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PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD LABOR MARKET CHALLENGES ACROSS SCHOOL TYPES

Norbert LAURISZ[1*], Katarzyna SANAK-KOSMOWSKA[2]

[1] Krakow University of Economics; lauriszn@uek.krakow.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-2079-1041
[2] Krakow University of Economics; sanakk@uek.krakow.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-3701-8899
* Correspondence author

Purpose: The paper examines the differences in attitudes of students from three types ofschools - urban public, urban private and rural public - towards developing skills necessary for the modern labour market. The study aims to explore how socio-economic and institutional factors influence students' readiness to engage with topics such as entrepreneurship, financial literacy and career management.
Methodology: The research uses correspondence analysis to examine survey data collected from 187 students representing the three school types. The methodology identifies patterns of similarities and differences in students' responses to various educational and vocational topics, focusing on nuanced relationships and internal group dynamics.
Findings: The analysis revealed significant differences in students' attitudes. Urban public school students were most enthusiastic about developing practical skills such as saving and investing. Urban private school students showed polarised attitudes, with responses ranging from strong interest to indifference, reflecting a variety of personal and contextual factors. Rural public-school students, on the other hand, showed predominantly neutral or sceptical attitudes. The findings highlight the importance of institutional support and socio-economic context in shaping students' engagement with labour market-oriented education.
Research limitations/implications: The limitations of the study include a relatively small and geographically restricted sample, which limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research could expand the scope to include a larger and more diverse population.
Practical implications: The research highlights the need for educational reforms, including integrating entrepreneurship and financial literacy into school curricula, expanding access to career guidance, and increasing resource allocation to public schools. These measures could better prepare students for the demands of the modern labour market.
Social implications: Addressing the inequalities identified could contribute to reducing socio-economic inequalities by equipping students with the necessary tools for upward mobility. Better alignment of education systems with labour market needs could also promote more inclusive economic development.
Originality/value: The paper provides a novel application of correspondence analysis to explore students' attitudes in the context of educational preparation for the labour market. It contributes to the literature on educational equity and labour market readiness and provides actionable insights for policy makers, educators and researchers.

Keywords: educational policy, student attitudes, labor market readiness, educational equity, competency development
Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

In Poland, as in many other countries, the public education system can be described as a non skills-focused education system. This model of education is mainly concerned with the transmission of theoretical knowledge and rarely considers the importance of fostering practical vocational skills such as teamwork, critical thinking or adaptability. (Busso et al., 2017; OECD, 2018). The lack of integration of practical education means that students leave school with a limited set of skills useful in the labour market, resulting in a mismatch between their qualifications and the requirements of the modern economy (Leuven, Oosterbeek, 2011; Salas-Velasco, 2021).

The non-skills-focused system prevalent in public schools in Poland is based on a traditional approach, in which teachers are the main source of knowledge and students function as passive recipients of information. In this system, the transmission of theoretical content, verified by examinations and tests, plays a key role (Laurisz, Sanak-Kosmowska, 2022). Unfortunately, this approach neglects the development of practical skills that are essential for functioning in a dynamically changing professional environment (Busso et al., 2017). For this reason, graduates often face difficulties in making a smooth transition from education to work because they lack skills valued by employers, such as innovation, adaptability and interpersonal skills.

In a system that does not focus on qualifications, students, especially those from less resourced public schools, are less prepared to face the challenges of the labour market. Research shows that graduates from such schools often lack adaptive and entrepreneurial skills, which limits their opportunities in the labour market (Afzal et al., 2023). The lack of access to career guidance, entrepreneurship workshops and other key skills development initiatives means that students in Polish schools have fewer opportunities to explore alternative career paths and are more likely to choose safe, stable occupations (Ćwiek et al., 2021).

Despite these limitations, urban public schools are increasingly integrating a skills-focused approach into their curricula, providing students with opportunities to develop entrepreneurial and practical skills. As a result, students are better prepared to meet the challenges of today's labour market, and their readiness to make independent career choices and implement innovative projects is enhanced. Public schools, which often have fewer resources and less flexibility in the choice of educational pathways, are not in a position to introduce such solutions without systemic changes (Laurisz, Sanak-Kosmowska, 2024).

The diversity of educational environments – both in terms of school types and their location – has a significant impact on the development of students' attitudes towards future professional

challenges (Echazarra, Radinger, 2019; Henderson et al., 2020). The education system in Poland includes a wide range of institutions, from urban public schools, which offer a more individualised approach and access to resources, to rural public schools, which often have limited career opportunities for students. In the context of different types of schools, a key concern is the mismatch between the support available to students for vocational preparation and the increasing demands of today's labour market.

From this perspective, understanding the diversity of school settings and the impact of systems that do not focus on qualifications on the development of students' career attitudes is crucial in the context of designing education reforms (Echazarra, Radinger, 2019; Laurisz et al., 2022; OECD, 2018). Developing education systems that integrate a skills-focused approach can help close the gap in work readiness between students from different school backgrounds, promote equity, and support students to make a successful transition from education to work.

This study makes a novel contribution to understanding students' preparation for the challenges of the labour market by examining the relationship between school type (urban public, urban private and rural public) and students' attitudes towards skills development. Unlike previous studies, which often focus on broad system analyses, this paper uses correspondence analysis to reveal nuanced relationships and internal group dynamics in student populations. The originality of this study lies in its comparative approach across different socio-economic and institutional contexts to show differences in access to educational support. The results reveal previously unrecognized disparities in students' readiness for the labor market, particularly highlighting the role of rural schools in limiting access to key skill development opportunities. This diagnostic perspective provides actionable recommendations for educational reform and contributes significantly to the literature on educational equity and vocational skills development.

2. Literature review

Research on educational systems and their impact on students' attitudes towards the labour market reveals important differences resulting from the interaction of a variety of environmental, socio-economic and structural factors (Cope, 2005; Deci, Ryan, 2013). Three main theories are useful in explaining these phenomena: Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1993; Bourdieu, 1984; Paquette, Ryan, 2011).

