



Alcohol ▲ Concern

ALCOHOL CONCERN

Alcohol and the Night-time Economy

Factsheet 1: SUMMARY

ALCOHOL CONCERN is the national agency on alcohol misuse, working to reduce the level of alcohol misuse and to develop the range and quality of helping services available to problem drinkers and their families. We are England's primary source of information and comment on a wide range of alcohol-related matters.

The Alcohol Concern Information and Communications Team provides a range of services including: producing its research bulletin *Acquire* and the *Alcohol Magazine* and website, and collating and interpreting the latest research in order to produce factsheets. The team also provides a telephone information line and a unique library of alcohol related literature.

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- The advantages and disadvantages of alcohol's impact on the night-time economy are hotly contested issues. This factsheet examines the positive and detrimental effects of drinking on the evening leisure culture. It considers what can be done to manage the worst excesses of alcohol misuse.

- The evening leisure industry is huge, as illustrated by the following:

There are currently 110,000 on-licence premises in England and Wales, an increase of 30% over the last 25 years

Applications for on-licences are running at 5000 per annum, an increase of over 145% over equivalent licenses granted in 1980

The pub and club industry turns over £23 billion per year – equal to 3% of the UK Gross Domestic Product.

- The night-time economy can benefit a local community by stimulating the refurbishment declining areas – a range of bars, restaurants and clubs attracts visitors and tourists, while at the same time improving facilities for local residents. Food and drink establishments also provide employment opportunities the community.
- Among the negative effects of the night-time economy is that it offers more opportunities for people to binge-drink and engage in anti-social behaviour. Consuming large quantities of alcohol in a short space of time is particularly common among 18-24 year olds and drinkers put themselves at increased risk of having accidents, are more likely to take sexual risks and get behave anti-socially.
The wider community suffers from aggressive, drunken behaviour, increased noise and litter and increased pressure on the emergency services.

This is a summary of the detailed factsheet which follows.
Factsheets on other topics are also available.

Factsheet revised
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The role of alcohol in the night-time economy

Introduction

Over the last decade the centres of many UK towns and cities have altered considerably. One noticeable feature is the proliferation of large fashionable bars, pubs and clubs, often located in 19th century industrial or commercial buildings, symbols of former prosperity. It is now accepted that the growth of night-time leisure has a role to play in rebuilding urban economies with metropolitan centres pointing to *“the vibrancy of their nightlife as a growing economic sector and a key indicator of a healthy economy and populous”*¹

However, the advantages and disadvantages of alcohol’s impact on the night-time economy are hotly contested issues. This article examines the positive and detrimental effects of drinking on the evening leisure culture. It considers what can be done to manage the worst excesses of alcohol misuse.

Background

The Government is committed to the idea of a *“resurgence in city centre living”* which is laid out in its Urban White Paper *“Our Towns and Cities: The Future - Delivering an Urban Renaissance”*.² 2 The creation of a 24-hour or night-time economy is an important element of the urban renaissance; particularly the development of night time cultural and leisure activities. Its significance is outlined in the writings of urban theorists such as Federico Bianchini, Ken Worpole and J. K Montgomery. In theory,

“cultural activities canprovide the catalyst for physical and environmental renewal, attract spending and capital investment to an area, generate new economic activity and jobs and change or enhance an area’s image”.³ 3

The experience of cities such as Leeds, Newcastle and Manchester suggest that there are major benefits to developing night-time leisure activities. However, urban regeneration depends upon a balance being struck between the needs and interests of different groups and the activities that take place in city centres. At present it appears that for many towns the night-time economy is dominated by a mono-culture of young people en masse enjoying a good night out. Very different from the ideal of the southern European city where people of all ages mingle comfortably into the late evening.

The night-time leisure economy is a highly profitable, fast growing sector of the economy. So far the bulk of the investment has gone into the development of licensed premises with alcohol consumption as principal feature of the hedonistic night-culture. Target drinks marketing and drinks promotions such as ‘happy hours’ help to make alcohol consumption a core activity for people on a night out.

