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The Diversity of Value Construal: A Constructivist Approach to the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values

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ABSTRACT

The Schwartz theory of basic values is the leading model in psychological research. However, few studies qualitatively approach how people make sense of value types. We propose a way to investigate this by focusing on emerging adulthood, a developmental period of exploration. Furthermore, participants are situated in the context of Balkan societies that are characterized by transitions. Relying on personal construct theory, we explored potential interpretations of values, their subordinate constructs, diversity, valence, and similarity to the definitions proposed in the theory. We used pyramiding in order to prompt constructs subordinate to each of the ten values. We applied thematic analysis to identify subordinate constructs in the 5866 responses obtained from 281 participants. The results show that participants understand abstract values through constructs that refer to specific actions, feelings, and personality traits. The values varied in the number of subordinate constructs and the degree of their deviation from the conceptual definition. There are also differences in the connotations of values or their desirability. Results show that all values, except Universalism, have a subordinate construct that expresses the negative side of the value. This study offers a more contextualized and content-oriented approach to values and has implications for future studies.

Values are one of the central concepts in social sciences and humanities. The Schwartz model of individual values (Schwartz, 1992) has been widely used in social sciences as it provided the field with a variety of scales for the measurement of personal values (Schwartz et al., 2001) and since its circular structure (Schwartz, 2015) and its use in cultures around the world has been supported empirically (Schwartz et al., 2001). The ten values which express ten end-states that people see with different degrees of importance have been found to motivate a wide range of attitudes (e.g., Beierlein et al., 2016; Dreezens et al., 2005) and behaviors (e.g., Daniel et al., 2015; Vecchione et al., 2015;). Empirical research has found that the ten motivations expressed in value types exist in nearly every society in the world (Schwartz et al., 2001). The idea of universality prompted researchers to treat values as a tool that can unveil how people from

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different societies understand their social realities (cf. Roccas & Sagiv, 2010) The observed cross-cultural variations would be then ascribed to characteristics of the societies. Little research, however, has attempted to explore how different people make sense of the values. This study aims to address this issue by investigating the diversity of the meanings behind the ten values which coexist within a single social group – emerging adults from Serbia. It is the first part of the project which proposes to investigate values from the constructivist perspective, as superordinate, bipolar constructs constituted upon meanings of their subordinate constructs.

This study relies on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of personal construct theory (PCT, Kelly, 1955). In PCT a person's constructs are organized in a hierarchical manner and can be superordinate or subordinate to each other, depending on relationships between them. To explore the meaning of the ten values, we propose treating those as superordinate constructs. In line with PCT, to understand the meaning behind the value types one needs to reveal their subordinate constructs. The exact composition of these hierarchies is unique to every person and depends on their experiences and social environment. Our focus is on emerging adults, who deal with the developmental task of identity and value exploration that results in a variety of diverse interpretations. In addition, Serbia, a country that has been experiencing social, political, and economic transformations over the past decades is the societal context of this study. Societies in transition expose their youth to fluid and plural systems of meanings (Tomanović & Ignjatović, 2006).

Overall, this study intends to create a venue for researchers to investigate the meanings behind value types and expand already established theoretical understanding of how people make sense of individual values and their functioning in developing societies, as well as provide future research with a more comprehensive account on values in the form of an expanded list of their subordinate constructs, since the diversity of constructions stands for the richness of meaning behind values.

Personal values, their characteristics and meanings

The Schwartz (1992) theory of basic values distinguishes ten types of values (Table 1), which represent basic motivations that serve as guiding principles in people's lives. While all values share a motivational function, the specific motivations they convey make them distinct from one another. The defining goals of some values are rather similar and can be pursued at the same time, others can be perceived as incompatible and mutually exclusive within a single act (Schwartz, 2012). The dynamic relationships between values have found their reflection in the position of each value type on a two-dimensional motivational continuum (Schwartz, 1992). One dimension represents values that either prioritize the outcomes for oneself or for others – "personal vs. social" focus. The second dimension describes whether the values emphasize the preservation of the existing order of things or the exploration of the unknown – "self-protection/anxiety-avoidance vs. growth/anxiety-free focus" (Schwartz, 1992; 2012).

The classification of the value types in accordance with their position on both continua yields two pairs of conflicting higher-order values – openness to change vs. conservation and self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence (Figure 1). Although people can disagree on the importance of different values, it seems that each value can equally legitimately occupy

Table 1. Definitions of basic values according to their motivational goals (from Schwartz, 1994, p. 22).

Value	Definition
Self-direction	Independent thought and action – choosing, creating and exploring
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and challenge in life
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, or relationships, and of self
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one has frequent personal contact
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature

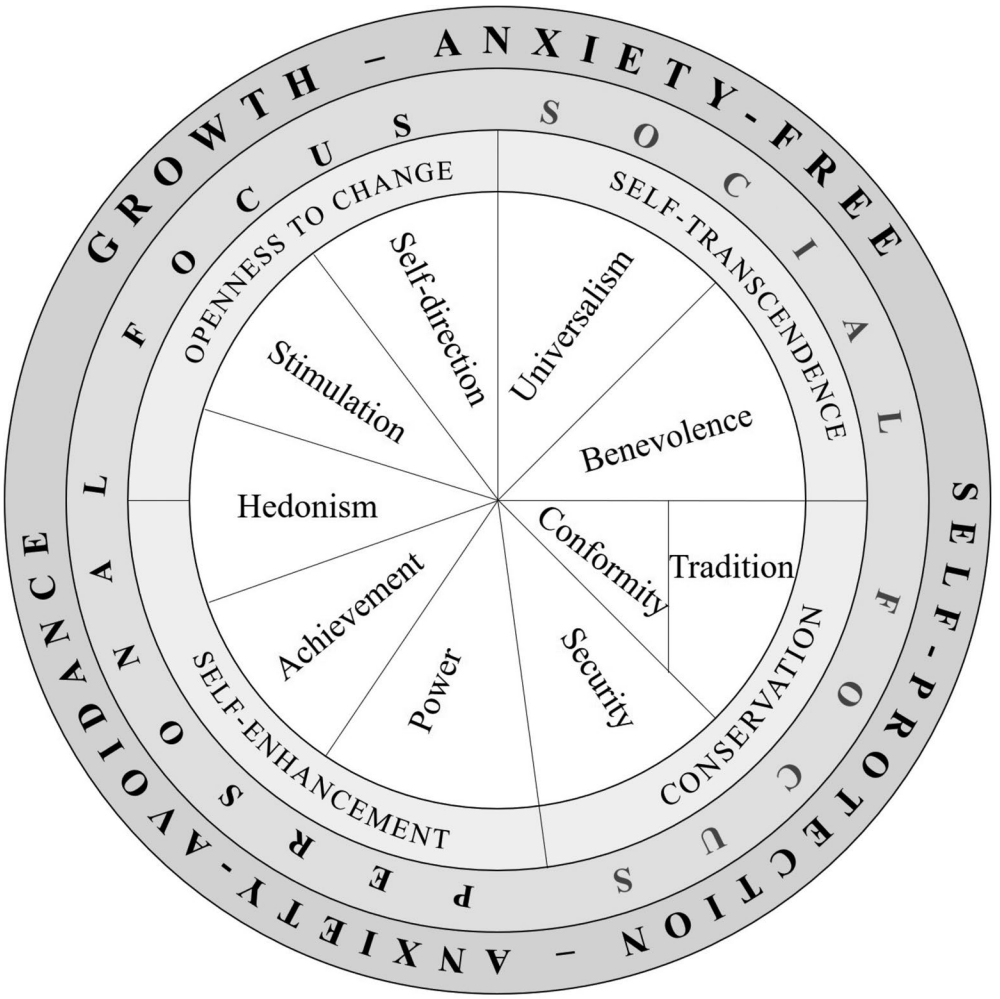

Figure 1. Relations between the basic values according to schwartz's theory of basic values.

the position of the most important one. As Roccas et al. (2014) show, people are typically satisfied with their values, regardless of the exact hierarchy of value priorities.

Values have multiple functions – they provide orientations of what is good and desirable (Schwartz, 1992), motivate behaviors (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992) and attitudes (Beierlein et al., 2016), navigate expectations (Mokosińska et al., 2016), inform decision making (Feather, 1995), and reveal people's concerns (Schwartz et al., 2000), to name some. The wealth of empirical evidence gathered from around the world demonstrates the utility of values in informing different aspects of human activities. Roccas and Sagiv (2010) claim that values help to reveal how people understand various objects, actions, and situations. The capacity of values to serve as a "phrasebook" which provide insights into deeper understanding of how people make sense of their social realities inspired comparative research of interrelations between values and other psychological phenomena (e.g., Schultz & Zelezny, 1999; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995). Interestingly, while some patterns of interrelations are similar across societies (Davidov et al., 2008), others show significant variations, showcasing the differences between cultures (e.g., Barni et al., 2016).

How similarly people from different groups understand values is an important question in value research. Doubts that the ten values can have universal meanings across societies have been expressed by researchers from different countries (Peng et al., 1997; Renner & Salem, 2005). For example, a qualitative study with a Russian sample (Efremova et al., 2017), identified cultural and semantic gaps in the intended meaning of values and those the respondents recognized in the items of SVS. Those concerns were addressed in quantitative studies, when the degree of the equivalence of the meaning was deduced from the pattern of interrelations between the value types (e.g., Fontaine et al., 2008).

In the past two decades, value research focused on the identification of the core ideas behind values: the revised value theory proposed narrower value definitions (Schwartz, 2012, 2017) and the modern measures use less abstract item wording (Schwartz et al., 2001) in order to increase the consistency of their interpretation by respondents. Indeed, the assessment of measurement invariance, a technique used to assess whether members of different groups understand a phenomenon in a conceptually similar way (see Milfont & Fischer, 2010), suggests that the "core" ideas of values exist across contexts (Cieciuch et al., 2014). However, overreliance on those techniques hinders the exploration of the context-specific constructions of the values. Moreover, the Schwartz model in its current state includes only those values which express motivations that seem to exist in all studied societies and have similar connotations. As a result, neither values that lack consistent cross-cultural meaning (i.e., spirituality, Schwartz, 2012), nor culture-specific values (e.g., Renner & Salem, 2005) are among the set of ten.

One line of research builds on the assumption that values in their abstract form are shared by all people, but their manifestations in daily life (i.e., instantiations) are specific (Maio, 2010) and vary across contexts and situations (Hanel et al., 2018; Maio et al., 2009; Ponizovskiy et al., 2019). This issue is addressed in the three-level hierarchical model proposed by Maio (2010). Maio distinguishes between system level, abstract (value) level, and instantiation level by positioning values as mental representations. He continues proposing that exposure to the concrete situations that people typically associate with values will support detecting and applying otherwise abstract

values (Maio, 2010). Following the same reasoning, some studies measure how texts communicate values (e.g., Bardi & Schwartz, 2003) and propose dictionaries of value-expressing words and phrases (Ponizovskiy et al., 2019). This strand of research however treats values as a scale against which other phenomena should be evaluated: According to that approach, those are values to infuse the events and objects with their ideal meanings, not the events and objects to inform the meaning of values. To date, little research has dealt with qualitative exploration of the meaning of value types and even less investigated their lay constructions.

To explore how people, understand values, we adopted the principles of the Personal Construct Theory (PCT). According to PCT, our reality is an ever-changing flow of interconnected pieces of information that would be chaotic if not for people's attempts to make sense of it by noticing (dis)similarities between events. By doing so, people form constructs (e.g., cold vs. warm) which navigate perception and inform interaction with the world. As one pole is always defined by the other and vice versa, constructs are by definition bipolar.

The hierarchical structure of the system of constructs in PCT may appear similar to the three-level model of values (Maio, 2010). However, subordinate constructs and instantiations have different functions and help to investigate values from different angles. Instantiations refer to more or less prototypical ways a value is manifested; subordinate constructs are the assortment of actions, attitudes, emotions that shape the value, with none of them representing a value on its own. Instantiations can therefore be considered as one type of subordinate constructs. In the present study we adopted PCT as a way to investigate the variety of meanings behind values rather than their most common manifestations.