2.1. Theoretical underpinnings of the analysis of differences in students' attitudes

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory focuses on the interplay of different levels of the individual's environment, from the immediate microsystem, the school, to the macrosystem,

which includes broader cultural norms. In an educational context, the school microsystem is where key skills related to future careers, such as autonomy and motivation, are shaped (Ettekal, Mahoney, 2017; Tong, An, 2024). From Bronfenbrenner's perspective, the differences between private and public schools, and urban and rural schools, can have a significant impact on students' career development. In urban public schools, where the school climate often supports proactivity and career aspirations, students are more likely to develop individual career aspirations. In contrast, in public schools, particularly in rural areas, students may have limited access to resources, which limits their career development.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital emphasises the importance of social and cultural resources in educational attainment and career aspirations (Ball, 2002; Bourdieu, 1984). According to this theory, cultural capital includes the values and skills transmitted by families and schools that can promote higher social and occupational status. Urban public schools are more likely to offer programmes that support the development of students' cultural capital through entrepreneurship classes that enhance their career aspirations. In contrast, in rural public schools, where access to cultural resources is more limited, students are more likely to prefer stable, traditional career paths, which may lead to a reduction in their career mobility.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory emphasises the role of observation and modelling in the acquisition of vocational skills. In the school environment, students learn by imitating and modelling behaviour, which means that access to inspiring teachers and mentors who promote innovative career approaches can be crucial (Afzal et al., 2023; Bandura, 1993; J.E. Robinson, 2000). Research shows that students in public schools are more likely to develop entrepreneurial attitudes because they are more likely to have role models who promote career independence and entrepreneurship. In public schools, particularly rural schools, the lack of such role models may limit students' aspirations and willingness to take career risks.

2.2. Factors influencing students' attitudes

School climate is one of the most important factors influencing students' readiness for future career challenges. Research shows that a supportive and inclusive school environment increases students' engagement, which is important for their success in the labour market (Afzal et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2013; Wulan, Sanjaya, 2022). Here, school climate acts as a microsystem that fosters the development of professional attitudes such as adaptability and self-confidence (Cohen et al., 2009). Schools with positive climates, especially public schools, often support students in acquiring skills needed in the labour market, while schools with less supportive climates may limit the development of these skills.

Socio-economic factors strongly influence students' career attitudes and work readiness (Busso et al., 2017; P. Robinson, 2017). Urban private schools, often attended by students from higher socio-economic backgrounds, provide resources such as career guidance and entrepreneurship workshops, which shape students' proactive career attitudes.

In contrast, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds attending rural public schools often have limited access to such resources, which limits their career aspirations and preference for stable, traditional occupations.

Another factor is the level of match between education and labour market requirements (Leuven, Oosterbeek, 2011; OECD, 2018). The non-skills-focused system that dominates the Polish public education system focuses mainly on providing theoretical knowledge and neglects the development of practical vocational skills (Laurisz, Sanak-Kosmowska, 2022). As a result of this educational model, graduates often lack key skills required in the modern labour market, such as critical thinking or teamwork. The lack of integration of practical skills in curricula makes it difficult for students to make a smooth transition into the professional environment and limits their opportunities in the labour market.

Access to non-formal education and extracurricular engagement play a key role in students' career preparation, providing them with opportunities to learn practical skills beyond the standard curriculum (Dewey, 1997; Rogacheva, 2016). Students in urban public schools are more likely to participate in skills development programmes as part of school provision, due to the availability of resources. In the context of public schools, particularly rural schools, access to such initiatives is often limited, reducing the opportunities for students to develop the necessary professional and adaptive skills.

The education system in Poland, as in many other countries, includes different types of schools that differ in their resources and approach to students' vocational preparation (Kubikova et al., 2024; Rogacheva, 2016). Urban public schools are characterised by access to rich resources that support the development of soft and professional skills. The programmes of these schools increasingly integrate practical skills, so that graduates are better prepared for the challenges of the labour market. Urban public schools offer slightly less support, but have greater access to resources than rural schools due to their urban location. Rural public schools, on the other hand, often have limited resources and a less extensive programme of extracurricular activities, leading to less labour market readiness among their students (Crespo-Cebada et al., 2014; Echazarra, Radinger, 2019).

Building on the analysis of different educational settings and their impact on students' attitudes towards readiness for the challenges of adult life and career development, our study and subsequent analysis focuses on how the type of school students attend - urban private, urban public or rural public - differentiates students' perceived need for additional skills and their willingness to engage in additional learning activities. Therefore, we decided that the main purpose of the article was to analyse the differences in the attitudes of students from the three school types towards labour market challenges and their willingness to develop skills such as entrepreneurship, financial education and career management. This purpose is driven by the following hypotheses: (1) students from urban public and private schools exhibit greater interest in developing market-relevant skills compared to those from rural public schools; (2) differences in students' attitudes are shaped by socio-economic context and access to educational

resources; and (3) within each school type, there are internal variations in attitudes influenced by individual socio-economic factors. By addressing these hypotheses, the study highlights critical inequalities in educational preparation for the labor market, providing practical recommendations for policymakers and educators.

Accordingly, we posed the following research questions:

1. How do the attitudes of students from the three types of schools - urban public, urban private and rural public - differ towards the development of skills needed in today's labour market?
2. How does school type affect students' interest in specific areas such as entrepreneurship, financial education or career management?
3. What factors, such as socio-economic context or access to educational resources, might explain differences in students' attitudes?
4. Are there internal differences in students' attitudes within different school types?

These questions aim to deepen our understanding of the role of educational context and school type in shaping students' readiness for life challenges and their overall career preparation.

3. Methodology

The study focused on the attitudes and skills of students in the final years of primary school, taking into account their attitudes towards future employment and career choices. It was conducted in late 2022 and early 2023 in three selected primary schools participating in a non-formal education development project implemented by the Cracow University of Economics (Poland). The study included schools differentiated by location (urban, rural) and ownership (public, private). The research group consisted of an urban public school, an urban public school and a rural public school. The survey was conducted using an anonymous online questionnaire aimed at final year students. The survey was conducted with the consent of the school and the parents or guardians. The total research sample was 187 individuals.