The following figures provide a picture of the growth and size of the on-licence trade in the United Kingdom in 2002/3:

- There are currently 110,000 on-licence premises in England and Wales, an increase of 30% over the last 25 years
- Applications for on-licences are running at 5000 per annum, an increase of over 145% over equivalent licenses granted in 1980
- The pub and club industry turns over £23 billion per year – equal to 3% of the UK Gross Domestic Product.⁴

Much of the momentum for growth and change in this sector pre-dates the government plans for urban rejuvenation. And although many of the initial changes came about as a result of government legislation (Beer Orders Act) market forces now drive much of the development in this sector. It’s clear that concentrated financial power on this scale could have a significant impact on local communities. For some cities/towns it has brought both benefits and problems.

Benefits of the night-time leisure economy: the community

- Improvement of declining city areas through the refurbishment of historical buildings and streets that can revitalise business and social/culture life in an area, eg. the £120 million Grainger Town Project in Newcastle (1997). Note that one effect of regeneration projects is to push up property prices in an area, but there are disadvantages to this price increase. (see section on related problems)⁵

- Attractive bars, restaurants and clubs attract visitors and tourists eg Manchester attracts up to 100,000 visitors on Friday and Saturday night.⁶ This raises the profile of a city, making it eligible for awards such as the “European Capital Culture”, which in turn can attract further investment and visitors. NB the average bar, club or restaurant is estimated to contribute more than £100,000 every year to its local economy.⁷
- Improved facilities benefit locals and improve the reputation of a town.
- Lively streets with more people moving around make people feel safer and reduce fear of crime.
- Increased employment as the night-time leisure economy employs large numbers, with 518,000 being employed in pubs and bars in 2003.⁸ However, it should be noted that the Low Pay Commission (1998) found that 40% of people employed in the hospitality industry were paid below the minimum wage, the highest proportion of any sector in the economy.⁹

Benefits of the night-time leisure economy: the individual

- For those who enjoy going out it provides increased leisure opportunities and a wider choice of places to relax and socialise.
- The development of a leisure culture tailored to people’s changing lifestyles, particularly in the case of young people with more time and money to devote to leisure activities. With the current trend of people settling down and having families later, more people in their late 20s and early 30s are taking advantage of night-time leisure facilities.

Problems of the night-time economy

It is the problems associated with the night-time economy that tend to dominate media coverage and discussions within central and local government.

Alcohol misuse is frequently identified as a cause of many of the resulting problems. A recent MORI poll commissioned by Alcohol Concern showed that 80% of police officers believed that alcohol was a factor in 3 out of 5 incidents on Friday and Saturday nights and 55% of paramedics estimated that 3 out of 5 patients treated at these times were there as a result of alcohol misuse. Although those aged 16-34 were the most regular visitors to town centres at night (45% going “at least once a week”) this figure dropped dramatically to 25% among 35-54-year-olds and 15% among those age 55+ and of these 71% claimed they visited either “less than once a month” or “never”.¹⁰

So far concern has focused on the increasing levels of crime and disorder in town centres resulting from excessive drinking by thousands of revellers in the locality. However, alcohol misuse in this context can impact on the individual and have wider implications for the community.

The individual

National surveys show that excess drinking and binge-drinking are on the increase among the young adult population. Binge-drinking is of particular concern. The Home Office Youth Lifestyles Study 1998/99 found that 39% of the 18-24-year-olds surveyed were binge-drinkers ie they got very drunk at least once a month compared to 42% of regular drinkers who drank at least once a month but got drunk much less often.¹¹ A detailed study of young people in the North West showed that 96% of club goers are current drinkers and they consume an average of 11.5 units on a night out.¹² This pattern of drinking can have long-term health effects but it can also have immediate serious implications, including:

- **Accidents** – intoxication can make people disorientated, which increases the risk of accident and their condition would be exacerbated in nightlife settings. It’s estimated that 20-30% of all accidents are related to alcohol consumption.¹³
- **Road Accidents** – Alcohol contributes to road accidents with 20% of drivers killed on the roads having illegal blood alcohol levels¹⁴ and 74% of pedestrians killed at night having blood alcohol levels above the legal driving limit of 80mg/100ml.¹⁵
- **Offending** - Binge-drinkers are 3 times more likely than regular drinkers to get involved in incidents such as fights, arguments, theft or damaging/destroying something.¹⁶
- **Sexual risk-taking** – Excess drinking is associated with unsafe sex which can result in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Alcohol is the key drug identified in cases of drink spiking and date rape¹⁷ with most pubs, bars and clubs as the most common location where drugging take place.¹⁸