This study contributes to the field of value research by proposing to treat values as superordinate constructs whose meanings rest on their subordinate constructs idiosyncratic to every person. We emphasize the embeddedness of values in a potentially infinite number of contexts each person is a part of and argue for the diversity of coexisting meanings values may have. Previous value research, mainly conducted in the positivist tradition, tended to either look away from the context (e.g., Bobowik et al., 2011; Davidov et al., 2008) or treat the very meaning-making context as a moderator between values and other variables (e.g., Barni et al., 2016; Sortheix & Lönnqvist, 2014). We argue that the context (e.g., culture) is an integral part of values. Following the constructivist reasoning, the context is not considered as something that affects values, but as organically present in the construction of their meaning. Therefore, the ways in which people construe values is fundamentally shaped by the ways they interact with values already constructed by their society.

Emerging adulthood in Serbia

Emerging adulthood is a developmental period when young people test their abilities and limitations by exploring their fit with their social environments, what their beliefs and values are, what worldview or ideology they might choose to hold (Arnett, 2011). The goal of these processes is the crystallization of one's identity (Erikson, 1968) through the long-term commitment to the specific set of beliefs and values (Marcia,

1980) that will guide major life choices. Emerging adulthood seems to be a period when value priorities adopted from parents go through the process of active revision in the face of diverse social environments and perspectives. Unlike adolescents, emerging adults have more freedom in choosing their daily routines and social environments where they can expose themselves to the new meanings of values and question the familiar ones. That characteristic of the developmental period has only rarely been addressed in past research on values (e.g., Barni et al., 2013; Vecchione et al., 2015).

Even though emerging adulthood was first tied to a roughly determined age range (18–25 years; Arnett, 2001), later Arnett (2011) acknowledged cross-cultural differences and revised the model by shifting the upper age limit to 29. However, he also claimed that the pace of entering adulthood may depend on given culture (Arnett, 2007; Arnett, 2012). Although emerging adulthood was first observed in the developed societies (Arnett, 2001), the Balkan societies also exhibit the phenomenon of postponed adulthood due to the unfavorable socio-economic situation, high unemployment, or low social integration of the youth (Tomanović & Ignjatović, 2006). In Balkan countries, emerging adults do not loosen ties with their families (Ule & Kuhar, 2008); on the contrary, two-thirds of emerging adults reside in parental households regardless of their marital status (Kuhar & Reiter, 2012). At the same time, the opportunities for socialization become more diverse: professional education, work, and intimate relationships, involvement with professional and political organizations and movements either directly (Nikolayenko, 2007), or through the media (Coyne et al., 2013) provide new venues to exercise values. Social transformations that occurred in post-communist Balkans led to the de-standardization and destabilization of former orderly transitions. Therefore, life paths of emerging adults in the Balkans range from the rigid communist constellations to more flexible, individualized ones, leading to more diversity (Kovacheva, 2001). The fluidity of meaning systems in this group is likely - the ambivalence and heterogeneity of the Serbian discourse (Subotic, 2011) in combination with the explorations typical for the developmental period may yield a wide range of potential interpretations of values.

Current study

In this study, we use a technique of pyramiding (Landfield, 1971) to identify the constructs subordinate to each of the ten value types. The specificity of the method enables us to understand the values by giving respondents the freedom to construe their meaning. Although this task can be challenging, as values refer to abstract trans-situational goals, there is empirical evidence demonstrating that people can specify them and provide examples of their various manifestations, for example, in the form of value-expressive behaviors (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Hanel et al., 2018). Bardi and Schwartz (2003), for example, found that Israeli students believe that "lending things to neighbors" is an example of a behavior a person with high importance of Benevolence would perform. A person who "studies at night" would hold Achievement important. To build up on these studies, we will focus our respondents on the behavior-related subordinate constructs, however any other named subordinate constructs will be treated as relevant as behaviors. Unlike previous studies, which used values to explain

behaviors, we use behaviors (along with any other subordinate constructs) people elicit to detail the meaning of values. In order to deepen the understanding of values in a contextually specific manner, we aim to explore:

1. How emerging adults from Serbia construe ten basic value types? Specifically, which constructs are subordinate to each value type; how diverse are the constructs subordinate to each value type; do values have positive or negative connotation?
2. Based on their subordinate constructs, how well, or unambiguously, do values match their conceptual definitions proposed in the theory?

To formulate the first research question, we relied on the propositions of the social constructivism, whereby the theoretical claims can only be made in relation to context-specific and relational aspects of the human condition (Gergen, 2011). Thus, PCT and qualitative approach combined allow us to explore and elicit a potentially infinite number of co-existing ways to construe each of the value types from the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values. The way people construe value types and act upon them, is deeply rooted in the social world around them. The aim of the second research question is to compare the elicited subordinate constructs with the theoretical model to see whether the meanings converge to the already established definitions of the value types or they rather diverge from them. We see this research process as an interaction with the Schwartz theory, which will bring new insights into the phenomenon of values, as well as have significant implications for the theory.

Method

Participants

We used snowball sampling to recruit 281 emerging adults from Serbia (76.2% female, age 18–40, ($M = 24.2$, $SD = 4.35$)). Those participants who reported satisfying all three criteria of adulthood (Arnett, 2001): having a full-time job, being married, and not being involved with the educational system, were excluded from the sample, leaving only emerging adults in the sample. Some participants filled in paper-and-pen questionnaire during their classes, others were recruited by their acquaintances and participated through a mobile application "Moje Vrednosti."[1] Every tenth user of the application received a □2 Eur voucher. The recruiters received 10 Eur for every 10 participants who completed the questionnaire. The study was approved by the ethical board of Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences.

Technique and procedure

To elicit the subordinate constructs of basic values, we employed the pyramiding technique (Landfield, 1971). To reveal how people, understand complex superordinate constructs, like values, researchers ask the "how" and "what" questions. The answers to those questions would uncover different subordinate constructs which detail and specify the superordinate one.

The participants' task was to read the Serbian translation of definitions of values (Table 1) then to elicit three subordinate constructs as a response to the questions: "Imagine a person who finds [value of interest] important. What does that person do? How does she/he behave?". This procedure yielded ten polls of subordinate constructs, one for each value.