Correspondence analysis and consistency analysis using Cronbach's alpha coefficient were used to clearly present the results of the study. The choice of correspondence analysis as the main method of data analysis was dictated by the nature of the study, which aimed to capture the complex relationships between school type and students' attitudes towards labour market challenges (Blalock, 1979; Luszniewicz, Słaby, 2008). Correspondence analysis, especially in the canonical standardization version, allows for the visualization of multidimensional relationships in an intuitive way while maintaining the detail of the data. Thanks to this method, it was possible to identify key differences and similarities between the study groups (Górniak, 2000). The use of correspondence analysis also provided a more accurate understanding of the variation in responses within schools, allowing nuances such as polarisation of attitudes

(e.g. the proximity of 'definitely yes' and 'definitely no' responses in some categories) to be captured. It was also particularly useful for analysing the quality of the categorical data that dominated the survey, such as students' ratings of attitudes on a five-point scale.

Correspondence analysis is a multivariate statistical technique used to examine relationships between categorical variables. It is a tool often used to discover patterns in data where two categorical variables are related. Correspondence analysis was used to examine the relationship between school type and students' responses regarding their attitudes towards preparing for adult life and the labour market. The aim of correspondence analysis is to simplify large categorical data sets by mapping them into a space with fewer dimensions, allowing for an easier understanding of the relationships between categories.

The analysis uses canonical standardisation, which allows the data to be transformed to maximise their distribution on the axes of the graph, while preserving the proportion of points in relation to their interdependence. Canonical standardisation allows the most salient patterns in the data to be extracted and is key to obtaining clear graphs showing the relationships between school type and student attitudes. In a canonical graph, each school and question response (category) is represented by a point. Closeness of points in space indicates greater similarity between categories. Responses that are close together suggest that students in a particular school have similar attitudes towards a particular question.

The following measures can be used to test the quality of a canonical correspondence analysis model: 1 Inertia: This is a measure of the variance explained in the data. It shows how much of the variance in the responses was explained by each dimension in the analysis. A high value of inertia indicates a good fit of the model to the data. 2 Eigenvalues: These are measures of the amount of variance explained by each dimension in the correspondence space. Eigenvalues show how much information has been 'compressed' across dimensions. Higher values indicate that more variability in the data is explained by a particular dimension. 3 Proportion of variance explained: This is the sum of the eigenvalues divided by the sum of all values to assess how much of the total variance is explained by a given dimension of the model. The higher the proportion, the better the relationship between the response categories is represented. The values of these ratios make it possible to assess the quality of the correspondence analysis and, in the case presented here, confirm that the results obtained are reliable and well represent the variation in students' attitudes according to school type.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the consistency of the research and analysis design. Cronbach's alpha provides an assessment of the internal consistency of a research instrument - in this case a questionnaire - and allows us to determine how reliably it measures key constructs related to students' attitudes (Blalock, 1979; Luszniewicz, Słaby, 2008). Cronbach's alpha values were calculated for each section of the questionnaire to ensure that questions addressing issues such as the need for additional life skills education, interest in financial topics or attitudes towards entrepreneurship were internally consistent and reliable. Values above 0.8 are considered very good in the context of social research, meaning that the sets of questions

are consistent and measure the attitudes under investigation well. In practice, Cronbach's alpha in the range of 0.7-0.8 is considered acceptable and above 0.8 is considered very good.

4. Results

The Cronbach's alpha values obtained, which are within the acceptable range (0.70-0.95), testify to the high reliability of the questionnaire, which allows reliable conclusions to be drawn from the analysis of the results (Table 1). Thanks to this analysis, it was possible to confirm that the research tool used consistently reflected the theoretical and analytical assumptions of the study, thus allowing a comprehensive assessment of attitudes towards preparation for adulthood and the labour market.

Table 1.
Reliability statistics

Reliability statistics	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha (based on standardised items)	Number of items
Set 1	0.815	0.811	5
Set 2	0.823	0.818	4

Source: own elaboration.

In the first step, Cronbach's Alpha took a value of 0.815 (set 1, for 5 items). A value above 0.8 indicates a high internal consistency of the questions in the set. The set of questions measures a consistent construct well, indicating that students responded consistently. The version based on standardised items (0.811) confirms that the scale works equally well with standardised responses. In the second step, Cronbach's alpha was 0.823 (set 2, for 4 items): This result is slightly higher than for set 1, which means that the scale is also very reliable in this case and that the questions in the set do not need to be modified. The version based on standardised items (0.818) confirms the robustness of the scale in both cases.

In the case of correspondence analysis, measures such as eigenvalues, inertia and proportion of variance explained for each dimension allow us to assess the quality of the analysis carried out and the importance of each dimension in explaining the variation in the data (Górniak, 2000). The results presented in the table (Table 2) show that Dimension 1 explains the dominant part of the variance in each of the categories analysed, especially in the case of coping activities in adulthood (94.00%) and attitudes towards responsibility for one's fate (84.74%). This suggests that the differences in these areas are strongly embedded in the underlying relationships between school types and response categories. Dimension 2, on the other hand, although explaining a smaller proportion of the variance (from 6.00% to 34.44%), provides additional information about subtle differences in categories such as saving and investing

(34.44%) and seeking activities independently (25.88%). In these cases, in particular, the inclusion of both dimensions provides a fuller understanding of the complexity of the data. The total inertia (the sum of the contributions of both dimensions) ranges from 13.688 to 30.490, indicating the high quality of the model and the high effectiveness of the correspondence analysis in capturing the variation in the data. The high values of inertia and explained variance suggest that the results of the analysis are robust and adequate for interpretation.

