The development of citizenship through mediated activities

O desenvolvimento da cidadania por meio de atividades mediatizadoras

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ABSTRACT

This text approaches the development of the concept of citizenship through media activities used in formal pedagogical practices and youth social mobilizations held in public spaces, such as the school occupations promoted by high schoolers in 2015 and 2016, as well as the youth articulation in Heliópolis, São Paulo. We aim to discuss the possibilities brought by digital tools as a support for educational development, mainly in the everyday and collective elaboration of citizenship by student youth. We collected data through online-semi structured interviews, which were analyzed based on the theoretical-methodological references of Cultural Historic Theory and Critical Geography. The results point out the importance of using digital tools for the effectiveness of the political fight and resistance carried out by the groups of young people analyzed. The concept of citizenship was clearly present among the students interviewed and it was also apprehended and widened by the social fights. Therefore, the media activities indicated an important path for formal pedagogical practices, having a formative and educational power in the context of

RESUMO

Este texto aborda o desenvolvimento do conceito de cidadania a partir de atividades mediatizadoras adotadas em práticas pedagógicas formais e em mobilizações sociais juvenis ocorridas em espaços públicos de luta, como as ocupações secundaristas de 2015 e 2016, bem como a articulação da juventude de Heliópolis, em São Paulo. Com isso, objetivou discutir as possibilidades trazidas pelas ferramentas digitais, como suporte para o desenvolvimento de atividades mediatizadoras, na escola e fora dela, visando o desenvolvimento educacional, com ênfase na elaboração cotidiana e coletiva da cidadania pela juventude estudantil. Os dados obtidos mediante a realização de entrevistas semiestruturadas (remotas) foram analisados com base nos referenciais teórico-metodológicos da Teoria Histórico-Cultural e da Geografia Crítica. Os resultados apontaram **a** importância da utilização das ferramentas digitais para a eficácia das práticas adotadas no ambiente escolar, bem como para a articulação das ações de luta e resistência política apresentadas pelos grupos de jovens estudados. O conceito de cidadania mostrou-se presente e de forma clara entre as alunas e alunos do grupo entrevistado como, também, revelou-se apreendido e ampliado pelas lutas sociais consideradas. Com

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everyday social struggles, evidencing its relevance in the process of human knowledge development.

isso, as atividades mediatizadoras indicaram um importante caminho para as práticas pedagógicas formais, assim como sua potência formativa e educativa no contexto das lutas sociais cotidianas, sugerindo-nos a relevância de serem consideradas no processo de desenvolvimento do conhecimento humano.

Keywords: Citizenship. Mediated activities. Youth mobilization..

Palavras-chave: Cidadania. Ativida mediatizadora. Mobilização juvenil.

1 Introduction

Didactic and pedagogical practices are constantly influenced, and to some extent modified, by new tools made available through ongoing technological development. This development, known as the technical-scientific-informational environment (SANTOS, 2013), has enabled us to access modern production and communication resources.

In this sense, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have produced and continue to produce important transformations in the educational context, both in formal education, developed in schools, and in the non-formal context, resulting from collective social mobilizations, since they offer new tools for the production and sharing of content, such as smartphone applications (apps), digital platforms for displaying videos, among many other digital resources.

When discussing the various possibilities for social interaction created by these tools and the global communication network (the Internet), Gohn (2018) shares his thoughts:

> The internet is one of the main factors that differentiate today's society because it has revolutionized the way civil society communicates and the way individuals interact. It provides access to information that was previously monopolized by groups and institutions or accessible only to a select few. However, this information is not only selected, focused on, and decoded by isolated individuals; there is a plurality of actors and agents disputing the interpretation and meaning of facts and data. This is where social networks, collectives, and social movements that have the power to shape public opinion come in. They decode and encode problems and conflicts based on the themes around which they are organized (GOHN, 2018, p. 119).

These tools have significantly contributed to the development of pedagogical activities, including mediated or mediating activities[2], as they have expanded and streamlined development processes. Access to these tools by professors and students has created learning contexts that deserve our attention.

These tools have become so integral that we must study and understand this new reality, considering their significant role.