Analysis

We used thematic analysis (Willig, 2013) to analyze qualitative data. Three of the authors who are native Serbian speakers, divided the ten polls of responses ($N = 5866$) and analyzed the data independently of one another. The inductive analysis was performed in four steps: 1) data overview; 2) development of descriptive codes; 3) construction of semantic categories; 4) assignment of the conceptually most suitable value (from Table 1).

In the first step, we read through the material to get the first impression of the data structure and contents. In the second step, we thematically coded the data using descriptive codes, i.e., basic descriptive features that carry meaning shared by several responses. Further, we created semantically related categories based on the meanings shared by several descriptive codes. As a result, each of the ten values was represented by several (max. 10) semantic categories. In the next step, we collaboratively revised each set of preliminary identified categories in order to establish the final categories: the original categories were merged with one another, split, or dropped, while some new categories emerged. After that, we categorized all data by assigning construct names to each specific response (top-down approach) in order to test the reliability of our coding. Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) were calculated to estimate the intercoder reliability. Since there was an unmanageable amount of qualitative data, we decided to test the ICC on a sample of around 10% of the data, i.e., the inputs of 30 randomly chosen participants. In the final phase, we compared how well the final semantic categories fit to the conceptual definitions of values proposed by Schwartz. Corresponding value labels were then assigned to each semantic category. This step is the only exception from the conventional thematic analysis since the final goal was not to build themes, but rather to compare with the theoretical value types.

Results

Tables 2–11 present the results of the analysis of the subordinate constructs listed for each of the 10 values. For each value, we provide a brief description of the results. Each table contains information on the subconstructs of the value of interest, their frequency in the data, description, example responses, and the proposed best-matching value-label for each construct. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for each value is at the bottom of the corresponding table. It is important to note that the degree of the applicability of these results to other groups depends on the similarity of their experiences and thus, commonality of the meaning behind each value type.

Table 2. Subordinate constructs for self-direction.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Achievement	Capability	161	Persistent, goal oriented and decisive actions, based on high competence, rational thinking and strong effort	Persistence Hard-working Firmness Competence Concentrating
Self-direction	Independency and self-fulfillment	160	Independent and autonomous actions, confident self-expression, contemplation and inspiration	Acting by oneself Self-assurance Freedom Inspiration Authenticity
Self-direction and achievement	Personal development	127	Intellectual engagement, learning, expanding, and working hard on life-achievements	Self enhancement Achievement Learning Critical thinking Intelligent
Stimulation and achievement	Active and dynamic	123	Proactive orientation to making changes, being engaged and versatile, taking initiative	Engagement Activity Impatience Into challenges Assertive
Self-direction	Creation	85	Orientation toward research, experimentation and creation	Exploring Creative action such as writing Imaginative Divergent Experimentation
Stimulation	Stimulation seeking	57	Being open to new experiences, having multiple interests, being enthusiastic and motivated	Adventure Curiosity Travelling Energetic Openness
Benevolence	Social orientation	42	Sociability, appreciation, and stimulation of other people	Meeting other people Being part of a collective Enhancement of others Kindness Honest
Other	A(nti)social	35	Neglectful behavior, arrogant, and self-absorbed	Disdain Selfishness Reckless Hypocrisy Alienated

Note. ICC=.931.

Self-direction

Most of the subordinate constructs of Self-direction (Table 2) reflect the definition of the Openness to Change group of values (Figure 1): Independence and self-fulfillment, Personal development, Activity and dynamic, Creation, Stimulation seeking. In terms of the refined theory of values (Schwartz et al., 2012), the most frequent constructs refer to the autonomy of action, while autonomy of thought is the most prominent in Creation. The Capability can refer to Self-direction if the intention behind it is mastery of knowledge and skills. However, it can serve the value of Achievement: Personal success, autonomy and independence may refer to the demonstration of competence in accordance with social standards. Finally, Social orientation and A(nti) social, demonstrate two possible relationships between self-directedness and sociability - either in a positive or a negative manner.

Table 3. Subordinate constructs for stimulation.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Stimulation	Dynamic and change	143	Being versatile, in transition, on the move, in the speed	Frequent travelling Changing jobs Vagabond Changing partners Volatile
Achievement	Proactivity	127	(Hyper)activity, paired with initiative, self-confidence, competition, and ambition	Competitive Being active Capable Busy Decisiveness
Stimulation	Adrenaline	106	Being on the edge, engaging in high-risk situations such as extreme sports	Adventure Out of comfort zone Travelling to distant places Extreme sport Fearless
Stimulation	Novelty	89	Orientation toward (re)search for the new	Trying new things Open Exploring Trying Experimenting with thoughts
Stimulation and hedonism	Enthusiasm	75	Being in a positive mood, optimistic and motivated	Happy Smiling Energetic Hedonism Celebrating life
Self-direction and achievement	Personal development	58	Engaging in all sorts of activities with the aim of personal growth and expansion	Learning, reading Thinking outside the box Questioning Creative
Stimulation	Sociability	48	Orientation toward meeting and knowing other people	Communicating Hanging out Meeting new people Extravert Calling
Hedonism	Self-indulgence	37	Being and acting impulsive, spoiled, stubborn and selfish	Arrogant Attention seeking Reckless Spending money Egoistic
Self-direction	Freedom	26	Politically or otherwise liberal acting, spontaneous, disinhibited	Independent Spontaneous Free Liberal Wild

Note. ICC=.933.

Stimulation

The elicited subordinate constructs of the Stimulation value (Table 3) show that participants understand the value in line with the Schwartz Theory, as most of the constructs reflect the conceptual definition of the Stimulation value. Constructs of Self-indulgence and Freedom, however, can have double interpretation, as either a manifestation of Open-mindedness, or as overly disinhibited and impulsive behavior. Similarly, to Self-direction, the Stimulation value is highly saturated with constructs relevant to the person-focused values (Personal development, Proactivity and Sociability), which marks the importance of Stimulation in demonstrating personal, professional and social competence.