Table 2.
Measures describing the dimensions of the correspondence analysis

Issue	Dimension 1 (eigenvalue / inertia / % of variance)	Dimension 2 (eigenvalue / inertia / % of variance)	Total inertia / % explained variance
People should be in charge of their own destiny	0.12916 / 12.916 / 84.74%	0.02237 / 2.237 / 15.26%	15.153 / 100%
I independently seek opportunities to participate in various extra-curricular activities	0.19110 / 19.110 / 74.12%	0.06673 / 6.673 / 25.88%	25.783 / 100%
I would attend classes on how to run a business	0.10279 / 10.279 / 84.81%	0.05682 / 5.682 / 15.19%	15.961 / 100%
I would attend classes on how to save and invest	0.19403 / 19.403 / 65.56%	0.10192 / 10.192 / 34.44%	29.595 / 100%
I would attend classes showing us future jobs and different professions	0.23924 / 23.924 / 77.47%	0.06566 / 6.566 / 22.53%	30.490 / 100%
Students need extra activities to prepare them for adult life	0.12885 / 12.885 / 94.00%	0.00803 / 0.803 / 6.00%	13.688 / 100%

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the correspondence analysis for the 6 problem areas presented in the figures below (Figures 1-3) allowed us to characterise the attitudes of students for each type of school and to define differences in attitudes towards the challenges of today's labour market in a non-skills-focused system.

The correspondence analysis allows for a clear interpretation of each of the problem areas. However, from the perspective of this article, it is not only the interpretation of individual attitudes that is important, but above all the characterisation of school types as well as the identifycation of differences in attitudes. Therefore, a table is proposed below that synthesises the results of the analysis carried out for each school (Table 3). The objective of this interpretation is to demonstrate the attributes of students' attitudes in relation to their educational context.

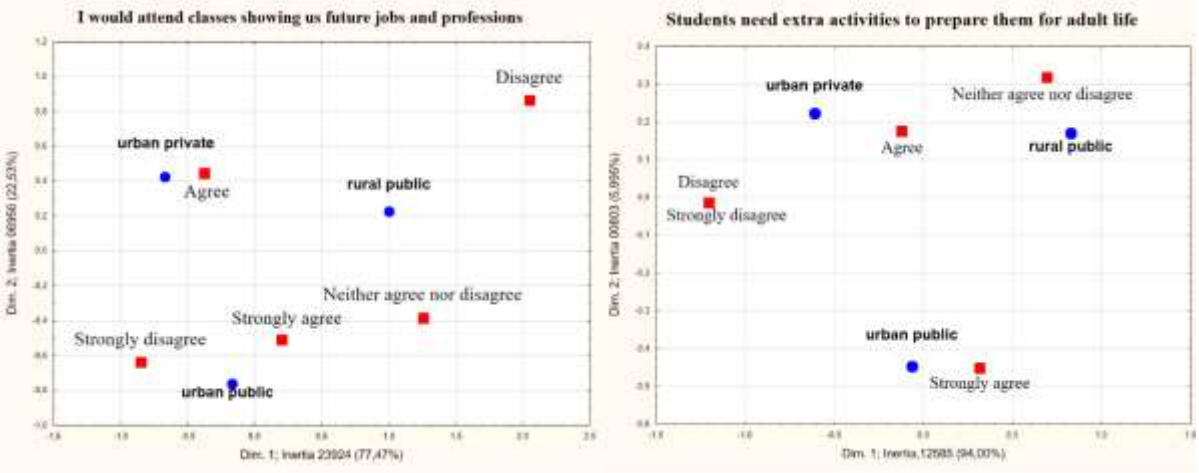

Figure 1. Correspondence analysis for two variables: 'Students need extra activities to prepare them for adult life' and 'I would attend classes showing us future jobs and different professions'.

Source: own elaboration.

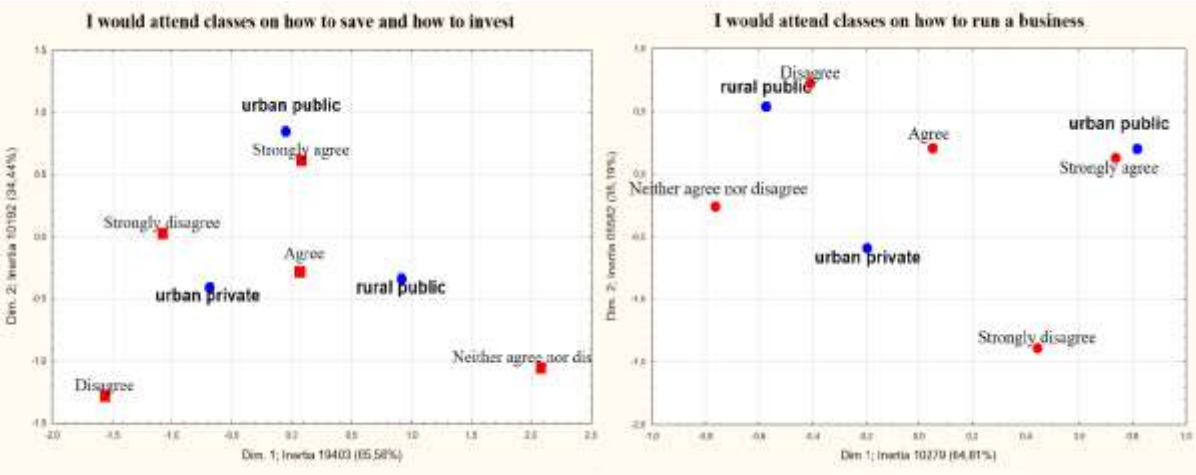

Figure 2. Correspondence analysis for two variables: 'I would attend classes on how to run a business' and 'I would attend classes on how to save and invest'.

Source: own elaboration.