The objective of this article is to discuss the possibilities that digital tools offer for supporting the development of mediating activities in and out of school, with an emphasis on educational development and the daily and collective development of citizenship among young students.

Of the many educational topics, we chose to focus our analysis on teaching geography in high school, specifically the concept of citizenship. We made this choice to narrow the scope of our doctoral research and because of the relevance of this concept when considering social practices and their educational implications.

The research aimed to identify civic practices among young people involved in secondary school occupations in Brazil in 2015 and 2016, as well as in the popular youth mobilizations that occurred primarily in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The most recent youth mobilizations across the country began with the demand for "Passe Livre" (free public transportation) in 2013, followed by other movements with very broad and distinct agendas. Occasionally, these movements were contrary to one another, such as the "Vem Pra Rua" (Come to the Street) movement (2013–2016), the "Ocupas" (Occupations) movement (2015–2016) against the "PEC dos Gastos Públicos" (Public Spending Amendment), the "CPI da Merenda" (School Meal Investigation) movement (2016), and the "Ele Não!" (Not Him!) movement (2018) (Pavan, 2021).

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[2] The terms are being used here to designate the same process, but due to their temporal aspect, we have adopted mediatized for activities that have already been completed and mediatizing for those that are ongoing.

All the movements were nationwide, with the largest demonstrations taking place in the country's main cities, except for the movement for the investigation of embezzlement of public funds for the purchase of school meals in the state of São Paulo.

In Gohn's analyses (2018), many elements are revealed in these manifestations:

> The June 2013 demonstrations, organized by young people, redefined social struggles. Before June 2013, surveys had already indicated the significant presence of young people on social media. They affected the political arena and strained the balance of power between political parties. Democracy expanded to embrace groups and movements with different repertoires, languages, and forms of expression than those usually seen on the streets until then (GOHN, 2018, p. 122).

The fundamental objective of this study was to identify educational successes resulting from mediating activities within and outside the school environment in spaces of social struggle and conflict, such as streets and other public spaces throughout the country.

The research was theoretically grounded in the primary references and authors of Historical-Cultural Theory and Critical Geography. The analyses were developed within the framework of dialectical historical materialism, a method common to both fields, from a qualitative perspective.

For the discussions presented herein, we used data obtained through semi-structured interviews and online forms (Google Forms), both of which were conducted remotely due to isolation conditions imposed by the pandemic (Covid-19) during the doctoral period.

We defined the specificities of the online form instrument, which was answered by eight out of sixteen recipients, including young students (aged 20–35) who were former participants in the 2015 and 2016 secondary school occupations from public secondary schools in four Brazilian states: Goiás, Minas Gerais, Paraná, and São Paulo. This group is referred to as the Ocupas Group.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely via WhatsApp and email with young activists from the popular movement in the Heliópolis community in São Paulo and social educators from that community.

The results provided important insights for our analysis and conclusions regarding the importance of media activity for developing human knowledge in school environments and organized social actions with the support of modern digital tools.

2. The importance of citizenship for society, both as a concept and a practice.

Many concepts and school subjects could be included in our analysis, but we have chosen to focus on citizenship. This choice was made to address a geographical concept that encompasses broad elements of individual development and is directly related to public activities within social relations.

Regarding the condition of being a citizen, Freire (2001, p. 25) emphasizes that "citizen" refers to an individual who enjoys the civil and political rights of a state, and that "citizenship" refers to the condition of being a citizen—that is, the right to have and exercise duties.

Additionally, citizenship deserves special mention due to the constant need to defend and preserve it, as it is not inherent to humans but rather results from their daily achievements.

> The so-called world wants to do away with citizenship, but each nation, each space, and each city will have the strength to recreate this citizen—who will contribute, I believe, later on, to suggesting another globalization. [...] This is our task at the beginning of the 21st century [...]. It is the recreation of citizenship through another globalization, horizontal rather than vertical like the current one, in which life is not dependent on calculation, but there is room for emotion – which is what unites men (SANTOS, 2002, p. 141-142).

This concept and its daily application are found in many official documents that guide teaching practices. One example is the latest publication that regulates teaching in basic education in Brazil: the National Common

Core Curriculum. According to this new guideline, one of the objectives of education is to empower individuals to: "Act personally and collectively with autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, resilience, and determination, making decisions based on ethical, democratic, inclusive, sustainable, and supportive principles" (Brazil, 2018).