- **Poly-substance use.** Studies show that among young people who go regularly, drinking status is related to recreational drug use with only 14.8% of non-drinkers ever having tried a drug compared to 78.5% of drinkers who had ever tried a drug.¹⁹

The community

Violence and public disorder

Violent incidents are a common feature of city centre night life with 13,000 incidents per week taking place around pubs, bars and clubs in the UK.²⁰ Alcohol misuse is reckoned to be a factor in 40% of assaults²¹ and consumption of alcohol or other substances increases the risk a person's becoming either a perpetrator or a victim of a violent attack.²² The link between alcohol and aggression is complex and factors such as personality, learned patterns of drunken behaviour and environment also play a role. The environment factor is particularly significant as dark, noisy and crowded surroundings are known to increase feelings of aggression. The situation is often exacerbated by problems such as poor transport facilities leading to arguments and fights later on the streets.

Studies suggest a complex relationship between increases in alcohol-related violence and density/proliferation of licensed premises. For example in Newcastle the total recorded number of violent incidents fell between 1997 and 2001. However, a 38% increase was recorded in the Quayside area in this period - corresponding to the regeneration of the area which saw a 19% increase in the capacity of licensed premises. Similar localised increases in alcohol-related violence were experienced in the Gay Village in Manchester between 1997 and 2001.²³

Pressure on emergency services

The presence of so many intoxicated people on the streets and the problems arising from drunken behaviour can put tremendous pressure on emergency service such police and A&E departments.

- Police are already under pressure to juggle resources to cope with high levels of inner city crime, and public disorder tends to require a "swift labour intensive response". Currently cities such as Manchester attract up to 100,000 visitors to pubs and clubs over the weekend and Nottingham up to 50,000 but Manchester police can only deploy between 30 and 40 officers on the streets at night while Nottingham is policed by 20-25 officers.²⁴ This diverts them from more serious forms of crime. In addition a visible police presence is vital in reducing public fear of crime and attracting diverse groups to city centres at night.
- Up to 35% of all A&E and ambulance costs are estimated to be alcohol-related (c £0.5bn). At peak times between midnight and 5pm over weekends, 70% of attendances are alcohol-related, with violent assault being the most common reason for attendance. In addition to treating intoxicated patients, staff may also be assaulted by these patients.²⁵

Environmental problems

Although the night-time leisure economy can contribute to regeneration of city centre areas it also creates environmental problems including:

- Noise emanating from the pubs and clubs themselves and from people on their way home when venues close.
- Concentration of young people engaging in anti-social behaviour such as arguments, street urination and fouling, al-fresco sex and vandalism
- Increased street refuse.
- Day-time and night-time business premises can suffer damage and loss of earnings as a result of vandalism.

These combined problems can be intolerable for residents in central urban areas and for many living in local authority or trust housing, moving away is not an option. Night-time operators are also aware of the need to maintain their properties and the surrounding area.

One more long-term problem that needs consideration is that of inflated property prices. Drawing people back to city centre living is a key tenet of the 'urban renaissance'. However, high prices will deter all but the young high-earning property owner and, unfortunately, these do not stay long enough to foster the sense of community that is required. In addition inflated property prices combined with market forces mean that less profitable cultural activities such as live music venues, comedy clubs and theatres cannot afford to operate in areas dominated by 'super pubs and clubs'. So it is more difficult to create a diverse leisure culture in city centres needed to attract different age groups and interest groups.

What can be done?