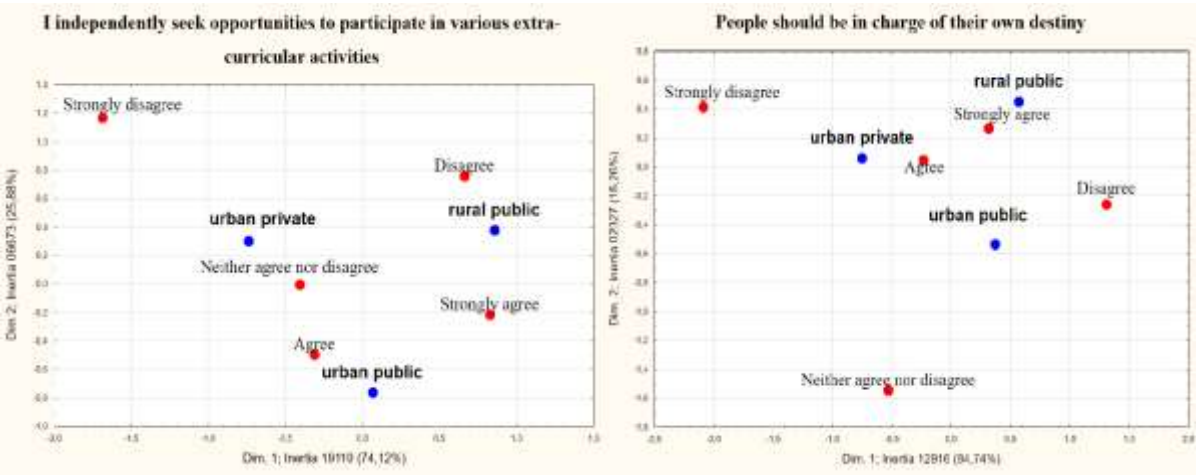

Figure 3. Correspondence analysis for two variables: 'People should be in charge of their own destiny' and 'I independently seek opportunities to participate in various extra-curricular activities'.

Source: own elaboration

Table 3.
Attributes of students' attitudes by different types of school

Issue	Public urban	Private urban	Public rural	Degree of differentiation between schools
I would attend classes on how to save and invest	Strongly yes (2)	Polarity: Definitely not (-2), with gravity to Yes (1)	Yes (1), with gravity to neutral (0)	Very high - large differences between schools
I would attend classes showing us future jobs and different professions	Polarity: Strongly yes (2) and strongly no (-2)	Yes (1)	Neutrality (0), with gravity to 'no' (-1)	Very high - strong differences and polarisation
I independently seek opportunities to participate in various extra-curricular activities	Yes (1) and Definitely yes (2)	Neither yes nor no (0)	No (-1)	High - differences between activism and scepticism
People should be in charge of their own destiny	No (-1), with gravity to neutral (0)	Yes (1), with gravity to neutral (0)	Definitely yes (2)	High - different approaches to accountability
Students need extra activities to prepare them for adult life	Definitely yes (2)	Yes (1), with gravity to no (-1)	Neutrality (0)	Moderate - differences mainly due to neutrality
I would attend classes on how to run a business	Definitely yes (2)	Neutrality (0), with gravity to 'yes' (1)	No (-1), with gravity to neutrality (0)	Moderate - mainly due to urban public school enthusiasm

Source: own elaboration.

4.1. Urban public school

The analysis demonstrates that students in urban public schools exhibit the greatest enthusiasm for activities pertaining to the acquisition of practical skills. In categories such as saving and investing, running a business, or coping with adulthood, the majority of respondents indicated a definitive affirmative response (2). This is exemplified by their unequivocal interest in financial education, which differs from the more sceptical attitudes observed among students from other schools. Furthermore, in the category of self-seeking extra-curricular activities, students demonstrated both moderate engagement (indicated by a rating of 'yes' on the scale) and clear proactivity (indicated by a rating of 'definitely yes' on the scale).

Nevertheless, in certain categories, such as responsibility for one's own destiny, there is a moderate degree of scepticism, indicated by the response 'no' (-1). This may be attributed to the heightened reliance on educational and social institutions in an urban setting. It is notable that this school exhibits a high degree of polarisation in attitudes, as evidenced by the category of activities pertaining to different professions. In this instance, students simultaneously express strong interest (2) and rejection (2). This discrepancy may be attributed to the presence of disparate career aspirations within this cohort.

4.2. Urban private school

The attitudes of the students at the urban public school are distinguished by a greater degree of diversity and moderation. The category of saving and investing evinces a polarisation of attitudes, with a preponderance of responses indicating a definitive negative (–2), although a subset of students evinces a proclivity towards a positive response (1). This may reflect differing priorities based on the individual family situations of the students, with some perceiving no necessity for such activities and others viewing their value. In categories such as coping with adulthood or running a business, responses indicating a moderate stance are more prevalent, suggesting a lack of clear-cut attitudes. Students at this school are less likely to display strong enthusiasm, yet also less strongly opposed, which may be attributed to their greater material comfort or access to alternative forms of educational support.

The attitudes of students in urban public schools are distinguished by a greater degree of diversity and moderation. In the domain of saving and investing, there is a notable polarization in attitudes, with a preponderance of "definitely no" responses (-2), yet a notable group of students exhibiting a proclivity towards "yes" (1). This may reflect differing priorities based on students' individual family situations, with some students perceiving no necessity for such activities and others acknowledging their value.

In categories such as coping with adulthood or running a business, responses indicating a moderate stance are the most prevalent, suggesting a lack of clear-cut attitudes. Students at this school are less likely to display pronounced enthusiasm, yet also less strongly opposed, which may be attributed to their superior material comfort or access to alternative forms of educational support.

One of the most distinctive aspects is the lower self-efficacy of the students in seeking additional activities, as indicated by the response 'neither yes nor no' (0). This finding contrasts with the greater level of activity observed among students at the urban public school, suggesting a different approach to motivating students in a private educational setting.

4.3. Rural public school

The attitudes of rural public-school students are distinguished by a greater degree of neutrality and moderation in the majority of categories. With regard to saving and investing, students indicated a moderately positive attitude, with a clear inclination towards neutrality. This may be attributed to a paucity of practical financial education or a constrained perception of its significance within the local milieu.

With regard to categories such as coping with adulthood and running a business, rural public-school students exhibited a predominantly neutral response, indicating a lack of perceived necessity for such classes. However, their attitude towards assuming responsibility for their own destiny was notably positive, with an unambiguously affirmative response ('definitely yes',

2). This result may reflect a stronger belief in individual responsibility in a rural environment, where students are more likely to perceive the need for independence and self-reliance.

