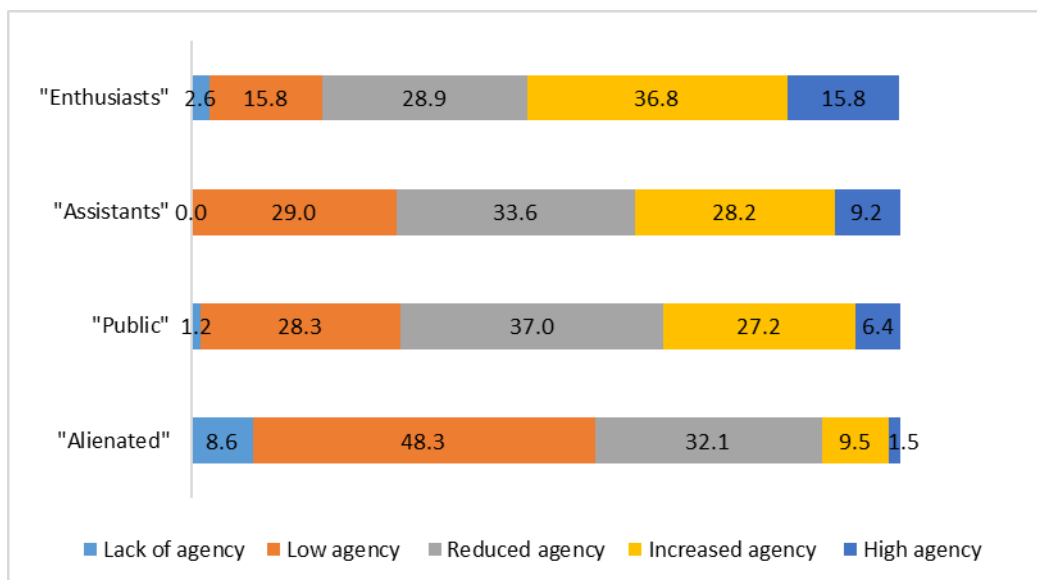
### **The level of involvement in SPB and agency**

Almost half of the respondents are in the "Alienated" group (N = 326; 48.8%). These students either have no experience of participating in SPB at all, or are formally involved in this activity, noting that they do not have enough time and energy for SPB classes if there are other priorities. Also, do not see any tangible results of their participation in these practices. About a quarter of respondents fell into the "Public"

category (N = 173; 25.9%). These respondents rarely participate in one-time SPB-related activities and take part in the discussion and selection of projects initiated by other students. The respondents who made up the "Assistants" group (N = 131; 19.6%) are included in SPB periodically, taking part in the development of projects and in the implementation of supported projects. Finally, the representatives of the "Enthusiasts" (N = 38; 5.7%) group are characterized by the promotion of project ideas for SPB, as well as the presentation and defense of projects. It is noteworthy that with an increase in the level of engagement, the proportion of participants who make up the corresponding group becomes lower: 48.8%-25.9%-19.6%-5.7%, respectively.

Next, let us consider the level of schoolchildren's agency is related to their involvement in SPB practices. The level of involvement showed a statistically significant relationship with the level of agency: a correlation of average strength was obtained ( $\rho = 358$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). If in the "Public" category, the total share of schoolchildren with an increased and high level of agency is about one third (33.6%), and it is more than half (52.6%) among the "Enthusiasts" (Graphic 2).

**Graphic 2 – Distribution of respondents by agency level depending on their involvement in SPB practices, % ( $\chi^2(df) = 99.179 (12)$ ;  $p < 0.001$ )**