The citizenship concept examined in this study is not merely a school subject at risk of being assimilated and forgotten; it is, above all, a way of life formed through daily struggles and social interactions, as Gohn (2012) presents.

> Citizenship is built daily through the process of political and cultural identity that everyday struggles generate. [...] The construction of collective citizenship is achieved when one begins to develop strategies for formulating demands and tactics for confronting opponents [...]. (GOHN, 2012, p. 20).

After all, citizenship cannot be assimilated without being incorporated into social practices and without constituting a direction of purpose, as Harvey (2014) points out:

> "The question of the type of city we want is inseparable from the question of the type of people we want to be, the social relationships we seek, the relationships with nature that satisfy us, the lifestyle we want to lead, and our aesthetic values. "The right to the city is therefore much more than an individual or group right to access the city's resources; it is a right to change and reinvent the city according to our deepest desires" (HARVEY, 2014, p. 28). (Harvey, 2014, p. 28).

Based on our understanding of citizenship, we guide our approaches and analyses. We seek to identify elements of civic practices in our research subjects, rather than merely recalling or memorizing the concept.

In accordance with this understanding, we identified a powerful form of transformation of existing material conditions in the actions studied due to the mastery and use of available digital tools. Iriart (2021) corroborates this understanding, emphasizing:

> When youth collectives and cultural groups, for example, inaugurate more authentic and autonomous forms of communication, combining the new media provided by digital networks with artistic expression and social mobilization, we can refer to a creative action that aims to transform society." (IRIART, 2021, p. 428).

Thus, changes in individual and collective practices have shifted our focus to understanding the contributions of mediating activities based on Historical-Cultural Theory and Critical Geography teaching in schools and beyond to establish citizenship as another tool for social coexistence.

3. The contribution of mediated activity to forming the concept of citizenship

Among the main concepts developed by Historical-Cultural Theory, the concept of mediated activity deserves special attention in this analysis. Its implementation allows for significant progress in developing pedagogical practices, including formalized and systematized practices in the school environment and informal practices in youth mobilizations. The concept of mediatizing activity stems from the concept of mediating activity, which results from the relationship between tools and signs (Vygotsky, 1995; 1998).

These activities permeate human relations and should be explored by pedagogical practices in forming and expanding concepts, as well as in developing human knowledge more generally.

> There are direct and mediated relationships between people. Direct relationships are expressed through instinctive forms, movements, and expressive actions. [...] At a higher level of development, mediated relationships appear, whose fundamental feature is the sign through which communication is established (VIGOTSKY, 1995, p. 148).

Mediatized activities, which have been extensively analyzed and discussed by Vigotsky and various authors of the Historical-Cultural Theory, such as Leontiev (1978) and Petrovsky (1980), among many others, have been reshaped

through modern information and communication technologies (ICTs), present in our daily lives and their multiple didactic and pedagogical possibilities.

> Our society is undergoing a period of transformation. These changes are occurring due to new information and communication technologies, which are gradually becoming intertwined with educational activities. The computer revolution has brought with it countless impacts that have, in turn, affected various social areas. Education is no exception to this change. Technology is increasingly present in schools and in student learning, whether through the use of technological equipment or through projects involving education and technology (OLIVEIRA; MOURA; SOUSA, 2015, p. 76).

Furthermore, these targeted activities proved to be essential for the development of human knowledge, since they promote the desired contexts for questioning and expanding school content.

> From this perspective, objective activity is that which is mediated by psychic reflection, consisting of the development of different levels and forms and guiding the subject in the objective world. This activity is inextricably linked to social relations and is based on the concept of "necessity," which guides and regulates it. The creation of new human needs drives individuals to learn and develop (Mello, 2018, pp. 50–51).

In his studies on the contributions of this theory to global psychology and the expansion of human knowledge, Fino (2018, p. 2) highlights Vygotsky's statement: "[...] human social and psychological processes are formed through tools, or cultural artifacts, which mediate interaction between individuals and between them and their physical surroundings."