Table 4.
Differences in students' attitudes between school types

Issue	Public urban vs. Private urban	Public urban vs Public rural	Private urban vs Public rural
I would attend classes on how to save and invest	4 (significant difference: 2 vs. -2)	3 (significant difference: 2 vs. 1)	3 (significant difference: -2 vs. 1)
I would attend classes showing us future jobs and different professions	4 (polarity 2/-2 vs. 1)	4 (polarity 2/-2 vs. 0/-1)	2 (moderate difference: 1 vs. 0/-1)
I independently seek opportunities to participate in various extra-curricular activities	3 (1/2 vs. 0)	3 (1/2 vs. -1)	1 (slight difference: 0 vs. -1)
People should be in charge of their own destiny	3 (-1 vs. 1)	4 (-1 vs. 2)	2 (moderate difference: 1 vs. 2)
Students need extra activities to prepare them for adult life	3 (2 vs. 1)	3 (2 vs. 0)	2 (moderate difference: 1 vs. 0)
I would attend classes on how to run a business	3 (2 vs. 0)	3 (2 vs. -1)	2 (moderate difference: 0 vs. -1)

Source: own elaboration.

A comparison of the attitudes of students from the three types of school reveals significant differences, which are due both to the educational characteristics of these institutions and to their socio-cultural context (Table 4). The urban public school is characterised by students' clear enthusiasm for practical skills, which is reflected in their clearly positive attitudes to categories such as financial literacy, entrepreneurship or preparing for adulthood. For students in this type of school, lessons on saving and investing are crucial, as evidenced by their overwhelming 'definitely yes' response. In the same category, however, students from urban public schools are more diverse, with their attitudes oscillating between strongly opposed and moderately interested. This contrast may be due to students' different life experiences and individual abilities, which influence their perceptions of the importance of financial education.

Similar discrepancies are observed in attitudes towards activities that show different occupations. Students in urban public schools are characterised by polarisation, with some expressing enthusiasm for such activities and others strongly rejecting them. In contrast, students in urban public schools show a more moderate interest, which may indicate a more homogeneous attitude due to access to other forms of vocational support, such as individual counselling or extra classes organised outside school. In rural public schools, on the other hand, there is more neutrality, which may be due to students' limited awareness of the diversity of careers or the lack of availability of such activities in the local environment. It is noteworthy that the urban public school also shows a clear commitment in the categories related to self-selection

of additional activities. Students from this school show both moderate activity and clear proactivity, suggesting high motivation and a need for self-development. In contrast, students from urban and rural public schools show more sceptical or neutral attitudes in this category, which may be due to different ways of motivating students and different access to educational resources.

In the context of responsibility for one's own destiny, students from an urban public school have moderately negative attitudes, which contrasts with the strong belief of students from a rural public school in the need for individual responsibility. This difference may be related to different social expectations in these settings - in a rural setting the idea of self-reliance and independence may be more highly valued, whereas in an urban setting students are more likely to rely on institutional support.

The differences in attitudes become less pronounced for activities related to coping with adult life. Again, the urban public school shows the highest level of interest, while the urban public school and the rural public-school show more moderate or neutral attitudes. This suggests that the need for such classes may be more pronounced in urban areas, where the challenges of adulthood may be more complex and varied.

A similar pattern can be observed for courses on running a business. The urban public school stands out for its enthusiasm for entrepreneurship, which contrasts with the neutrality of the urban public-school students and the scepticism of the rural public school. These differences may be related to the different career aspirations of students depending on their environment - in urban schools, students may be more likely to see entrepreneurship as an attractive career path, while in rural environments more traditional approaches to work prevail.

Analysis of the results presented in the tables also allows for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the variation in attitudes of students from different types of school. Particular attention should be paid to cases where responses to different categories are close together, which may indicate internal variation within the groups surveyed. For example, in the case of the category 'I would take lessons on saving and investing', students from urban state schools showed a polarisation between 'definitely no' and 'yes', reflecting the diversity of beliefs within this group. This may reflect differences in students' family experiences - students from more affluent families may not see the need for financial education, while others may see its potential value. This type of variation suggests the need for further research into the individual factors influencing students' attitudes, rather than treating the results as a clear trend for the group as a whole.

A similar situation exists for the category 'I would take part in activities that showcase different careers', where a polarisation between 'definitely yes' and 'definitely no' responses was observed in urban public schools. This suggests significant differences in students' preferences, which may be related to their individual career aspirations or access to information about different career paths. Such a result does not suggest a homogeneous approach within this group, but rather clear divisions that may be due to socio-economic differences and levels of family

and school support. In contrast, rural public-school students, who were more likely to choose neutrality, showed more homogeneous but also less pronounced attitudes, which may be due to a lack of access to a variety of career role models in their environment.

The category 'I would take a course on running a business' is also an interesting case. Students from rural public schools showed a clear tendency towards 'no' and 'neutral' answers, indicating a lack of clear attitudes towards entrepreneurship. In the context of urban public-school students, neutrality with a tendency towards 'yes' may indicate their moderate interest, but not strong enough to dominate the attitudes of the whole group. The difference in results between these groups could be interpreted as a result of differences in access to educational resources, such as entrepreneurship workshops or meetings with entrepreneurs, which are more common in urban areas.

The results of the analysis indicate that there are significant differences between schools, but also reveal significant internal variation in some categories. Interpreting the closeness of responses to different categories suggests that the results are not always clear cut and may reflect more complex relationships, which we intend to explore in further research on this topic. In future research, we plan to supplement our analysis with more detailed qualitative data that will allow us to clarify students' individual motivations and approaches to the challenges of the contemporary labour market.

5. Discussion

Differences in students' attitudes may be due both to differences in access to appropriate educational tools and to the socio-economic context in which they are located (Busso et al., 2017; Echazarra, Radinger, 2019; Li, Hou, 2022). Education in public schools, especially in rural areas, does not always provide the relevant skills needed in today's labour market, which is reflected in students' lower self-seeking activities and more sceptical attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Students in urban private schools have more opportunities and are better prepared for the challenges of today's labour market, which may be due to a more individualised approach to education and more classes developing soft and entrepreneurial skills (Gibb, Haskins, 2014; Laurisz, Sanak-Kosmowska, 2022; Oosterbeek et al., 2010). The findings of the study on differences in students' attitudes towards the challenges of today's labour market are confirmed and complemented by previous research. The following points elaborate on the previously discussed interpretations, enriching them with research perspectives that allow for a fuller understanding of the observed differences.