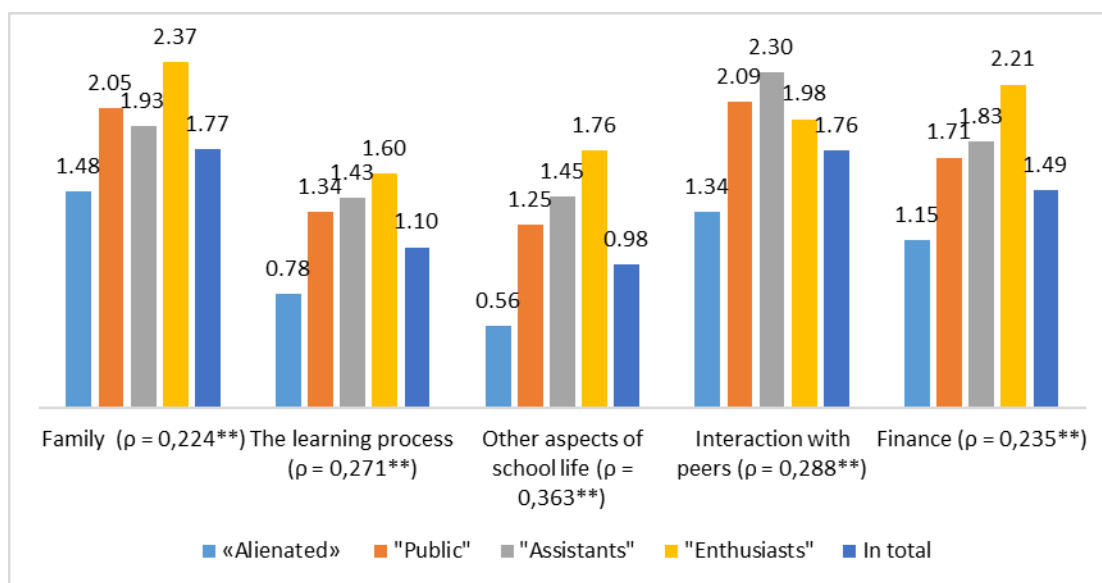


Source: survey of schoolchildren, 2023 (N = 670)

Schoolchildren's agency manifests itself to the greatest extent in the family during interaction with parents, and also among peers (Graphic 3). At the same time, the strongest correlation between involvement in SPB and agency is observed for aspects of

school life not directly related to the education process and interaction with peers. It is noteworthy that schoolchildren with the highest involvement in SPB (“Enthusiasts”) are characterized by the highest level of agency in almost all areas, with the exception of the circle of peers.

**Graphic 3 – The index of agency in various spheres of manifestation (average score), depending on involvement in SPB practices**



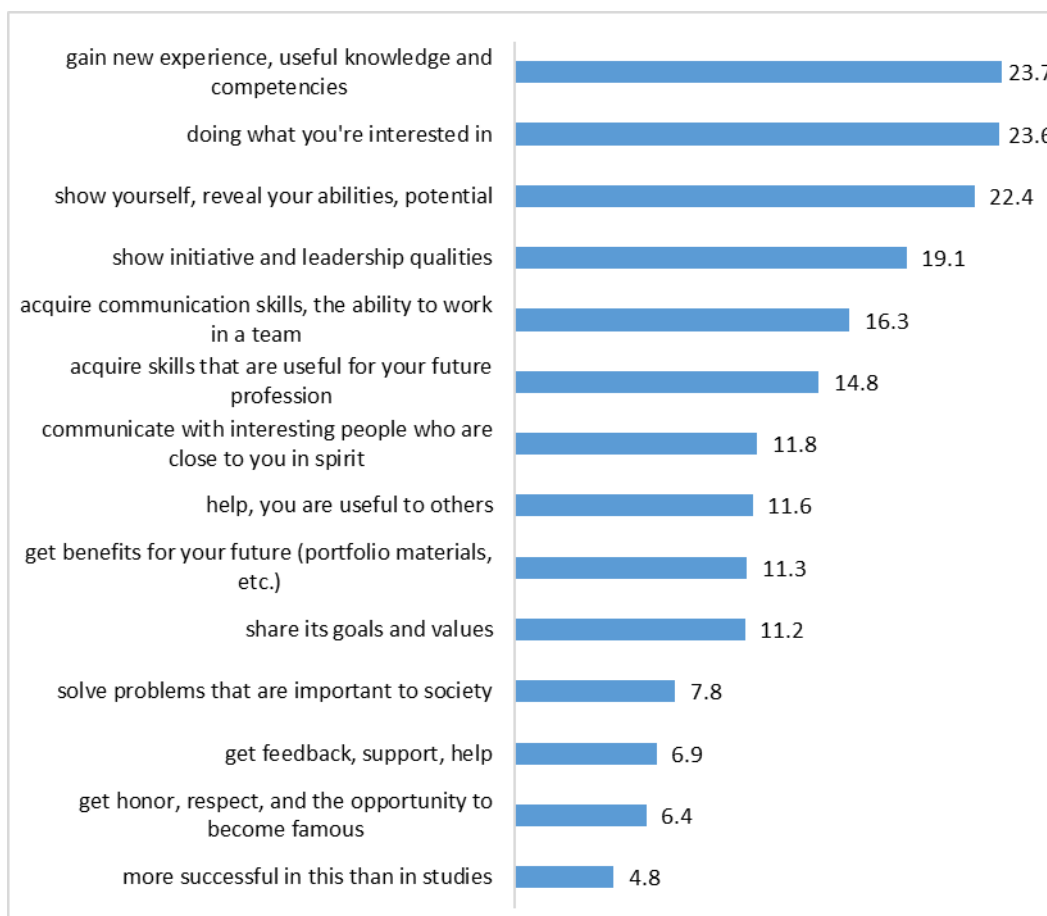
Source: survey of schoolchildren, 2023 (N = 670)

