

The Role of the Blue Economy in Promoting Sustainable Economic Development in Albania

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Abstract—The Blue Economy has emerged as an important framework for promoting sustainable economic growth through the responsible use of marine and coastal resources. For Albania, with its extensive coastline and rich marine biodiversity, the Blue Economy represents a significant opportunity to strengthen economic development, increase employment, and support environmental sustainability. This paper examines the potential of the Blue Economy in Albania, with a particular focus on fisheries, maritime tourism, and marine resource management. The study aims to identify the main opportunities and challenges associated with the development of a sustainable Blue Economy model in Albania. Key issues analyzed include marine pollution, limited infrastructure, insufficient investment, and weak institutional coordination. The paper also highlights the role of international organizations, particularly the World Bank and the European Union, in supporting Albania’s transition toward a sustainable maritime economy. The methodology is based on a descriptive and comparative approach supported by a literature review and secondary data analysis. Statistical data from INSTAT, the World Bank, and other institutional reports are used to evaluate current trends and future development potential. In addition, a SWOT analysis is applied to assess Albania’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to Blue Economy development. The findings indicate that Albania possesses strong natural and strategic advantages for developing a competitive Blue Economy. However, several structural barriers remain, including inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, and limited financing. The study concludes that sustainable policies, increased investment, and stronger environmental governance are essential for the long-term development of the Blue Economy in Albania.

Keywords—Blue Economy, Sustainable Development, Maritime Tourism, Fisheries, Albania

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of the Blue Economy has gained increasing global attention as a strategic approach for achieving sustainable economic growth while preserving marine and coastal ecosystems [1]. The Blue Economy promotes the responsible use of ocean and coastal resources to support economic development, employment, food security, and environmental sustainability. It encompasses a wide range of sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, coastal tourism, renewable marine energy, and marine biotechnology [2].

Figure 1. Main Components of the Blue Economy

Blue Economy development strategy		
Knowledge Management: 1- use and activities 2- assessment of assets 3- identification of risks, conflicts and synergy.	Government and risk management reforms: 1- identifying pathways to prosperity in the marine environment 2- identifying public funds and spending them on sustaining the blue economy.	Encouraging private investment: 1- identifying potential investors 2- ranking sectors based on investment potential 3- identifying new sources of private investment.

Source : Author

For developing and transition economies, the Blue Economy offers significant opportunities to diversify economic activities and improve long-term resilience [3]. Albania, due to its strategic geographic position along the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, possesses considerable potential for the development of maritime industries. The country’s coastline, marine biodiversity, natural landscapes, and cultural heritage create favorable conditions for the expansion of blue tourism, fisheries, and other marine-related sectors. In recent years,

these sectors have become increasingly important contributors to employment and economic growth.

Despite this potential, Albania continues to face several structural and environmental challenges that limit the sustainable development of the Blue Economy. Marine pollution, overexploitation of natural resources, insufficient maritime infrastructure, weak institutional coordination, and limited investment capacity remain significant barriers. Furthermore, the effects of climate change and the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased pressure on marine ecosystems and coastal economies.

Given these challenges, the development of an integrated and sustainable Blue Economy strategy has become increasingly important for Albania [4]. This paper aims to analyze the opportunities and challenges associated with Blue Economy development in Albania, focusing particularly on fisheries, maritime tourism, and sustainable marine resource management. The study also evaluates the role of public policies, international organizations, and strategic investments in supporting the country’s transition toward a more sustainable and competitive maritime economy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Concept of the Blue Economy

In recent decades, the concept of the Blue Economy has emerged as an important framework for promoting sustainable economic development through the responsible use of marine and coastal resources. The Blue Economy integrates economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being by

encouraging sustainable activities related to oceans, seas, and coastal areas [5]. According to the World Bank, the Blue Economy refers to the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of marine ecosystems.