Table 4. Subordinate constructs for hedonism.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Hedonism	Self-treatment	158	Taking care of oneself in a positive manner	Wellness Doing things that they like Hobbies Travelling Taking courses
Hedonism	Enjoyment	130	Orientation toward pleasure, joy, fun, having a bohemian lifestyle and being passionate	Enjoying Having fun Being heartful Satisfied Loving life
Other	Egoism	96	Self-centered, egocentric and narcissistic manner	Selfish Egoistic Egocentric Self-absorbed Narcissist
Power	Haughtiness	62	Being and/or acting in an arrogant, dominant manner with no empathy toward others	Disdainful Rude Vain No empathy Integrity
Hedonism	Caprice	60	The image of a spoiled, childish, superficial person with no ability to delay gratification	Materialistic Irresponsible Impulsive Spending parents' money Shallow
Hedonism	Relaxation	39	Carefree state of mind and activities, such as easy walking and bathing	Fulfilled Resting Avoiding problems Meditates Relaxed
Self-direction and achievement	Management	36	Hard-working, bold and ambitious behavior, with a clear and concrete mindset	Advanced training Direct Planning Organized Work ethic
Self-direction	Self-assurance	34	The reverse side of the "egoism" construct; self-sufficient person who values him/herself	Self-conscious Self-satisfied Autonomous Confident Independent

Note. ICC=.928.

Hedonism

Table 4 shows that most of the revealed constructs correspond with the definition of the Hedonism value - a strong focus on pleasure, self-care and joy, most of which are positively construed (Self-treatment, Enjoyment, Relaxation). However, being hedonistically oriented in life can be related to materialism, impulsivity and losing sensitivity for other people (Egoism, Haughtiness, Caprice). That finding suggests the interjection of Power dynamics in the construction of the Hedonism value. Few constructs (Self-assurance, Management) are associated with positive personal and professional outcomes, which reveals the relationship the respondents find between Hedonism and Self-direction/Achievement values. They may perceive satisfaction as an attribute of a successful life.

Table 5. Subordinate constructs for achievement.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Achievement	Motivation for achievement	195	Being ambitious, goal oriented and energetic, strong effort in striving for academic or career success	Works Assertive Dedicated Educates oneself Tries hard
Self-direction	Personal development	161	Working on life-achievements through reading and researching. Strong willingness, a sense of stability, capability and assertiveness	Improves himself Authentic Capable Sure of oneself Individualistic
Power	Approval and attention seeking	110	Relying on other people for a sense of fulfillment, being conspicuous, intrusive and irritating	Shows off Proves himself Imposes himself Officious Always talks about their success
Benevolence and conformity	Social orientation and conformity	88	Being reliable and righteous, wanting to do good by people, even if it means to conform and suppress oneself	Communicative Abides by social rules Always kind to others Volunteers Makes sacrifices
Power	Arrogance and materialism	65	Being arrogant, impulsive, narcissistic, using other people as a means to an end, interest in the superficial and materialistic	Phony Self-centered Vain Stubborn Cheats

Note. ICC=.910.

Achievement

The most frequent construct present in the participants' responses about the Achievement value (Table 5) is Motivation for achievement. Together with subordinate constructs of Approval and attention-seeking and Arrogance and materialism (Power) it depicts the values of the Self-enhancement group (Figure 1). The other construct which respondents recognize as a manifestation of Achievement is Personal development, which has a highly positive connotation. According to Schwartz's model of values, however, Personal development is a core idea of Self-direction. The other positive construct is Social orientation, a form of Self-transcendence that includes responses that describe someone who is communicative and able to please others. It is possible that some respondents believe this competence is valuable when pursuing one's goals. Interestingly, while Motivation for achievement is positively construed, the constructs related to Power are not.

Power

Power (Table 6) is one of the most unambiguous constructs in our study as most of the revealed constructs refer to the ideas of different forms of dominance. Notably, most participants used negatively connotated traits and behaviors to describe the value. Despite the theoretical assumptions about the "inherent positivity" of values (Sagiv & Roccas, 2017, p. 4), this value was not positively construed in our sample. Other subordinate constructs are related to the value Achievement, which also falls into the Self-enhancement group of person-focused values. In this sense, Achievement can be

Table 6. Subordinate constructs for power.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Power	Arrogance and manipulation	223	Acting disdainful, being narcissistic, using other people as a means to an end	Selfish Pretentious Liar Greedy Insolent
Power	Dominance	134	Wanting to lead and assert their dominance, being cold and calculated, showing antisocial behavior	Aggressive Obtrusive Rules by force Hostile Authoritarian
Power	Approval and attention seeking	64	Relying on other people for a sense of fulfillment, being conspicuous, intrusive and irritating	Likes to be the center of attention Self-promotes Sticks out Obnoxious Nervous
Power and achievement	Competitiveness	61	Ambitious, feisty, energetic, wants to achieve his goals badly	Leads the state Elevated Wins Would break the rules to reach the top High-strung
Power	Materialism	61	Having an interest in the superficial and materialistic, i.e., money, social status, prestige	Squanders money Rich Travels often and boasts about it Capitalist Buys expensive things
Achievement	Capability	49	Diligent, hard-working, intelligent, takes initiative and risks	Works hard Tries hard Confident Proud Acts deliberately

Note. ICC=.930.

perceived as a way to obtain power. It should be noted that Achievement is represented by two constructs, one of which is related to higher levels of energy and competitiveness, while the other reflects high capability of the person that holds this value. The latter can be interpreted as a representation of Self-direction as well, as it can refer to mastery of knowledge and skills and not necessarily normative competence.