In the same vein, Vygotsky (1998, p. 70) emphasizes the role of signs created in these intentionally mediated relationships: "The sign acts as an instrument of psychological activity in a manner analogous to the role of an instrument in work." These activities have recently come to rely heavily on digital tools that comprise the sociocultural universe of today's communities. Although to varying degrees, contemporary social segments have access to these resources, which impacts their daily practices. Our pedagogical practices are

also part of the context of the transformations that social relations are undergoing. They are affected daily by the changes that surround us and, in the best-case scenario, improved, promoting human development and affirming humans as social and collective beings, not just biological ones. As Vásquez (2007, p. 125) reinforces, "To be human, one cannot remain in one's subjectivity; one must objectify oneself. But in this objectification, he makes himself present as a social being." In this sense, tools of social mastery allow people to redefine themselves as subjects and recreate the material conditions through which they establish themselves and relate to each other.

> [...] to live in society, the biological foundations that nature provides to individuals genetically are not enough; they need to appropriate at least some cultural heritage created historically and socially by previous generations to objectify themselves as social beings, transforming it through their activities (OLIVEIRA, 2010, p. 23).

Due to the mastery of modern tools and their incorporation into everyday teaching practices, as well as the association of these tools with culturally created signs, we observed significant results in our research on learning the concept of citizenship among the surveyed young people, suggesting successful mediation activities.

These activities point to a promising path for critical geography education, as stated by Souza (2011).

> This theoretical dimension has revealed clues for understanding how geography professors construct their knowledge and the role that mediation plays in this process. Associated with the notion of higher function, mediation is the process that allows social issues to be brought to the social and psychological dimension of the individual." (SOUZA, 2011, p. 129).

Keeping this perspective in mind, we developed our approach with the Ocupas Group[3], aiming to gather elements for analyzing the contribution of formal

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[3] This group, as described in the introduction, was part of the group of people analyzed in the doctoral research from which this article derives.

educational processes intentionally mediated in the school context. When asked about their understanding of this concept, the people in this group responded emphatically and clearly, as shown in the following graph. This group, as described in the introduction, was part of the group of people analyzed in the doctoral research from which this article stems.

Figure 1 – The concept of citizenship according to the students' understanding—Occupy Group.
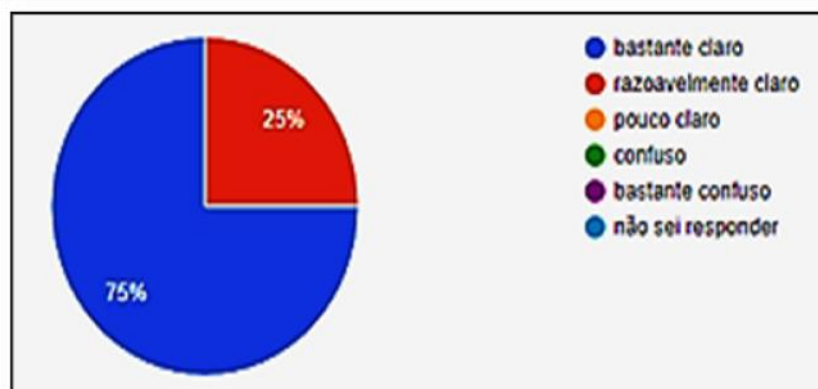
Source: Pavani (2021, p. 124).

This clear notion, or even the reasonably clear notion that they reported having, was related by them to the school content covered in a wide range of subjects, according to the information gathered in the chart below:

Figure 2 – Contribution of subjects to understanding the meaning of citizenship, according to student assessment – Ocupas Group.
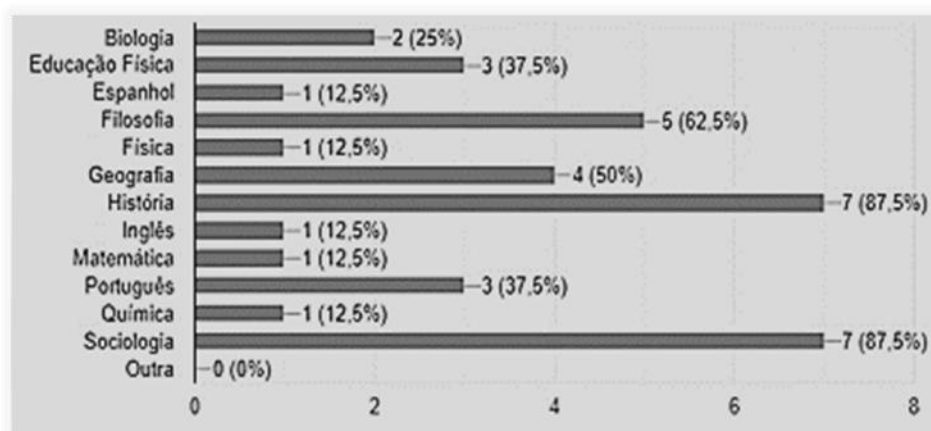
Source: Pavani (2021, p. 125)