The concept includes a wide range of sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, coastal tourism, marine renewable energy, and marine biotechnology. Unlike traditional economic models focused mainly on resource exploitation, the Blue Economy emphasizes long-term sustainability, environmental governance, and the efficient management of natural capital [6]. Recent studies [7] highlight that marine ecosystems provide not only direct economic benefits but also important ecosystem services such as biodiversity protection, carbon sequestration, and coastal resilience against climate change.

B. Blue Economy and Sustainable Development

The Blue Economy is strongly connected to the principles of sustainable development and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14, which focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources. Several studies have shown that sustainable maritime industries can contribute significantly to economic growth, employment creation, poverty reduction, and food security, especially in developing and transition economies.

Tourism, fisheries, and maritime transport are among the most important sectors contributing to the growth of the Blue Economy [8]. Coastal tourism has become a major source of income for many Mediterranean countries, while sustainable fisheries and aquaculture contribute to food production and export growth. At the same time, researchers [9] emphasize that the uncontrolled exploitation of marine resources, marine pollution, and climate change represent serious threats to the long-term sustainability of these sectors.

Recent literature [10] also underlines the importance of integrating environmental protection into economic policies.

Previous studies have highlighted the impact of technological innovation on accounting and corporate finance, emphasizing both the opportunities and the challenges associated with digital transformation processes [11]. The valuation of marine natural capital and the promotion of environmentally responsible investments are considered essential components for achieving sustainable blue growth.”

C. Challenges of the Blue Economy in Developing Countries

Despite its significant potential, the implementation of the Blue Economy faces several challenges, particularly in developing and transition economies. Limited infrastructure, insufficient institutional capacity, weak regulatory enforcement, and lack of financial investment are among the main barriers identified in the literature. Similar structural vulnerabilities have also been identified in Albanian SMEs, particularly regarding cybersecurity preparedness and organizational resilience. Previous studies found that insufficient employee training, lack of regular backups, and the absence of incident response plans significantly increase exposure to operational and digital risks in Albanian businesses [12]. In many countries, marine pollution,

overfishing, biodiversity loss, and climate-related risks continue to threaten the sustainability of coastal and marine ecosystems. The Albanian experience offers a replicable model for emerging nations seeking to integrate academic resources into their national AI development objectives, particularly in areas such as FinTech. [13].

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of maritime sectors such as tourism, fisheries, and maritime transport. Restrictions on mobility and disruptions in global supply chains negatively affected coastal economies and reduced the performance of several marine industries. Studies suggest [14] that improving resilience, strengthening governance, and increasing public-private cooperation are essential for supporting sustainable blue development. In a context where FinTech is significantly transforming the way financial services are delivered, Albania faces natural development challenges, but also holds potential for technological adoption [15].

The digital transformation of the banking industry has ushered in a new era filled with both opportunities and challenges, particularly in the realm of identity verification [16]. This research [17] contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on e-banking adoption patterns in developing economies and offers strategic recommendations for banks to improve service delivery. This study [18] investigates best practices in ESG reporting and its impact on financial performance, offering insights into how businesses navigate regulatory pressures and investor expectations. A comprehensive ESG reporting framework can bridge the gap between corporate actions and sustainable development goals, enabling companies to create long-term value while addressing environmental and societal concerns

D. Opportunities for Albania's Blue Economy

Albania possesses significant natural and strategic advantages for the development of the Blue Economy. Its geographic position along the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, combined with rich marine biodiversity, coastal landscapes, and cultural heritage, creates favorable conditions for the expansion of maritime tourism, fisheries, and aquaculture. In recent years, tourism and fisheries have become increasingly important contributors to economic growth and employment in coastal regions such as Durrës, Vlorë, and Sarandë .

However, several structural challenges continue to limit the full development of Albania's Blue Economy. These include insufficient maritime infrastructure, marine pollution, weak environmental governance, and limited investment capacity [19]. Existing studies [20] on Albania mainly focus on tourism development or fisheries management separately, while there is limited research examining the Blue Economy as an integrated development model. Therefore, this study [21] aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing a broader analysis of the opportunities and challenges associated with sustainable Blue Economy development in Albania.