Note:  $^{**}p < 0.01$

### Agency and motivation to participate in SPB

The main motives for students' participation in SPB are: the acquisition of new experience, useful knowledge and competencies, as well as the opportunity to do interesting things, express themselves, reveal their abilities, and realize their potential. The respondents rarely mention public recognition, popularity, and the possibility of achieving success outside the educational process (Graphic 4).

**Graphic 4 – Distribution of responses to the question "SPB-related activities are important to you because you...?", in %**



Source: survey of schoolchildren, 2023 (N = 670)

If we consider how the respondents are distributed according to the agency level, then we can observe the opposite picture in many ways (Table 1). Thus, most of the respondents with the highest level of agency among those who noted that they are more successful in SPB practices than in studies, share the goals and values of SPB, and also gain public recognition and popularity.

**Table 1 - Distribution of respondents by agency level, depending on the choice of answers to the question "SPB-related activities are important to you because you...?", in %**

Answer options	Lack of agency	Low agency	Reduced agency	Increased agency	High agency	$\chi^2$
more successful in this than in studies	0.0	18.8	34.4	25.0	21.9	23.939***
share his goals and values	1.3	20.0	32.0	32.0	14.7	31.125(4)***
get honor, respect, and the opportunity to become famous	0.0	18.6	39.5	30.2	11.6	13.665**
acquire skills that are useful for your future profession	0.0	33.3	38.4	17.2	11.1	15.395**
get feedback, support, help	0.0	37.0	23.9	28.3	10.9	8.893
help, you are useful to others	1.3	33.3	37.2	17.9	10.3	7.674
solve problems that are important to society	0.0	28.8	36.5	25.0	9.6	7.089
doing what you're interested in	1.3	26.6	31.0	32.3	8.9	35.450(4)***
communicate with interesting people who are close to you in spirit	0.0	29.1	38.0	24.1	8.9	9.890(4)*
gain new experience, useful knowledge and competencies	0.6	30.8	35.8	23.9	8.8	17.912**
acquire communication skills, the ability to work in a team	0.9	32.1	33.9	24.8	8.3	9.408
get benefits for your future (materials for a portfolio, etc.)	0.0	27.0	39.2	25.7	8.1	1.824
show yourself, reveal your abilities, potential	2.7	20.7	42.0	26.7	8.0	28.916***
show initiative and leadership qualities	0.8	23.4	35.9	32.0	7.8	29.005***

Source: survey of schoolchildren, 2023 (N = 670)