Although the interviewees reported greater proximity between humanities subjects such as history, sociology, philosophy, and geography, the other subjects were also related to the development of this school content, albeit more commonly in the aforementioned subjects.

More broadly, the interviewees emphasized the importance of school curriculum practices, whether they occurred in the classroom or in unconventional settings, such as courtyards and amphitheaters[4].

This information leads us to another important aspect of our analysis: mediatized activities that occur outside of schools but are still relevant to the formation of concepts and individuals. Activities outside the school environment are another important aspect of Historical-Cultural Theory and pedagogical practices, which is why they are addressed in this analysis. We were inspired by the educational potential of collective social activities, such as the high school occupations in Brazil in 2015 and 2016 and the activities that have emerged in the Heliópolis community in São Paulo recently.

The organization of collective actions, in both occupations and popular mobilizations in Heliópolis, awakened our interest in studying and understanding the educational possibilities of these activities.

The analyses reinforced the importance of social relations established in sociocultural contexts for developing human knowledge and citizenship among individuals amidst relations and, above all, social mobilizations. In both cases, youth initiatives supported by digital tools were crucial for the mediations carried out and the successes achieved.

In the case of secondary school occupations, ICTs—especially communication tools such as phones with chat apps—streamlined the actions and strategies adopted in the mobilizations. Student groups discussed and planned their action goals in a short amount of time because they were

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[4] In the interviews, several responses indicated the occurrence, during the school years spent in high school, of planned media activities carried out beyond the classroom, highlighting the importance of didactic innovation, such as conversation circles and public debates, which were highlighted in the responses given.

connected and shared information with other occupying groups from different schools in the state and country.

Additionally, they debated actions to defend themselves against threats from people opposed to the movement, as well as from the police. These actions were quickly shared with other groups, strengthening the resistance and the movement.

When analyzing the organization and development of the secondary school occupations, Groppo (2020, p. 31) states: "What we found in empirical reality was not a fragile copy or exoticism, but rather an active collective youth life with great autonomy and creative capacity."

The decision to occupy and close schools to prevent the implementation of a decree by São Paulo's governor, Geraldo Alckmin, which would have led to the closure of 94 state schools and the relocation of students to more than 750 other schools throughout the network, revealed the intentional actions of the mobilized student groups.This was another relevant aspect of the occupations because the young people gathered there established the parameters for their actions in a horizontal, democratic, and creative way, creating new meanings and significance for their condition as students and citizens.

> [...] The perception of school spaces also changes with use. Spending long periods of time in a space triggers a process of appropriating it, both concretely and symbolically. During the occupations, students worked hard, cleaning daily and organizing special efforts to cut weeds, unclog gutters and drains, reorganize storage areas, and revitalize walls with graffiti and paint. These types of activities were a substantial part of the occupation routine, interspersed with recreational, cultural, and educational activities, as well as assemblies (Campos et al., 2016, cited by Kuboyama & Cunha, 2019, p. 38).

In terms of the democratization of youth decision-making and collective action, the experiences and achievements of the youth in Heliópolis, São Paulo, are noteworthy. As a typical peripheral community of a large urban center in an underdeveloped country like Brazil, Heliópolis lacks many goods and

services that public authorities are responsible for providing. The community lacks daycare centers, schools, quality medical care, basic sanitation, and sufficient recreational spaces. In short, it would be easier to list what is available in adequate quantities—which is almost nothing. Thus, all adversities faced by society in general tend to be more pronounced in areas such as Heliópolis for obvious reasons. Since the end of 2019, the pandemic situation caused by the coronavirus and the risks posed by the virus have imposed restrictions and isolation on us. The inability to work, study, or participate in any in-person activities has forced us to find ways to perform our duties remotely. Many people have viewed this new reality as an opportunity for learning and overcoming challenges.