Security

Security is an interesting value because it consists of both positively and negatively connotated subordinate constructs, constructs relevant to both person-focused and social-focused values. Some constructs fell into the Self-protection/Anxiety-avoidance group; the majority, however, was referring to Growth/Anxiety-free focus (Table 7). The most prominent subordinate construct of Security reflects the need for maintaining social relations (Social cohesion). This construct can be related to the subtype of societal security that refers to social order. The constructs of Spirituality and Virtuousness highlight that emerging adults perceive the sense of security related to the Orientation toward others. Those constructs, however, can be interpreted as the outcomes of personal development, where the sense of security or inner peace is an aftereffect. Although

Table 7. Subordinate constructs for security.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Benevolence and conformity	Social cohesion	268	Reliable, with a strong sense of righteousness. Wanting to do good by people, even if it means to conform and suppress oneself	An activist Cares about others Respects others Empathetic Avoids conflict
Universalism and security	Spirituality	74	Introspective, wise, practices yoga, eastern philosophy or mysticism	Wise Nature whisperer Self-actualized Balance of the mind Happy
Self-direction and hedonism	Personal development and self-fulfillment	70	Confident, stable, works out, seeks stimulation, rational, intelligent	Determined Responsible Stable Sure of themselves Likes nature walks
Security and conformity	Passivity and control	63	Restrained, adjusts to others, boring, passive, cautious, wary, needs security, respects norms	Normal Has life insurance Inconspicuous Obedient Plays by the rules
Universalism and self-direction	Virtuous	38	Being a person of integrity and various qualities, such as trustworthiness	Honest Expresses his opinion Has character Tries hard Doesn't take or give out bribes
Security	Insecure	13	Cares about others' opinion, unstable, questioning oneself, indecisive	Scared Quiet Questions oneself Locks the car door 10 times Hesitant

Note. ICC=.847.

Security is the mostly positively construed value, pursuing it may come at a cost of suppressing one's own needs (Passivity & control). This construct can be seen as an expression of societal security that is related to conformity, but also personal security as it reflects the need to avoid danger. The constructs that are directly related to Security and represent anxiety-avoidance (Passivity & control and Insecurity) do not refer to socially desirable qualities - they reflect a state of insecurity and wariness toward uncertainty and a need to obtain security and emotional stability.

Conformity

The value of Conformity (Table 8) consists of the subordinate constructs which equally frequently occur in the data: Conformity and Submissiveness, Cautiousness, Care. Conforming, with the accent on submissiveness, appears to be accompanied by Care and Social competence (corresponding to Benevolence in the Theory), which is a recurring theme throughout the subordinate constructs of other values as well. Cautiousness (Self-direction and Security), as a form of compulsive behavior, allows Conformity and submissiveness and Self-suppression, which are supposedly followed by negative emotions toward oneself and/or others.

Table 8. Subordinate constructs for conformity.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Conformity	Conformity and submissiveness	106	Submissive to others' expectations and control, blindly following already existing structures and procedures	Doing what others expect from them Conformist Not questioning anything Dogmatic Submissive
Self-direction and security	Self-control	98	Taking actions cautiously	Careful Compulsions Impulse control Analyzing Calculating every step
Benevolence	Care and social competence	91	Success in the interpersonal domain, capable of managing, maintaining or improving relationships with others, supportive	Caring Thinking about others Good Helping Careful about others' emotions
Other	Emotional instability	87	Inwards emotional responses to suppression of individuality	Anxious Nervous Pressure In fear No confidence
Conformity	Self-suppression	85	Suppressing oneself	Passive Static Introverted Suppressing thoughts Hiding how they feel
Other	Frustration	12	A "ticking time bomb"	Aggressive Bad Angry Frustrated

Note. ICC=.846.

Tradition

The Tradition value is saturated with Conformity, Religiosity and Traditionalism, together with a conscious element of accepting and nurturing traditions - Preservation (Table 9). However, we observe Benevolence expressed in the construct of Kindness again, which means that Benevolence may play an important role in pursuing traditional ways of life. Finally, there is an extreme version of traditionalism - Active fanaticism, relating to both Tradition and Security, and it is the most negatively construed category of responses.

Benevolence

The most prominent subordinate construct of Benevolence reflects the Universalism value (Table 10). This finding may indicate the lack of differentiation between these two values among our respondents (see also Universalism, Table 11). Furthermore, being benevolent is associated with social and professional skills (Socially & professionally active), as well as with the high level of self-development (Self-actualization). Those constructs highlight the interrelatedness of Benevolence and Self-direction. At the same time, respondents recognize the potential negative consequences of Benevolence to oneself ("Sucker").

Table 9. Subordinate constructs for tradition.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Conformity	Conformity	95	Frightened unconditional submitting to dominant others and their requirements from them	Doing what they are told Submissive Following Nervous Being alert
Tradition	Religiosity	90	Practicing religion: practices conserving the dominant religion	Going to church Fasting Devotedness to religion Believer Praying
Tradition	Preservation	86	An orientation toward preserving existing tradition related beliefs and rituals	Traditional Respecting tradition and customs Conservatism Nurturing practices and values Protecting traditional values
Benevolence	Kindness	79	Preserving and nurturing close relationships	Warm Caring Kind Good friend and colleague Understanding
Tradition	Traditionalism	57	Conforming to follow tradition, passivity, and rigidity related to it because the others do so	Doing everything the culture and religion require Celebrating all of the holidays Stability Group belonging
Self-direction	Personal growth	52	Being in peace and balance with themselves	Fulfilled Calm Open Reading In balance
Tradition and security	Active fanaticism	27	An irrational and irregular excessive belief on something - uncritical and unreasonable faith and enthusiasm, displaying close-mindedness. Submit fully without using logical and cognitive way of thinking.	Dogmatic Exclusive Fanaticism Blindedness Fighting

Note. ICC=.858.

Universalism

As Table 11 shows, the most frequent manifestation of Universalism is Care, the concept proposed as central to Benevolence in the original model of values. Acceptance refers to the interpersonal domain of Universalism, while Activism is a socially active component. Specific individual practices mostly stay under the constructs of Personal growth and Environmental practices, indicating not only Universalism, but Self-direction and Hedonism (e.g., Personal growth).