Note: df = 4; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

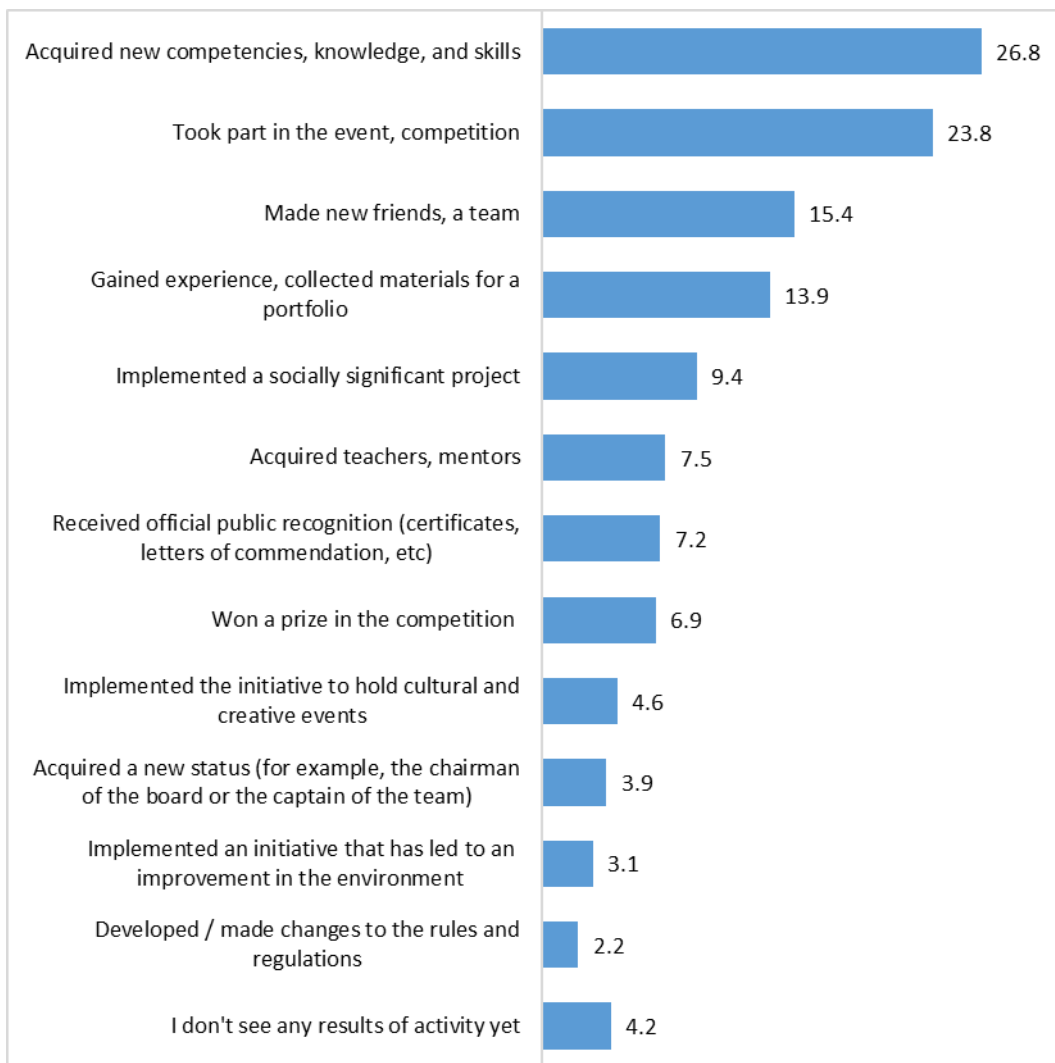
### Agency and results of participation in SPB

Speaking about the results of participation in SPB, a quarter of respondents note the acquisition of new competencies, knowledge, skills, as well as participation in competitions and events. Somewhat less often, the respondents point to making new friends, gaining new experience, and collecting materials for a portfolio. Less than 10%



mentioned the implementation of a socially significant project (Graphic 5). Even fewer (less than 5%) note such results as the implementation of an initiative to hold cultural and creative events, as well as an initiative that could lead to an improvement in the environment. The respondents rarely mention that, thanks to their participation in participatory budgeting, they were able to develop and amend rules and regulations. Thus, the study shows that in most cases, students primarily see individual acquisitions and personal development as the effects of their participation in SPB and very rarely assume the transformation of existing social structures.

**Graphic 5 - Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "What results have you managed to achieve thanks to participation in SPB?", %, 2023**



Source: survey of schoolchildren, 2023 (N = 670)

The data obtained showed that the largest proportion of schoolchildren with high agency is among those who report on amendments or the development of new rules or regulations, as well as on the implementation of socially significant projects. A high percentage of respondents with increased and high agency are also among those who note the acquisition of a new social status (for example, the head of the team) and the receipt of diplomas, commendations and other forms of official public recognition as a result of the participation in SPB (Table 2).

