

ARTICLES

EVALUATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation of local and regional development programs from the perspective of sustainability

In contribution, we presented an assessment of development programs from a sustainable view. We analysed the sustainable design of the selected local and regional programs from 2008 to 2013. To determine sustainability levels we methodologically used an assessment system based on ecosystem criteria, integrity and welfare criteria and self-sufficiency criteria, which was based on local community cooperation. We came to the conclusion that local and regional development programs were written based on weak sustainability starting points. Moreover, only few of them actually reached their planned results. For long- term sustainability the ecosystem, economic, social and ethical aspects need to be integrated already at a beginning of designing new development programs.

KEY WORDS

ecosystem approach, local and regional development, self-sufficiency, public participation, municipality, sustainability.

1. Introduction

The current regional and local development programs are mostly emphasized as being sustainable and supportive to the sustainable development (Vovk Korže, 2010). However, in their content the mostly stressed element is the need for competitiveness and the growth of gross domestic product (GDP). It thus opens the question of how sustainability is understood, given the fact that scientists warn us that the planet Earth in 21st century faces great dangers (Ekin and Medhurst, 2003), for which we ourselves are mainly to blame. These are reflected in the lack of healthy and safe food as well as pure drinking water, in an increasing number of forceful storms with devastating consequences and the extinction of plant and animal species, which can lead to the collapse of ecosystems and increased health risks. There is also a big problem of high surplus of the nitrogen in the soils and waters because of extremely high intensification in agriculture. And finally, we are not aware of, or hardly know any of the self-cleaning capabilities of our planet (Kajfež Bogataj, 2009).

We therefore need a considerate, tolerant and planned attitude to the environment at the moment, when planning the development activities. Adoption of the European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development (*A Sustainable Europe for a Better World 2001*), presented to the European Council in Gothenburg, June 2001, was a step forward to awareness that climate changes, traffic, health and natural treasures should be dealt with simultaneously. In 2002, the Commission also presented the report on external dimensions of sustainable development. It underlined the need for economic, social and environmental views to act in compliance with one another as one (Prugh, Assadourian, 2003).

In 2013, a five-year program period ended, in which local and regional communities had planned their development priorities. At the end of program period in 2013, we evaluated the selected local and regional programs in Slovenia with the aim of assessing their sustainable basis. Sustainability indicators were created on the basis of professional starting points that define sustainability (Vovk Korže, 2010). We included five programs in the research (three local and two regional) and assessed them according to the ecosystemic criteria, the holism and prosperity criteria as well as the criteria of self-sufficiency and inclusion of the local people, who are also the pillars of sustainable development.

2. Methodology

From the previous viewpoints on sustainable development, we have developed the following aspects of sustainability: the ecosystem aspect, the aspect of integrity and prosperity and the aspect of self-sufficiency with the participation of local community. We have developed the criteria for these aspects and used them in our evaluations of the selected development programs in Slovenia. The word "aspect" therefore signifies the content of individual measures, which we include into the criteria that are internationally comparable. In our research, we included the programs, which were selected by the following criteria:

- the programs have been developed in the past five years,
- we know the programs because of location proximity - *north-eastern Slovenia*, programs are defined as "sustainable",
- programs include city, rural area and include Natura 2000 and
- they reflect similar natural conditions and they all deal with areas in the macro-region of Sub-Pannonian Slovenia.

In the continuation, we state the detailed criteria for sustainable approach on the local and regional level (Vovk Korže, 2010):

- **ecosystemic criteria**
 - promoting diversity in living spaces,
 - promoting natural and sustainable elements in settlements,
 - minimizing land urbanization
 - reducing the emission of harmful substances into the air, water and soil,
 - minimizing the use of non-renewable energy sources,
 - minimizing the use of non-renewable resources, promoting the conservation of ecosystems,
 - minimizing excessive mobility of vehicles (over-mobility)
 - supporting environmentally - friendly forms of transport.
- **holism and prosperity criteria**
 - developing activities deriving from the local environment,
 - connecting the activities in a way that they complement each other,
 - deriving from multi-purposeness of each activity based on tradition, natural and cultural heritage,
 - promoting educational opportunities for all residents,
 - increasing personal responsibility and awareness in the long-term,
 - supporting cultural, social and regional identity,

- taking care of one’s own health and the health of others,
- promoting well-being and life quality.