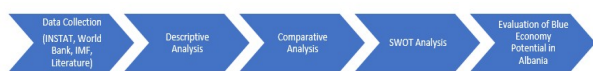
III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study applies a descriptive and comparative research approach to examine the potential of the Blue Economy in Albania and its role in promoting sustainable economic development. The research combines qualitative and quantitative elements in order to provide a broader understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with maritime sectors such as fisheries, tourism, and marine resource management.

The descriptive approach is used to analyze the current state of Albania’s maritime economy, including existing infrastructure, marine resources, environmental issues, and economic performance. In addition, the comparative approach evaluates international experiences and best practices related to Blue Economy development, particularly in Mediterranean and European countries.

Figure 2. Research Methodology Framework



B. Data Collection

The study is based on secondary data collected from national and international institutional sources. Statistical data and official reports were obtained from INSTAT, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania, and other relevant organizations. These sources provide information related to fisheries, maritime tourism, marine biodiversity, trade activities, and environmental sustainability.

In addition, the study incorporates academic literature, policy reports, and previous research studies related to the Blue Economy, sustainable development, and marine governance. The literature review supports the theoretical background and helps identify the main challenges and opportunities associated with Blue Economy implementation.

C. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and comparative analysis techniques. Statistical indicators related to fisheries production, tourism development, and maritime infrastructure were interpreted in order to evaluate the current performance and future potential of Albania’s Blue Economy sectors. Furthermore, a SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with Blue Economy development in Albania.

The analysis also examines the relationship between sustainable resource management, economic growth, and environmental protection, emphasizing the importance of integrated policies and long-term strategic planning.

D. Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis relies mainly on secondary data and institutional reports, which may not fully reflect recent developments in Albania’s maritime sectors. Second, limited availability of updated national statistics and sector-specific studies may affect the depth of

the analysis. Finally, the study focuses primarily on Albania, which may limit the generalization of findings to other regional contexts.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. State of Albania’s Blue Economy

Albania possesses significant maritime and coastal resources that create favorable conditions for the development of the Blue Economy. Fisheries, maritime tourism, and coastal economic activities have become increasingly important contributors to employment and economic growth, particularly in coastal cities such as Durrës, Vlorë, and Sarandë. Due to its strategic geographic position along the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, Albania has the potential to strengthen its role in regional maritime development and sustainable coastal tourism.

The fisheries sector remains one of the most important components of Albania’s Blue Economy. According to INSTAT data, the Albanian fishing fleet increased from 559 vessels in 2017 to 752 vessels in 2021, reflecting a gradual expansion of maritime economic activities and increased interest in fisheries and marine production. The largest concentration of vessels is located in the port of Durrës, followed by Vlorë and Sarandë, confirming the importance of these coastal regions in supporting the maritime economy.

Figure 3. Distribution of the Albanian Fishing Fleet by Ports (2017–2021)

Emërtimi	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Description
Shpërndarja e flotës sipas porteve						
Durrës	204	233	243	272	285	Durrës
Vlorë	181	198	198	229	234	Vlorë
Sarandë	84	99	103	103	111	Sarandë
Shëngjin	73	78	79	91	92	Shëngjin
Himara	10	12	15	9	13	Himara
Lushnje - Fier	7	12	13	16	17	Lushnje - Fier
Gjithsej	559	632	651	720	752	Total

Source: INSTAT 2017-2021

Furthermore, Albania possesses rich marine biodiversity, with more than 40 fish species identified in national fisheries statistics. Fish production experienced fluctuations during the COVID-19 pandemic, decreasing significantly in 2020 due to restrictions in economic activity and disruptions in supply chains. However, production recovered in 2021, indicating the resilience and long-term potential of the fisheries sector.