**Table 2 - Distribution of respondents by agency level, depending on the choice of answers to the question "What results have you managed to achieve thanks to participation in SPB?", in %**

Answer options	Lack of agency	Low agency	Reduced agency	Increased agency	High agency	$\chi^2$
Developed / made changes to the rules and regulations	6.7	13.3	33.3	26.7	20.0	9.675*
Acquired a new status (for example, the chairman of the board or the captain of the team)	3.8	3.8	30.8	42.3	19.2	26.248***
Received official public recognition (certificates, letters of commendation, etc)	4.2	20.8	33.3	27.1	14.6	14.625**
Implemented a socially significant project	0.0	12.7	39.7	33.3	14.3	33.995***
I don't see any results of activity yet	0.0	46.4	21.4	17.9	14.3	8.160
Implemented the initiative to hold cultural and creative events	3.2	22.6	32.3	29.0	12.9	7.552
Acquired new competencies, knowledge, and skills	1.1	26.1	35.0	28.3	9.4	34.599***
I made new friends, a team	1.9	22.3	39.8	27.2	8.7	17.832**
Gained experience, collected materials for a portfolio	1.1	24.7	36.6	31.2	6.5	16.059**
Took part in the event, competition	1.3	25.6	38.1	29.4	5.6	25.325***
Implemented an initiative that has led to an improvement in the environmental situation	4.8	23.8	28.6	38.1	4.8	5.141

Won a prize in the competition	4.3	15.2	41.3	34.8	4.3	13.520**
Acquired teachers, mentors	0.0	32.0	36.0	28.0	4.0	5.218

Source: survey of schoolchildren, 2023 (N = 670)

Note: df = 4; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Another important point is that among the participants of SPB practices, the proportion of schoolchildren who are focused on making changes to the functioning of existing social structures, i.e. showing high-level agency, is relatively small.

## Discussion

This study, conducted using a specially developed methodology for calculating the integral index of “general” agency, for the first time allowed us to investigate the relationship between the manifestations of general agency by schoolchildren in major fields of everyday life with the degree of involvement in the practice of SPB, seen as a very specific domain of agency, available for only some schoolchildren, depending upon the conditions in their schools and individual situations. It was expected that a positive relationship would be established here, while it is important to note that the level of involvement in SPB is positively correlated not only with agency in school life, the educational process, and finance, but also in the family and in informal communications with peers. This indirectly indicates that agency, as the ability to proactively behave is, to a significant extent, an attribute of an individual and not an effect of specific structural conditions.

This conclusion corresponds to the ideas about the effects of SPB, increased awareness of the school community about the common good, motivation to care for others, an increase in the desire to become a conductor of social change, and increased confidence in the possibility of changing the situation at school [BARTLETT, SCHUGURENSKY, 2023]. However, these effects do not provide for the transformation of power structures in educational organizations but fit into the existing social order.

The distribution of the dominant motivations for SPB participants is intriguing: the study showed that motives related to personal development, the achievement of public recognition, and respect prevail. These motives presuppose the achievement of goals that can be attributed to “first-level changes” in Hogget's terminology (2001). Nevertheless, the implementation of SPB as a practice aimed primarily at democratizing the

management of educational organizations presupposes the achievement of other goals that lie beyond the individual trajectories of students and involve radical changes in the surrounding social reality and in the life of the school community. This task presupposes "second-level changes" [HOGGETT, 2001]. However, as studies conducted in various countries show, the manifestations of such a high level of agency are hindered primarily by the limitations of the social structures themselves and their resistance as a form of internal protection from transformations. The opinion of schoolchildren is often not taken into account, they may not be listened to or they are not considered because of their age and because of the restrictive beliefs of adults towards minors [ESTEBAN et al., 2022]. It can be assumed that students are given few opportunities for real and transformative participation, and adults largely monitor the students participating in SPB, especially with regard to making decisions that are significant for the educational organization. An alternative idea is to consider "substantial citizenship" as a necessary condition for the transition from childhood to adolescence [NOVELLA CAMARA et al., 2022]. The achievement of this state is proposed through gradual autonomy, participation, and the gradual recognition of independence.