5.1. The role of educational environment

The educational environment plays a key role in shaping students' attitudes towards career development and the acquisition of soft skills (Afzal et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2013). Urban public schools, according to the study, are characterised by greater flexibility in adapting their curricula to the needs of students and the labour market. According to our study, students in these schools show an interest in entrepreneurship and financial education, which may be due to a more individualistic approach. Research shows that curricula that introduce elements of entrepreneurship are effective in shaping skills such as innovation and the ability to manage risk (DiBenedetto, 2019; Gibb, Haskins, 2014; Oosterbeek et al., 2010).

Urban public schools, on the other hand, while offering a more structured programme, often fail to address the specific needs associated with dynamic changes in the labour market. Analyses show that public educational institutions struggle to adapt to new demands, which may affect students' limited willingness to explore alternative career paths (Echazarra, Radinger, 2019; OECD, 2018). The polarisation of attitudes among this group of students, particularly in relation to activities that showcase different occupations, reflects this problem.

For public schools in rural areas, the impact of resource constraints is even more pronounced. The findings of students' neutrality or scepticism towards additional vocational activities are consistent with researchers' findings that lack of access to mentors, modern technology and extracurricular activities leads to lower career aspirations among rural students (Laurisz, Sanak-Kosmowska, 2022; Mbagaya, 2021; Zynuddin et al., 2023).

5.2. Socio-economic context

The importance of socio-economic context in shaping students' attitudes is supported by literature. Differences in the social status of students' families influence their attitudes towards education and their professional future (Bourdieu, 1984; Busso et al., 2017; Li, Hou, 2022). Students from families with higher socioeconomic status, who often attend public schools, have more resources and support, making it easier for them to develop social and entrepreneurial skills. The results of our study indicate that students from these schools show a clear interest in self-development in their careers, which is reflected in their proactivity and high support for individual responsibility for their own destiny.

In contrast, in rural areas, where socio-economic status is often lower, students have neutral or sceptical attitudes towards extracurricular activities and alternative career paths. Researchers suggest that limited access to vocational role models and community support may result in lower student motivation to develop marketable skills (Mbagaya, 2021; Robinson, 2017). This issue is particularly evident in rural students' scepticism towards activities such as running a business or saving and investing.

5.3. The education system and labour market needs

Adapting curricula to meet the needs of today's labour market remains a challenge for education systems around the world. Our study found that public schools, particularly in rural areas, are less effective in preparing students for the challenges of work. These findings are supported by studies showing that public schools in less urbanised regions are less likely to adopt innovative curricula, which limits the development of soft and entrepreneurial skills (Griffin et al., 2011; Li, Hou, 2022; Mbagaya, 2021).

In contrast, urban public schools, with their greater autonomy and flexibility, are able to respond more quickly to labour market needs (Crespo-Cebada et al., 2014; Henderson et al., 2020). Researchers highlight that curricula in private educational institutions are more likely to include elements such as project management, interpersonal skills development or entrepreneurship, thus better preparing students for a dynamic work environment.

At the same time, it is important to note that even in public schools there are barriers related to access to technology and specialised resources, especially in less developed regions (Henderson et al., 2020; Li, Hou, 2022). The results of the study indicate polarised attitudes among public school students towards activities such as saving and investing, which may suggest that even there, access to modern educational tools is not always equal.

5.4. Students' proactivity and willingness to take action

Students' proactivity in seeking additional educational opportunities is a key indicator of their readiness to work in a dynamically changing professional environment. Our study shows that students in urban public schools are more likely to take autonomous initiatives, which is in line with research findings that educational environments that support autonomy and self-efficacy foster students' intrinsic motivation (Deci, Ryan, 2013).

In contrast, in public schools, particularly rural schools, students' lower levels of proactivity may be due to a lack of extrinsic motivation and role models. Researchers suggest that a lack of support in the school and community environment leads to lower educational and career aspirations, which is reflected in students' sceptical attitudes towards extracurricular activities (Busso et al., 2017; Crespo-Cebada et al., 2014; Zynuddin et al., 2023).

5.5. Awareness of labour market challenges

Awareness of current labour market challenges is strongly related to access to educational resources and the quality of curricula. The high level of support among public school students for the statement that "people should be in charge of their own destiny" indicates that they are more aware of the role of soft skills and entrepreneurship. This finding is supported by studies that emphasise the importance of a sense of agency in developing proactive attitudes (Bandura, 1993; Echazarra, Radinger, 2019; Li, Hou, 2022; P. Robinson, 2017).

In contrast, the neutrality or scepticism of students in public schools, especially in rural areas, may be due to a lack of access to tools that support the development of skills necessary for the labour market. Researchers point out that limited access to technology and modern teaching methods can perpetuate traditional attitudes towards work, influencing perceptions of contemporary career challenges as unattainable (Brynjolfsson, Mcafee, 2014; Ćwiek et al., 2021; Laurisz et al., 2022).

6. Conclusions

The analyses conducted have shown that by studying different types of schools it is possible to identify differences in students' attitudes towards their professional future. Among other things, studies have shown that students from urban public schools are more proactive and interested in developing soft and entrepreneurial skills (Crespo-Cebada et al., 2014; Koehorst et al., 2021; Laurisz, Sanak-Kosmowska, 2022). Their attitudes can be attributed to access to richer educational resources, mentors and training programmes. These schools are characterised by flexibility in adapting their curricula to the demands of the labour market, which fosters attitudes in line with modern professional expectations. In urban public schools, a diversity of student attitudes was observed, particularly in categories related to entrepreneurship and financial education. While some students express enthusiasm for these areas, a significant group remains sceptical, which may indicate the lack of a coherent strategy to support the development of professional skills in these schools. In contrast, rural public schools are characterised by the lowest levels of student interest in additional activities to develop skills needed in the labour market. Neutral or sceptical attitudes prevail, reflecting limited access to educational resources such as workshops, specialists or technology. The high support for traditional values, such as responsibility for one's own destiny, indicates the different nature of the socio-cultural environment, which may shape a more conservative approach to education.