Table 1. Fish Species and Quantities Caught in Albania (2017–2021)

Detar, Bregdetar, Laguna/ Marine, Coastal line, Coastal lagoons							
Species	Njësia matëse/Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Species
Asuga	Tonë/tonnes	320	1,516	1,227	256	1,199	European anchovy
Karkaleci thellësi	Tonë/tonnes	1,473	1,275	962	1,026	1,034	Deep-water rose shrimp
Merluç	Tonë/tonnes	940	872	731	751	703	European halib
Sardële	Tonë/tonnes	1,065	460	677	384	671	European pilchard
Barbut	Tonë/tonnes	470	347	373	333	399	Surmullet's nei
Të pa specifikuar	Tonë/tonnes	155	41	16	6	9	Marine fishes nei
Skampi	Tonë/tonnes	389	257	213	194	211	Norway lobster
Oktopod	Tonë/tonnes	137	176	185	154	141	Common octopus
Kallamar	Tonë/tonnes	113	129	170	183	210	Common squids nei
Skumbër	Tonë/tonnes	37	116	97	116	122	Scamber mackerel's nei
Ton	Tonë/tonnes	57	100	156	169	163	Atlantic bluefin tuna
Starvide	Tonë/tonnes	105	95	163	171	154	Jack and horse mackerel's nei
Sejë	Tonë/tonnes	83	79	60	67	79	Common cuttlefish
Vaqe	Tonë/tonnes	83	75	100	101	94	Bisque
Shajë	Tonë/tonnes	69	67	20	36	21	Common sole
Koce	Tonë/tonnes	65	57	59	41	47	Gilthead seabream
Levek	Tonë/tonnes	43	45	60	75	69	European seabass
Qofull	Tonë/tonnes	72	44	40	35	41	Mullet's nei
Karkaleci detit	Tonë/tonnes	33	38	43	66	72	Carnote prawn
Spalçë	Tonë/tonnes	44	31	52	52	64	Pardoran nei
Gjil	Tonë/tonnes	10	22	19	51	57	Gurnards
Shkator	Tonë/tonnes	21	20	21	26	32	Megrim
Shprat (Papalina)	Tonë/tonnes	22	17	20	23	29	European sprat
Hënëz deti	Tonë/tonnes	21	17	32	33	35	Manfishes nei
Dentall	Tonë/tonnes	17	15	16	28	21	Common dentex
Shajë	Tonë/tonnes	10	11	10	-	26	European flounder
Palamid	Tonë/tonnes	11	7	29	35	40	Atlantic bonito
Konger	Tonë/tonnes	5	6	5	10	9	European conger
Kem	Tonë/tonnes	7	6	1	5	6	Grouper's nei
Amet (Lolja)	Tonë/tonnes	12	6	9	12	5	leerfish
Peshkuqen Pëllumb	Tonë/tonnes	37	5	-	-	-	Smooth-hounds nei
Symadhe	Tonë/tonnes	5	4	4	-	10	Silversides
Gulë	Tonë/tonnes	6	3	5	9	14	Greater amberjack
Vangola	Tonë/tonnes	1	2	4	-	-	Striped venus
Korbë	Tonë/tonnes	3	-	-	-	-	Croakers
Mdhja mesdetare	Tonë/tonnes	25	-	-	-	-	Mediterranean mussel
Peshkë Shpat	Tonë/tonnes	16	-	-	-	-	Swordfish
Rombe	Tonë/tonnes	1	-	23	25	28	Turbot
Karkaleci i kuq	Tonë/tonnes	-	-	48	65	69	Aristaeomorpha foliacea
Gallorri blu	Tonë/tonnes	-	-	20	24	31	Blue Crab
Karkaleci violet	Tonë/tonnes	198	125	130	135	124	Blue and red shrimp
Muskardin	Tonë/tonnes	-	-	7	130	131	Ecdone spp.
Peshku Kovac	Tonë/tonnes	-	-	9	13	17	John dory
Cikale	Tonë/tonnes	101	116	123	125	111	Mantis Shrimp
Gjithsej	Tonë/tonnes	6,282	6,202	5,936	4,965	6,298	Total

Source: INSTAT 2021

Maritime tourism represents another important pillar of the Blue Economy in Albania. The country's coastline, natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and increasing international tourism demand create favorable opportunities for the development of sustainable coastal and marine tourism. Tourism has become an important contributor to GDP and employment, while yacht tourism and marine recreational activities are increasingly attracting foreign visitors. However, Albania still faces important infrastructural limitations, including insufficient marina capacity, limited coastal transport infrastructure, and inadequate investment in maritime services.