The distribution of schoolchildren by the degree of involvement in SPB (from the "Public" to the "Enthusiasts") is similar to the distribution by levels of agency: the higher the degree of involvement in SPB, or the higher the agency level, the fewer children it covers. The consequences of participation in SPB practices noted by the respondents show that in most cases, they are limited to individually significant achievements in the form of gaining new knowledge and competencies and participating in events and competitions. Only a relatively small percentage of respondents report socially significant changes, for instance adjusting rules and regulations and implementing socially significant projects aimed at improving school life. These participants show the highest level of agency. The small number of respondents characterized by a high level of agency is quite understandable, taking into account that the implementation of structural changes in most cases requires going beyond the limits of existing structures, which often leads to the rupture of established and habitual social ties (HOGGETT, 2001). Accordingly, only a few are ready to challenge these structures in this way.

Nevertheless, based on the concept of A. Bandura, a combination of internal personal qualities and structural capabilities is fundamentally important for the implementation of agency (BANDURA, 2018). In the absence of the latter, even the

brightest personal initiative may fade away [MANYUKHINA, 2022; ABEBE, 2019; VERONESE et al., 2019]. Accordingly, when implementing SPB, it is important to create conditions conducive to schoolchildren's proactive behavior. Genuine participation in SPB practices is possible only when socially significant goals aimed at improving the life of the school community are achieved. This means that the projects chosen by children should be aimed at solving urgent problems and improving the quality of education and school infrastructure. Forced participation of schoolchildren in social activities leads to the suppression of interest and de-motivates subsequent activity (ESTEBAN et al., 2022). In order for student participation to lead to educational results and social effects, it is important to contribute to the realization of socially significant goals and to provide students with the opportunity to contribute to change by making them real, not only by accepting the rules, but also by changing and improving them.

In general, the distribution of respondents' answers to the question about the results of participating in SPB in accordance with the agency level clearly indicates the implementation of socially beneficial transformations by schoolchildren, who are characterized by the highest level of agency, which is consistent with the definition of agency given above. Along with the orientation towards a constructive change in the social environment, an equally important quality of schoolchildren with increased and high agency is ambition. It manifests itself in the desire to obtain a higher social status and recognition in society.

By itself, participation in SPB implies an active position. However, as the study findings showed, in most cases this activity is limited to personal goals and individual results, such as gaining new experience and self-development. Referring to the typology of the levels of agency [HOGGETT, 2001], in these cases, we can talk about "changes of the first level" when people do what the rules dictate, remaining within structural constraints, but achieving their own goals. Relations between the first and the second level changes may be more complex and individual success in changing one's position within a structure may lead to further transformation of the structure itself, especially if the structure is aimed at supporting democratic principles and inclusivity (which is obviously the case for SPB institutions). This issue remains a topic for future studies.

## **Conclusion**

The research, for the first time, using specially developed methodology, allowed us to consider the relationship between the “general” agency shown by schoolchildren and involvement in practices of SPB (seen a specific domain of agency, available only for some schoolchildren) and to study the motives of their participation in SPB and the resulting changes. It is shown that the agency level of schoolchildren in various spheres, such as family, educational process, school life, relationships with peers, and finance is positively correlated with the level of involvement in SPB. A high level of agency and the maximum degree of involvement in SPB, are characteristic of only a small percentage of respondents. Among the motives that encourage students to participate in SPB, and the results they note, individual ones are most common, including personal development, the acquisition of new knowledge and competencies, and social mobility. SPB participants seek to amend the existing rules and regulations and implement socially significant projects aimed at improving the life of the school community.

The practical significance of this study is in the possibility of determining the educational results of SPB and their assessment in terms of agency levels. A model for diagnosing educational results was developed. This approach allows the supplementation of school education with conceptual guidelines and effectively applying a theoretically substantiated and empirically tested model in the professional development of teachers responsible for organizing SPB.

This study has some limitations, among which are its exclusively quantitative design, a relatively small sample of respondents, and a large proportion of respondents who noted "alienation" from SPB practices. This questionnaire did not allow us to determine exactly what activities the respondents had in mind although a qualitative study could show this. In the future, it seems advisable to supplement the results with data from qualitative studies (e.g. interviews), to study in more detail the factors that prevent schoolchildren from realizing socially beneficial transformations and to explore in more detail the relationship of individualistic and holistic motives with the manifestations of agency at various levels, taking into account interregional and intercountry differences.

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