The night-time economy has the potential to benefit local communities but it's clear that the downside that results from excess drinking needs to be managed. There are a number of approaches that have been suggested:

Raising awareness of the problems of alcohol misuse

Recent UK studies show that the majority of young 'go-outers' are not delinquents but conventional young people who study, train and work during the week. For them intoxicated time out makes this worthwhile as part of a "work hard -play hard strategy".²⁶ One Home Office study revealed that young drinkers were sceptical about the possibility of reducing alcohol consumption but they did identify increased education in schools as a possible means.²⁷

While education in schools could influence the behaviour of future generations of drinkers, the problem is how to target the current group of young adults out drinking. Attempting to bring about an attitude change in young people can be an uphill struggle. According to Eric Appleby, Chief Executive of Alcohol Concern:

*"Trying to put people off drinking doesn't work....What we're working towards is identifying the things about drinking that don't fit in with a young person's projected image of themselves such as vomiting or embarrassing themselves or strikes a cord over issues such as personal safety."*²⁸

The Portman Group launched a national anti-drunkenness campaign in 2001 with the slogan "If you do drink, don't do drunk" aimed at addressing people's attitudes. The North West Safer Nightlife Group identified a range of public health initiatives to reduce alcohol consumption in the North West and concluded that they had a much greater chance of success if they included targeted initiatives to address issues such as the links between alcohol and unprotected sex and were distributed widely throughout night-time settings. *Some local authorities have gone further and combined these initiatives with voluntary agreements with licensees to stop the use of irresponsible drinks promotions and initiatives such as cooling periods in venues so that alcohol is not sold in the last hour.*²⁹ It is hoped that the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy due out this year will give a national lead on an appropriate strategy to reduce binge drinking.

Policing the night-time streets

There are two core elements to the management of crime and disorder in the night-time economy – the level of crime itself and the public's perception of crime. Both of these need to be addressed if a diverse, inclusive night-time culture is to prosper in UK towns and cities. Reducing night-time disorder has been a key priority with the Government, which has implemented a range of legislation and initiatives to achieve this - including:

- The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which placed a statutory duty on local authorities and police to conduct local crime audits and draw up strategies for tackling identified problems. As a result alcohol-related crime was identified as a major problem in many areas. The ODPM: Housing, Planning Local Government and the Regions Committee is pushing for the Home Office to place a statutory requirement on local night-venue operators to participate in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.³⁰
- The Home Office (2000) Action Plan on Alcohol which aimed to:
 - reduce problems caused by underage drinking
 - reduce public drunkenness and to prevent alcohol-related violence
- Alcohol bylaws making it possible for local authorities to ban drinking on the streets.
- The Private Security Industry Act 2001 that requires all door supervisors to be trained and registered and prevents individuals with a criminal record for violent crime being employed as door supervisors.³¹
- The Penalty Notice for Disorder scheme introduced as part of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. This scheme allows for penalties to be imposed for low-level and anti-social behaviour and nuisance committed by over 18-year-olds with several of the penalties relating specifically to alcohol misuse being drunk and disorderly.³²
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 aims to ensure that the police have adequate powers to tackle anti-social behaviour in the community. This includes widening the use of Fixed Penalty notices to include 16-17- year-olds. It also increases powers to shut down noisy establishments and improves the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).³³
- The Police Reform Act (2002) gives chief police officers the power to appoint appropriate people as Community Support Officers (CSOs) under a community safety accreditation scheme. CSOs will have

the power to issue fixed penalty notices and seize alcohol from young people on the street and detain people under certain conditions. In addition to their law enforcement powers, CSOs could play a significant role in reducing anti-social behaviour and public fear of crime. As a visible force on the streets at night they should be able to deter low-level disorder.

The issue of policing of the night-time leisure economy is a hot topic. Partly because of concerns over the effectiveness of the new police powers but it is also debateable whether the police forces will have sufficient resources to enforce these new powers. In particular it is thought that the extended licensing hours that could result from the new Licensing Act (2003) will stretch police resources too thinly (see section on Licensing reform). The ODPM committee has requested that the impact of the new act be carefully monitored and that the Government investigate the idea of imposing a 1% levy of the annual turnover of night-time operators to pay for any additional policing that might be needed.³⁴

Town and city planning

Based on the experience of the different cities and towns with growing night-time economies, the ODPM Committee established that "cities with the fewest problems are those who take a proactive approach to the management[of these]". Also it is important for planning and licensing applications to be considered in the context of a long-term vision for the area³⁵. However, local authorities produced evidence showing that current planning regulations present difficulties for planners. The key ones are as follows:

Zoning – the 1996 revision of Planning Policy Guidance 6 recommends the subdivision of larger cities into distinct quarters including zones for leisure and entertainment uses. This can work well when properly planned in larger cities but it can also produce entertainment ghettos dominated by hordes of young people. Zoning does not foster the mixed use of areas and the new licensing regime may aggravate the situation, enabling drinkers to migrate from bar to nearby bar rather than produce staggered dispersal of drinkers through varying closing times.