Despite these positive developments, the current state of Albania's Blue Economy continues to face several structural and environmental challenges. Marine pollution, overfishing, weak enforcement of environmental regulations, and limited institutional coordination continue to affect the sustainable management of marine resources. In addition, insufficient investment in innovation, research, and maritime infrastructure limits the country's ability to fully capitalize on its coastal and marine potential.

B. Main Challenges of Blue Economy Development

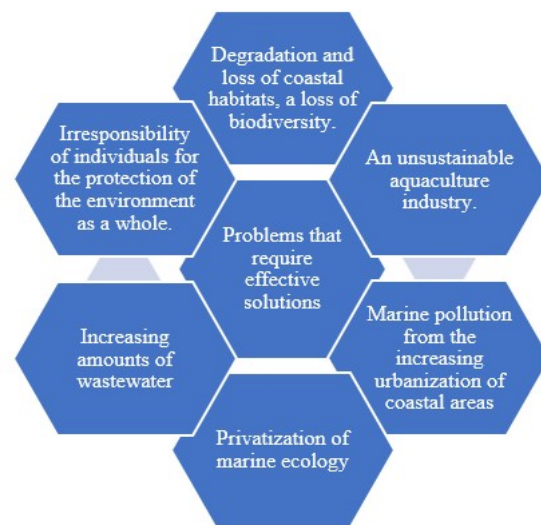
Although Albania possesses significant natural advantages for developing a sustainable Blue Economy, several challenges continue to hinder the sector's long-term growth and competitiveness. One of the major concerns is marine pollution, particularly plastic waste and wastewater discharge caused by rapid urbanization and inadequate environmental management. Pollution negatively affects marine ecosystems, biodiversity, fisheries productivity, and the attractiveness of coastal tourism destinations.

Another important challenge is the overexploitation of marine resources and unsustainable fishing practices. Weak

monitoring systems and insufficient enforcement of fisheries regulations have contributed to biodiversity loss and reduced productivity in certain marine areas. The literature emphasizes that sustainable fisheries management is essential to preserving marine ecosystems while maintaining long-term economic benefits for coastal communities.

Infrastructure limitations also represent a major barrier to Blue Economy development in Albania. Despite the country's favorable geographic position, maritime infrastructure remains underdeveloped compared to other Mediterranean countries. The limited number of marinas, insufficient anchorage capacity, and inadequate coastal transport systems reduce Albania's competitiveness in maritime tourism and related industries.

Figure 4. Main Challenges Affecting Blue Economy Development in Albania



source: author

Institutional and financial challenges further complicate the implementation of sustainable Blue Economy policies. Limited public investment, weak interinstitutional coordination, and insufficient support for research and innovation reduce the effectiveness of development strategies. In addition, the lack of specialized professionals and technical expertise affects the country's ability to manage marine resources efficiently and implement sustainable maritime policies.

The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed the vulnerability of maritime sectors such as tourism, fisheries, and maritime transport. Restrictions on mobility and disruptions in global trade negatively affected economic activity in coastal regions and highlighted the importance of increasing resilience and sustainability within the Blue Economy sectors.

C. Opportunities and Development Potential

Despite existing challenges, Albania possesses significant opportunities for developing a competitive and sustainable Blue Economy. The country's strategic position between the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, combined with its natural landscapes, biodiversity, and cultural heritage, creates strong potential for expanding maritime tourism and attracting foreign investment. Coastal tourism, yacht tourism, and marine recreational activities could become major drivers of

economic growth if supported by sustainable infrastructure and effective environmental management.

The fisheries and aquaculture sectors also offer important development opportunities. Improving fisheries management, investing in sustainable aquaculture systems, and promoting seafood processing industries could increase exports, employment, and economic value creation. Furthermore, the adoption of environmentally sustainable fishing practices would help preserve marine biodiversity while ensuring long-term productivity.