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how emerging adults from Serbia construe values. By taking the PCT approach, we explored how highly abstract values as superordinate

Table 10. Subordinate constructs for benevolence.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Universalism	Care and respect for others	233	Altruistic, prosocial behaviors oriented toward doing good to other people	Helping Caring Encouraging Volunteering Listening
Benevolence	Warmth	115	Personal characteristics of a benevolent person: being understanding, kind, considerate etc.	Empathetic Patient Agreeable Committed Loyal
Benevolence	Care and respect for close people	72	Genuine interest, keeping in touch, affection and reciprocation in close relationships	Visiting Interested in family health Good friend Loving Keeping in touch
Achievement and stimulation	Socially and professionally active	44	Being open, talkative, assertive and professional in social and work life	Speaking up Sociable Active Diligent Organizing
Self-direction and other	Self-actualization	26	State of mind of a mature and optimistic person	Conscious Calm Fulfilled Prudential Positive
Benevolence and conformity	"Sucker"	21	Downside of being benevolent; actions and consequences of being "too" good and complaisant	Withdrawal Making compromises Self-silencing Stressed Adjusting

Note. ICC=.923.

constructs (e.g., "tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature") translate into subordinate constructs that are more specific and embedded in daily routines, actions, feelings, and concerns (e.g., "organizing charities", "being warm", and taking "ecological orientation"). Our results show that the ways in which respondents construe values varied greatly across the ten value types proposed in the Schwartz theory.

In order to present the meanings behind each value, we used several dimensions when analyzing the subordinate constructs: *stability, heterogeneity* and *connotation* (positive vs. negative), in addition to comparing the construction of person- and social-focused values. Furthermore, we analyzed the content of the subordinate constructs in relation to the social context of the study.

First, none of the subordinate constructs of value types consists solely of examples of specific actions (e.g., "changing partners", "locking the car door 10 times", "organizing charities"), even though they were the most frequent. Participants' responses sometimes referred to personality traits (e.g., "considerate", "assertive", "selfish") and emotional states (e.g., "happy", "scared") or other forms of generalized characteristics (e.g., "listening", "analyzing", "improves himself"), sometimes in the form of evaluative adjectives (e.g., "good", "fanatical", "phony"). However, the type of the response depended rather on the participant's response style than on the value type, so that no single value was construed exclusively around personality traits or specific actions/states. Yet, the analysis of emotional states showed that positive emotions ("happy", "in a good mood") were

Table 11. Subordinate constructs for universalism.

Value	Construct	Frequency	Description	Example responses
Benevolence	Care	153	Shows empathy, understanding and makes the interpersonal relationships work and feel good; nurturing and helping	Caring Supporting Helping others Considerate Warm
Self-direction and hedonism	Personal growth	90	Spiritual internal processes of growth resulting in positive emotions	Balanced Learning Open minded Calm Spiritual
Universalism	Acceptance	87	Spiritual self-transcendent external processes related to love, understanding of all of the otherness and the patience in encounters	Understanding Patient Tolerant Respect for others Listening
Universalism	Activism	78	Environmental and humanitarian actions that benefit the society and community as a whole	Social activism Volunteering Active Taking responsibility Organizing charities
Universalism and self-direction	Environmental practices	54	Appreciation of the nature and awareness of the need for actions that preserve the nature followed by individually executed practices	Cleaning rivers Recycling Nurturing plants Ecologically oriented Takes care of animals

Note. ICC=.955.

adduced in construing values from the Openness to change group and Benevolence, while "fear" and "being scared" were exclusively reported in construing Conformity value.

Some values consisted of many subordinate constructs, others had rather few. For instance, the analysis of Achievement and Universalism yielded only five distinct subordinate constructs, while Stimulation and Hedonism were the most diverse with nine and eight subordinate constructs, respectively. Such variation can point to how stable the construction of a value is: fewer subordinate constructs stand for more stable construction of a value. In this light, Stimulation is the least, while Achievement and Universalism are the most stable ones. Interestingly, this finding diverges somewhat from the theory. Schwartz et al. (1992) proposed that Universalism is a conceptually broad value that consists of subtypes, while Hedonism and Stimulation are conceptually narrow which was later tested empirically (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004) and included in the refined theory (Schwartz et al., 2012).

The diversity of meanings of the revealed subordinate constructs was another indicator of stability. The far-left column of Tables 2–11 displays the value type we inferred from the meaning of the semantic category describing the elicited subconstructs of a given value. Sometimes the value given and the value inferred overlapped. For instance, Power was rather homogenous with most responses referring to various forms of dominance (which all build up to the Power value in the far-left column), while Security had a greater variety of interpretations and covered a more diverse set of relevant subordinate constructs (which build up to six different values in the far-left column). The more diverse the inferred values were, the more the given value diverged

from its theoretical definition and the less stable it was. Based on both criteria (the number of subordinate constructs and the diversity of their meaning), Power and Universalism are construed as the most stable, while Benevolence and Security were the least stable ones.

This diversity can be understood in terms of constructive alternativism and propositionality, which we adopt from PCT. It is an assumption that there is a plenitude of ways to construe any element of interest (Kelly, 1955). The number of alternative ways to construct any particular value can be seen as an indicator of the richness of its meanings and complexity of the construct. At the same time, it suggests that the first, predominant subordinate construct does not preemptively claim ownership over the meaning of the value. It coexists with alternative subordinate constructs. That is why we needed to take into account all the subordinate constructs when interpreting data.

Also, our results showed that all values, with the exception of Universalism, included a subordinate construct which referred to the negative side of the value: Hedonism is typical for a spoiled child with no ability to delay gratification; Benevolence comes with the tendency to please others at the price of one's own well-being, etc. The overview of the results shows that emerging adults in Serbia construct some values more positively than others (e.g., Self-direction contains Creation and Personal development, while Power contains Arrogance & manipulation, Materialism, Approval- & attention-seeking). Since values are deeply embedded in social contexts, this may be interpreted as the presence of social norms in the construction of values, in such a way that some values are more socially acceptable and desirable than others (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Unlike previous research, which states that values are "inherently positive goals that reflect what people consider important" (Sagiv & Roccas, 2017, p. 4), and that they "are socially shared conceptions of what is good, right, and desirable" (Knafo et al., 2011, p. 178), we argue that positivity of values is not inherent, but dependent on the people who construct them within their social context. Emerging adults in Serbia do not construct all values as positive and desirable, but rather more or less socially preferable. This dimension is present in the construction of each value, reflecting their positivity and desirability either for the individual (Personal development, Self-fulfillment) or for the society (Sociability, Care).