Use Class orders and concentration of licensed premises.

The Town and Country Planning (Use classes) Order 1987 (UCOs) allocated a standard A3 classification for all premises selling food and drink for consumption on the premises. Over time, use of A3 premises can change without a new class order being required so a cafe can become a bar and similarly cinemas can become nightclubs. The impact of these different types of use on a locality can be considerable. The Government is currently investigating changes to the Use class orders and a first statement on the proposed changes will be made in March 2004. It is understood that local authorities will have the power to consider concentration of similar use premises in a small area when considering planning applications.

However, the ODPM Committee noted that as the implementation of planning regulations can be very rigid, it would be helpful if the cumulative effect of many premises operating in a small area could be considered as part of a licensing application. The proposed licensing system is more flexible as licenses can be revoked or varied depending on local conditions. (See the section "The Impact of the Licensing Act 2003")

There are concerns over the Government's plans to create a new Use class, A3c for 'super-pubs' of over 100 sq m in size to differentiate them from nightclubs. The classification will be based on the size of the premises. However, many smaller pubs/bars will operate as 'super-pubs' in effect. Also super-pubs and nightclubs have very similar uses and user groups. It's recommended that 'super-pubs' and nightclubs be placed in separate D class and the classification take account of capacity as well as floor space.

Another problem is that premises that operate as cafe-bars during the day can be transformed into vertical drinking venues at night once chairs and tables are removed. Cafe bars that sell food should provide seating/tables for the whole time they're open. Guidance is required on how planning authorities can ensure that the interior of premises are fit for the purpose they state in the planning application for the whole time they are open.

Tackling the impact of night-time venues on the environment

Apart from tightening up on planning regulations for the establishments, a number of other measures have been proposed to control the environmental impact of the night-time economy such as

- Changes to the building regulations and noise acts to include requirements for the installation of sound delimiters or the creation sound locks in entrance halls opening onto the street. The use of noise enforcement patrols to monitor the level of noise emanating from premises, though as yet there are no powers to regulate transient noise on the streets.
- A recommendation that the ODPM place a requirement on licensed operators to maintain the immediate vicinity of their premises.

- The introduction of Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) to enable local authorities and local businesses to develop local areas jointly. Businesses will be able to vote to fund additional services and amenities such as additional street cleaning, improved street lighting or additional community Officers.
- Closer liaison between local authorities, police, transport providers and late-night operators to provide safer late-night transport to ensure the rapid dispersal of crowds and reduce the risk of arguments or fights

With so many elements to consider the ODPM has proposed that the Government require all local authorities to produce management strategies for the night-time economy in their areas. Such strategies would need to be informed by baseline data on numbers and concentration of premises and outlets and also the full range of associated problems. Findings from the six pilot projects to be set up by the Civic Trust should provide guidance on best practice. The Government has now published its response to the ODPM select committee's report, accepting some recommendations but not others. It is not yet clear what line the Government will take within this changing situation.

Impact of the Licensing Act 2003

The main controlling factor for the future development of the night-time economy will be the implementation of the proposed Licensing Act 2003. Unfortunately it looks as if the act could prove as much part of the problem as the solution to many of the problems outlined above. The possible implications of the act are enormous. This section looks at some of the key issues in relation to the night-time economy.

Operation of the proposed licensing regime

Briefly the Act gives licensing responsibilities to local authorities which are required to develop a licensing policy that meets the objectives of the Act, being:

- prevention of crime and disorder
- public safety
- prevention of public nuisance; and
- protection of children from harm

The Licensing Act sets out a single integrated system for all premises that sell alcohol, sell late-night refreshments and provide entertainment. A premises licence is required for each establishment and a personal licence is required by each licensee. Each premises licence will carry a range of conditions with regard to opening hours, capacity and operating requirements. Local authorities will be able to attach conditions to the license to meet the objectives of the Act³⁶

Potential problems

Whereas fixed closing times for licensed premises have tended to result in large numbers of people exiting onto streets at the same time and increasing the risk of violence and disorder. Flexible hours aim to produce staggered closing times that should result in the gradual dispersal of crowds. Unfortunately they could just mean that the disorder occurs later or over a longer period, making it more difficult to police.