However, staying at home in isolation and carrying out activities remotely has become the newest capitalist barrier, almost insurmountable for these disadvantaged communities, as is the case in Heliópolis. After all, in precarious houses and shacks, without the slightest infrastructure, without water and sewage, let alone internet coverage, how would it be possible to maintain hygiene to prevent contamination?

Or, even more so, how can they carry out their work activities while maintaining social distance? Except in a few cases, most of the people who live there do not work in companies or hold prominent positions. They are mostly day laborers and general service providers, informal workers with no professional registration. Not showing up at the homes where they work or other informal workplaces would result in dismissal. These people have become even more vulnerable due to the uncertainties generated by the severity of the economic crisis that has come to dominate the national and international scene as a result of the pandemic.

For these and many other reasons, this population did not have the luxury of heeding the call to stay home—not even in their homes. They had to go out and face chaos.

However, in this adverse scenario, the younger population of Heliópolis established strategies to overcome and survive, taking action to compensate for the routine absence of public authorities and the difficulties caused by the pandemic.

This ability to overcome difficulties through social organization finds theoretical support in Petrovski (1980), who calls it "volitional activity." According to the author, "These are conscious actions directed toward a specific goal and related to efforts made to overcome obstacles that arise along the way." "These are conscious actions directed toward a specific goal and related to efforts made to overcome obstacles that arise along the way." (Petrovski, 1980, p. 361).

Unable to attend in-person classes due to the lockdown imposed to protect public health, young people were faced with a dilemma: How could they continue studying for end-of-year and college entrance exams without internet access to follow remote classes?

Once again, when faced with difficulties, it was the "volitional activities" of young people, supported by digital tools, that mitigated them. These young people organized into WhatsApp groups and began sharing didactic content and discussing how to solve simulated exercises. This contributed to overcoming some of the difficulties they faced.

Although these activities occurred outside the school environment, they were motivated by the desire to bring the community closer to educational activities and content, which were inaccessible due to social isolation at that time.

Thus, in both cases, the connection between the activities that occur in school, as part of the pedagogical planning, and the activities that occur in other learning environments, such as public spaces where social struggles and conflicts take place, was fundamental to the formation and development of the concept of citizenship.

In both analyzed groups—the interviewed group and the mobilized youth—the adopted concept of citizenship was understood by the subjects, as shown in the responses of the Ocupas Group in Figure 1 and in their relationships with various school subjects in Figure 2, as well as in the relationships established between

participants in the high school occupations and those mobilized in the streets and alleys of Heliópolis.

Understanding the importance of complementarity between these activities within and outside the school environment, as well as considering them for future educational actions, seems crucial to their success.

Modern digital tools developed in a sociocultural context have gained meaning and relevance as they have become part of the daily activities of mobilized youth.

Human activities give technologies their function as tools for transforming material conditions. These conclusions reiterate Vásquez's (2007) assertion that humans become human by overcoming their subjectivities and objectifying their practices.

Final thoughts: Citizenship is shaped by practice.

It's not something you can just learn in school.

It's not something you can memorize in isolation, either. Rather, it's the result of collective practice.

Some of these conclusions were obtained through our analysis. We identified how dependent the concept of citizenship is on social practices, since it is reshaped daily through these actions.

Recently, digital tools, such as information and communication technologies (ICTs), have played an important role in supporting these actions and developing educational mediations.

Our studies have shown that mediating activities developed in non-formal, collective social practices are relevant spaces for expanding on content formally covered in a school setting, particularly the concept of citizenship, which is fundamental to the social sciences.

These mediating activities complement each other by combining systematic didactic efforts in school education with learning developed in the context of youth

social mobilizations. These mobilizations occurred in struggles and confrontations in various public spaces.

The results highlight the need for a more detailed analysis of these activities' potential for didactic-pedagogical practices and the most effective ways to use digital tools to carry them out.

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