An important opportunity highlighted in this study is the creation of a national maritime brand such as “Blue Albania.” A strong national brand could improve Albania’s international visibility, support tourism promotion, and increase the competitiveness of Albanian seafood and maritime products in foreign markets. In addition, aligning Blue Economy strategies with European Union policies and regional Adriatic-Ionian initiatives could strengthen Albania’s access to international funding, technical assistance, and regional cooperation opportunities.

The study also emphasizes the importance of innovation, research, and public-private partnerships in supporting sustainable Blue Economy development. Investments in environmental protection, marine technology, digitalization, and coastal infrastructure could contribute significantly to improving economic resilience and long-term sustainable growth.

D. SWOT Analysis Discussion

The SWOT analysis highlights both the strengths and the structural limitations of Albania’s Blue Economy development. One of the country’s main strengths is its favorable geographic position and extensive coastline, which provide strong opportunities for maritime transport, fisheries, and tourism development. The growing contribution of tourism and fisheries to employment and economic activity demonstrates the increasing importance of maritime sectors within the national economy.

However, the analysis also identifies several weaknesses, including marine pollution, biodiversity loss, weak environmental governance, and limited infrastructure capacity. These issues continue to reduce the efficiency and sustainability of Blue Economy activities. The lack of sufficient investment and technical expertise further limits the country’s ability to modernize maritime industries and improve competitiveness.

At the same time, Albania has important opportunities to expand its Blue Economy through sustainable tourism, fisheries modernization, and the development of a national maritime identity such as “Blue Albania.” Increasing international demand for environmentally sustainable tourism and seafood products creates favorable conditions for long-term growth. Nevertheless, threats such as weak law enforcement, climate change, and environmental degradation remain important risks that require integrated policy responses and stronger institutional coordination.

Overall, the findings suggest that Albania possesses considerable potential to establish a sustainable and competitive Blue Economy. However, achieving long-term success will require stronger governance, strategic

investments, environmental protection measures, and greater cooperation between public institutions, private businesses, and international organizations.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of the Blue Economy represents an important opportunity for Albania to promote sustainable economic growth, strengthen coastal development, and improve the management of marine resources. Due to its strategic geographic position along the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, rich marine biodiversity, and growing tourism sector, Albania possesses significant potential to expand maritime industries such as fisheries, aquaculture, maritime tourism, and marine services.

The findings of this study indicate that the Blue Economy can contribute positively to employment creation, economic diversification, and environmental sustainability. The fisheries and tourism sectors have already demonstrated their importance for local economic development, particularly in coastal regions such as Durrës, Vlorë, and Sarandë. In addition, the increasing international demand for sustainable tourism and environmentally friendly products creates favorable opportunities for Albania to strengthen its competitiveness in regional and international markets.

However, the study also identifies several challenges that continue to limit the sustainable development of the Blue Economy in Albania. Marine pollution, biodiversity loss, overexploitation of marine resources, insufficient maritime infrastructure, weak institutional coordination, and limited financial investment remain important barriers. Furthermore, the effects of climate change and external economic shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have increased pressure on coastal and marine sectors. To overcome these challenges, Albania needs to develop integrated and long-term Blue Economy policies focused on sustainability, environmental protection, and innovation. Greater investment in maritime infrastructure, fisheries modernization, marine research, and coastal tourism is essential. In addition, stronger cooperation between government institutions, private businesses, local communities, and international organizations is necessary to support sustainable blue growth. Continued investment, workforce training, and regulatory support will be essential for sustainable development [22]. Microfinance plays a crucial role in enhancing financial inclusion by providing accessible and flexible credit opportunities, particularly for low-income individuals and small businesses [23].

The study also highlights the importance of creating a national maritime identity through initiatives such as the “Blue Albania” brand. Such an approach could increase international visibility, promote sustainable tourism and seafood exports, and strengthen Albania’s position within the Adriatic-Ionian region. Overall, the Blue Economy offers Albania a strategic pathway toward long-term economic resilience, environmental sustainability, and regional competitiveness.

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