It is hoped that flexible opening hours will contribute to more sensible drinking behaviour and, in particular reduce, the binge-drinker behaviour that is associated with fixed closing times. Unfortunately the Scottish experience suggests that longer opening times result in increased binge-drinking unless other controls are put in place.

These problems could exacerbate the pressures that night-time leisure activities already place on local communities. Agencies responsible for managing the night-time economy have identified several disadvantages to the new regime and suggested ways to lessen potential problems including:

Input to the licensing process. Currently the new Act allows for specified agencies and groups of individuals to comment on licensing applications. However, transport operators cannot comment even though they provide the essential services that to ensure people get home safely and also that crowds are more quickly dispersed. Similarly the draft guidance on the act states that "*conditions cannot be attached to licenses specifically to address public health issues*".³⁷ Yet public health issues such as alcohol misuse, particularly binge-drinking, have a direct effect on street disorder and people's safety. The Government is being asked to reconsider the range of agencies that can comment on applications.

Burden of evidence. Although local residents will have the power to object to a licence, there is concern that the Act places too much emphasis on the need to produce "*evidentiary proof*". This could prove difficult and costly for residents to produce, so the ODPM Committee is recommending that local authorities be able to

accept resident's "sworn evidence of nuisance"³⁸

Cumulative effect. During the passage of the bill through Parliament, the ODPM Committee recommended that given the pressures caused by large numbers of people in city centres at night, licensing strategies should define the "upper capacity in terms of people with which particular areas ...can reasonably cope at given times of the day".³⁹

So far, the Government has rejected the idea that licenses should be reviewed solely on the grounds that a high concentration of people in an area can result in crime and disorder, though it accepts that there should be upper limits imposed on individual premises on the grounds of public safety. The ODPM Committee is now urging the creation of impact pilot projects to assess the effects of cumulative impact and methods of "demonstrating 'direct'; causal connections between capacity and crime and disorder".⁴⁰

Corporate social responsibility. The drinks industry is a major driving force behind the development of the night-time economy. The trade as whole is in favour of changes outlined in the new Act. In particular, responsible bodies such as the British Institute of Innkeepers see it as an opportunity for professional licensees to "better discharge their responsibilities to customers and the local community".⁴¹

However, there will always be less reputable operators that will respond to market pressures by offering irresponsible drinks promotions such as 'happy hours'. There is pressure for local authorities to be given powers to ban this type of promotion. However, responsible practices also need to be encouraged and these could include:

- Recognition of the value of the British Institute of Innkeeping's National Certificate for Licensees as a pre-requisite for obtaining a personal licence.⁴²
- Working with local licensees to develop voluntary agreements on good practice for example by refusing entry to known trouble makers or introducing 'cooling off periods' in which no alcohol is served in the last hour.⁴³
- Development of professional codes of practice for licensees.⁴⁴
- The introduction of legislation that makes the participation of operators in partnerships aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour a licence condition.⁴⁵

Experience has shown that liaison with licensees can be highly effective in reducing problems of the night-time economy.

The Act is due to be implemented early in 2005, however, there are signs that the organisational structure of the new regime is already being put in place and local authorities are being asked to prepare licensing policies. The new Act gives considerable powers to local authorities. However, successful implementation of the act will depend on authorities striking a balance between the interest of local businesses and their customers and protecting local communities from the downside of the night-time economy.

Conclusion

It's clear that for most of the UK's larger towns and cities the night-time economy is a feature of modern living that it is here to stay. Successful management of night-time leisure will depend on a proactive planning by all local agencies to ensure the creation of a diverse leisure culture that the whole community can participate in. This will mean the use of many local partnerships and an integrated approach that ensure issues such as public health are not neglected. This paper has focused on creating a safe context for people's drinking. However, it is clear that the missing piece in future planning is the National Alcohol Harm Strategy which is urgently needed to provide overall coherence in tackling the harms caused by alcohol.

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