- **criteria of self-sufficiency based on local community involvement**
 - promoting local products,
 - supporting trade routes within the region,
 - creating innovative work environments,
 - promoting new local and quality jobs,
 - connecting local environments (rural areas) with urban centres (cities) by offering original products and services
 - basing on harmonized and coordinated different interests
 - ensuring the possibility of all stakeholders’ involvement in all spheres of regional action,
 - ensuring the equality, dialogue and connections among the people in the region.

In the selected development programs, which we evaluated with these criteria, we assessed the inclusion of the suggested criteria and we used a simple scale for this:

- +yes – if they were included in the program
- no – if we did not find them in the program
- 0 partly** if they were mentioned, but not specifically highlighted

The overall assessment according to the criteria of the sustainable design of the selected programs was the basis for determining the sustainability model.

Table 1: Criteria of sustainable basis (Vovk Korže, 2010)

CRITERIA OF SUSTAINABLE BASIS	Value (%)
Ecosystemic criteria	
Criteria of holism and prosperity	
Self-sufficiency criteria based on local community involvement	
Total Share (%)	

* In this summary table we enter the total values for ecosystemic criteria, holism and prosperity criteria as well as the criteria of self-sufficiency and participation of the local community. Each of these criteria can have a score from 0 to 100%. This table gives us the average value.

3. Models of sustainability

On the basis of the achieved common grade in %, we classified the programs according to their scores into the accurate sustainability model, by which we assessed as the *classical model* - the one that had less than 50% of all measures without sustainable concepts, and as the *ecocentric model* - the one with over 90% of the measures recognized as sustainably oriented.

Table 2: Models of sustainability

CLASS	MODEL OF SUSTAINABILITY
under 50%	Model 1: very weak sustainability
between 50% and 75%	Model 2: weak sustainability
between 75% and 90%	Model 3: strong sustainability
above 90%	Model 4: very strong sustainability

Source: Vovk Korže, 2010

Model 4: Very strong sustainability – ideal model: it is reflected in the radical change of the man's attitude/ relation towards the environment. It emphasises the form of pure sustainable development, in which humanity returns into the environment as much as it takes from it. At the same time, it tries to increase and protect the biotic diversity. In this approach, there is no common growth in quantitative meaning as it is traditionally measured. Mankind live inside the environmental limits, development is not measured by the life standards but with the quality of life. Living and non-living world have intrinsic value, which is independent of the mankind. It emphasizes the social dimension of development, in which there is a special place for the work of associations and non-profit organizations, where anyone can cooperate within and according to his interests.

Model 3: Strong sustainability – the improvement of conditions in the sphere of social equality is taking place simultaneously with the economic development. The view of the modern environmental economy in this approach denies the finding that the expenses and benefits are economically calculable. It argues that there are certain natural resources, which are, according to their characteristics, of key importance for the health of biosphere - that is why non-monetary pointers of environmental sustainability need to be used. It supports the development of pure technologies, and the economic growth is still important indicator of sustainability. Strong sustainability leans on the broad understanding of the principle of cautiousness. Whenever possible, the use of non-renewable natural resources should be replaced by renewable ones and effective environmental management must be developed. The approach requires market regulations and state intervention by using mechanisms that are supposed to affect changes in behaviour.

In the field of the environment, this means appropriate regulations, plans for the use of land, financial incentives and support, economic instruments, such as eco- taxes, pollution fees, environmental permits, subventions, various funds and raising awareness. In spite of the fact that economic growth is still important, this model can lead into ecological reconstruction and, consequently, into the improvement and minimisation of social inequality.