It should be noted that the connotation of value construction may also depend on the respondents' value hierarchies. Hence, it might be that Universalism and Self-direction were important to our respondents, while little priority was given to Power and Hedonism. This goes in line with the research on pan-cultural consensus on the importance of Universalism and Self-direction, and the least consensual importance of Power value (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Nevertheless, that interpretation is speculative, and it should be taken with caution since the data has no records of respondents' value priorities.

Further, Schwartz's theory differentiates between person- and social-focused values based on whether those values emphasize the outcomes for the self or for the society. Our results reveal a presence of both personal and social dimension in the very construction of all values. For example, person-focused values, Self-direction, Stimulation and Achievement, are construed as positively related to sociability and social

orientation. That can be interpreted in terms of social functionality of the legitimization of self-oriented behavior (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). In other words, gratification of personal needs is important for the group's welfare. At the same time, Hedonism and Power, which belong to the same dimension, are construed as negatively related to sociability, as they refer to egoism, haughtiness and materialism. This can be interpreted as the reflection of social intolerance for the mainly individually serving values, (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). However, Security is construed as both socially and personally desirable, since it is represented with subordinate constructs of social cohesion and spirituality, but also virtuousness.

Generally, socially-focused values (Security, Tradition, Benevolence and Universalism) are more positively construed than person-focused ones, and are perceived as connected with personal growth. That means that for emerging adults in Serbia, enhancing social and personal welfare are intertwined processes. However, being overly dedicated to the contribution of social relations and care for other people does come at a cost of pursuing one's own goals. Schwartz and Bardi (2001) argue that even though some values are "by definition socially desirable" (p. 280), socialization of such values as Conformity and Security is likely to result in some negative affect (this finding is similar to that of Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). In this study, that may have been reflected in the evidence of the indications of self-restraint, self-suppression and frustration in all socially-focused values, except Universalism. Specifically, that refers to the following subordinate constructs: Passivity & control, Insecurity (Security), Emotional instability, Self-suppression, Frustration (Conformity), "Sucker" (Benevolence). On the other hand, person-focused values, especially those of the Self-enhancement group (Achievement, Power and Hedonism), are construed as having a dash of arrogance and haughtiness, paired with approval- and attention-seeking. These findings echo those of Kajonius et al. (2015), who showed that these are values held by people with pronounced Dark Triad traits.

Interestingly, Achievement is present in the construction of all values from the Openness to change group (Self-direction, Stimulation, Hedonism). Coelho et al. (2019) also found that Openness and Self-enhancement values (that Achievement is a part of) are more tightly clustered together and conceptually overlap more than Conservation and Self-transcendence values. This finding may stand for reflection of neoliberalism of the modern society. Namely, there is a strong focus on personal development, but also the relevance of high professional achievement in the process of personal development. This is particularly important in developing societies like Serbia, where the youth is caught in the clash of different value systems (Subotic, 2011). On the one hand, there is a social demand for personal and professional growth, which can be achieved by being self-centered, active, and competitive. On the other hand, there are traditionally nurtured social values which mark the importance of prosocial orientation, security, and preservation of the already established social meanings. The evidence of low differentiation between Benevolence and Universalism present in our data further strengthens the interpretation that a struggle for a better world and environment starts with care and respect for those around as the basic principle.

Our results also open new issues regarding the ways in which values are operationalized by researchers. For instance, there is a mismatch between how our respondents understand Security and how standardized questionnaires (e.g., different versions of

Portrait Value Questionnaire, PVQ) operationalize it. Based on the conceptual definition "Safety, harmony and stability of society, or relationships, and of self", our participants described a person who is a reliable member of their society, spiritual and oriented toward personal growth, and only somewhat passive and self-restrained, i.e., focused on self-protection and avoidance of anxiety. These characteristics diverge from the operationalization of Security in PVQ (Schwartz et al., 2001). The presence of the Social cohesion on the one hand, and several person-focused values in the construction of Security, on the other, can be treated as reflections of the personal and societal subtypes of the value (Schwartz, 2017; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). However, in contrast to these conceptualizations of security, our respondents did not name a strong state or concerns about one's physical safety as subordinate constructs of Security. Our findings indicate that Security can be construed as a value emphasizing personal growth rather than self-protection.

Conclusion and implications

This study advocates a context-sensitive and meaning-oriented investigation of human values - it aims at creating a venue for researchers to investigate the meaning behind values. Approaching people as construing beings situated in their social environments opens up a universe of meanings behind any social phenomena. Although people's personal construct systems are unique, they stem from the social world and thus have some recurring elements (commonality, as in Kelly, 1955). Our results illustrate both expected pluralism and commonality of meanings behind the value types among emerging adults in Serbia and demonstrate the richness of values as a concept. Conclusions and implications presented here are, however, limited to similar contexts and groups. Therefore, we encourage researchers to explore the ways in which people in different developmental periods, and of different gender, education, ethnicity, race etc. understand values.

This study nuances the meanings of values by exploring their subordinate constructs in a non-Western context - Serbia- a Central and Eastern European country and a society in transition (Kovacheva, 2001). Also, it focuses on emerging adults, a group in a developmental transition that is characterized by exploration that can yield a wide range of potential interpretations of values. The results of this study enrich our knowledge of values and propose an extension of the existing theoretical model without the aim to generalize the idiosyncratic and context-specific meanings. Furthermore, we propose a new application of a well-known technique from PCT that can be used in future to investigate similarities and differences between meanings of values across social contexts. Finally, PCT's theoretical framework opens opportunities for exploring the opposite poles of value types and allows for investigating replicability of the value circumplex structure. The second study of this project tackles the opposite pole of the value types through exploration of their subordinate constructs and in these ways completes the investigation of value construction by emerging adults from Serbia.

At the same time, the study acknowledges the relevance of the value theory for explaining people's meaning-making system in order to understand their tendencies in life. Pyramiding can be used by anyone to gain a better understanding of the way

emerging adults (or anyone else) understand abstract concepts. This study advocates the use of constructivist heritage and inspires diversification of methods and eclecticism in the field of value research. Hopefully, we inspire researchers to entertain the plurality and complexity of meanings of social phenomena instead of simplifying them by reduction to general tendencies.

Note

1. As it exceeds the scope of this article, for more information about the application please contact the corresponding author.

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