The results of this study are in line with the research literature that shows the influence of educational environment, socio-economic status and curriculum structure on students' attitudes (DiBenedetto, 2019; Koehorst et al., 2021; Rehman et al., 2023; P. Robinson, 2017; Santos, 2023). Looking at the educational environment, we can see that public schools, with their greater flexibility and access to resources, better prepare students for the challenges of the labour market. Public schools, especially in rural areas, have difficulties in adapting their curricula to the vocational needs of students, which affects their lower career aspirations. When analysing the socio-economic context, it is important to note that students with a higher social status, who are more likely to attend public schools, are more aware and motivated to develop their vocational skills. In contrast, students from rural areas with limited access to modern

resources may perceive the contemporary labour market as less accessible. On the other hand, the curricular perspective shows us that the lack of adequate curricular adaptation in public schools, especially in rural areas, reduces students' interest in topics related to entrepreneurship, financial education and personal development (Busso et al., 2017; Robinson, 2017; Santos, 2023).

Based on the research findings and their analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to policy makers in order to reduce the gap between schools and better prepare students for the challenges of the labour market:

1. Curricular reform in schools.

In order to better prepare students for the challenges of the labour market, it is necessary to introduce changes in the core curriculum that take into account the development of soft skills, financial education and entrepreneurship. Specific actions:

- mandatory entrepreneurship and financial management modules in the classroom that include practical exercises such as budget management simulations, business projects or the organisation of mini-enterprises.
- the introduction of design thinking and problem-solving classes to develop creativity and teamwork skills.
- flexibility in public school curricula to allow school leaders to add classes that respond to local labour market needs.

2. Strengthening school resources.
    - schools need support in terms of infrastructure and educational resources to close the gap in development opportunities for students, especially for rural schools compared to urban schools. Proposed actions:
    - technology development grants to enable the purchase of computers, multimedia equipment and internet access in every rural school;
    - creation of an 'Education for the Future' programme to provide access to online learning materials such as entrepreneurship and financial literacy platforms such as dedicated educational apps;
    - partnering with local entrepreneurs and vocational training organisations to provide workshops, internships and mentoring for students.
3. Introduce career guidance counsellors in schools.
    - the systematic support of career counsellors in every school is essential to help students choose their career path and develop their vocational skills. Proposed steps:
    - establish the position of a career counsellor in each school, responsible for individual counselling of students and organising workshops and meetings with representatives of different professions;
    - tailor careers guidance programmes to the specific needs of students, taking into account local career opportunities and students' individual aptitudes;

- organise career days in schools where students can meet local entrepreneurs, professionals and employers.

4. Encourage cooperation between schools and local businesses.
   - partnerships between schools and local businesses can improve students' practical skills and labour market awareness. Concrete actions:
   - introduce 'practical education' programmes where students have the opportunity to take part in short-term work placements in local businesses;
   - organise regular workshops and training sessions led by local entrepreneurs, focusing on skills such as management, marketing or logistics;
   - establishing regional networks between schools and entrepreneurs to share experiences and jointly develop educational programmes that meet local needs.
5. Equal access to technology.
   - ensuring that students from different backgrounds have equal opportunities to access modern technology and digital resources is key to preparing them for the future. Proposed steps:
   - implement a 'Technology for Every School' programme to provide every public school with modern computer labs and access to digital and virtual learning tools;
   - introduce compulsory digital literacy classes, including coding, data management and the use of technology in team and project work;
   - establish regional digital education centres to provide courses and workshops accessible to both students and teachers.
6. Develop teacher support programmes.
   - an important element of the changes in the education system is the upgrading of teachers' skills, especially in entrepreneurship and soft skills. Proposed actions:
   - organise regular training for teachers in modern teaching methods, including project-based learning and blended learning;
   - establish mentoring programmes for teachers to help them adapt their teaching to the needs of students and the labour market.

The results of the analyses carried out show that differences in students' attitudes towards the labour market clearly reflect the influence of the educational environment, socio-economic status and the quality of the curricula. In contrast, the key factors that differentiate students are the quality of the education provided and access to resources and educational support to develop key skills. For this reason, policy-makers should seek to equalise educational opportunities between different types of school by introducing reforms to improve the quality and accessibility of vocational education, particularly in rural areas. Such measures will not only make students more competitive in the labour market, but will also contribute to reducing social and economic inequalities in society.

Limitations

The survey was conducted with a limited sample of 187 students from three types of schools, which may affect the possibility of generalising the results, particularly in the context of local differences in the educational conditions of public schools. It is possible that the results of the survey, which constitutes the primary research tool, may also reflect students' subjective preferences or alignment with societal expectations, rather than actual beliefs. A further limitation is the timing of the survey, which was conducted at a specific point in the school year. This may have affected the intensity of students' interest in different issues, such as upcoming examinations.

The full impact of the local context, such as the level of school funding, parental support or teacher involvement, which can significantly differentiate students' attitudes, was not taken into account. In rural schools, for example, a lack of resources may have contributed to neutral or sceptical responses towards entrepreneurship or financial education. Future research would benefit from taking these factors into account in order to gain a fuller understanding of the results and their significance.

Ethical statement

Students from schools involved in the research and education project took part in the study. Each participant had the consent of the school and parents to participate in the project and the evaluation study. Participation was voluntary. Informed written consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of each participant in the study. Anyone could withdraw their consent without giving a reason. The study was anonymous and signed consent forms were only available to the support services at each university. Each participant also had parental consent for the processing of their personal data, in accordance with Article 6 of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation). All research procedures were in accordance with the Code of Good Practice in Higher Education Institutions developed by the Polish Rectors' Foundation and adopted by the Plenary Meeting of the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP) on 26 April 2007, as well as the Ethical Standards of the Krakow University of Economics adopted by the Senate Resolution (No. 38/2011). All participants, as well as schools and parents, were provided with comprehensive information about the study, including details of its scope, subject matter, and the right to refuse to answer questions.

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