Model 2: Weak sustainability - is based on the assumption that existing political and economic system is able to solve all environmental problems without extensive changes. The view on the living and non-living world has no internal value, therefore its protection is limited only to - whether the preservation of certain species adds directly to economic growth or to the direct benefit of maintaining the system. The purpose of this approach is to connect capitalist growth with care for the environment. The main priority of policies is still economic growth, so the environmental problems are exposed to the procedure of the damage estimates in the environment, which can be effectively mitigated with the so-called technologies at “the end of the pipe”. Environment is pushed into the sectorial politics, there is no social equality, and prosperity is meant only for the part of the generation. Environmental governance ignores and underestimates the experience of the local population. Political decision makers lead inappropriate solving of the environmental problems.

Model 1: Very weak sustainability - natural environment is only in the function of providing resources. Sustainable development is the synonym for economic growth, which is measured by the growth of GDP, since the development is equalled with its growth. Emphasis is on the technology, which should be able to solve any problem. Economic and political instruments are focused on maximizing the production and growth, regardless of the environmental consequences. This model satisfies the economic needs of only some part of a generation and will, in the future, satisfy only one part of future generations because of their political power.

4. The results of the analysis of selected programs with sustainability model

In continuation, we evaluated the selected development programs by taking into account the ecosystemic criteria, the holistic and prosperity criteria and the criteria of self-sufficiency based on the participation of the local community. We compared these three sets of criteria with the concrete activities that were being followed in the five selected programs. On the basis of the common assessment of sustainable basis, we established the sustainable model in a quality manner.

- Regional Development Program for the Podravje Region

By linking all three criteria of sustainable basis, we determined the total sustainability assessment and in this way the program was placed into the appropriate sustainability model. We quantified the sustainability models in such a way that the programs had to show at least half of the measures supporting a sustainable design, that is, the boundary between the classic sustainability model, which means very weak sustainability, and a higher level, that is, a model of weak sustainability, where the measures/ activities are already clearly connected with sustainable life styles. A strong sustainability model should have at least three quarters of sustainability measures, while the ecocentric model should have at least 90% of this kind of action.

Table 3: Assessment of the sustainable basis of the Regional Development Program for the Podravje region

SUSTAINABLE BASIS FOR PODRAVJE	Estimates in (%)
Ecosystemic criteria	25
Criteria of holism and prosperity	25
Criteria of self-sufficiency on the basis of the local community cooperation	12.5
Total estimate in percentage (%)	20.8 %*

*Average value

Table 4: Classification of the Regional Development Program for the Podravje Region as a model of sustainability

Class	Model of sustainability
under 50%	Model 1: very weak sustainability
between 50% and 75%	Model 2: weak sustainability
between 75% and 90%	Model 3: strong sustainability
above 90%	Model 4: very strong sustainability

The Regional Development Program for Podravje is assessed from the point of view of sustainable basis as a model of very weak sustainability, as it does not predict enough measures to protect nature and the environment, to connect the activities in the area and to involve people and take into account the specificities of the local environment - that is, the municipalities in the Dravsko polje, the foothills of Pohorje, Dravinjske gorice and partly Slovenske gorice. The regional specificities are not considered enough in the Regional Development Program for the Podravje region. Such programs should be rationally judged from the sustainable points of view already in the early phases of their creation, in order to influence their connection with

theecosystemic characteristics, people's ideas and the interrelation of the measures.

-Study of the sustainable development of Selnica ob Dravi Municipality

In the Study of the Sustainable Development of the municipality Selnica the ecosystemic criteria are not sufficiently taken into account, as measures to limit the environmental pressures on nature are very rare. The goal of the municipality's residents is the development which is understood by the road and infrastructure improvements or construction and other performed activities. It is true that people have specifically emphasized they want to have untouched nature, but further than to the conservation of the current state they did not get.

Assessment of holism and prosperity is high because people felt their belonging to their municipality and with active participation also indicated that they wanted to participate in the development of their own place. In addition, the connection between local communities and municipality consolidated. The project office was established, where we provided detailed information for all the interested people about the *hydro-pumped storage power plant project* and new possible challenges. There is also a high assessment of the self-sufficiency on the basis of the local community cooperation.

Table 5: Overall assessment of sustainable basis of Sustainable Development Study for Selnica Municipality

SUSTAINABLE BASIS	Estimates in (%)
Ecosystemic criteria	37.5
Criteria of holism and prosperity	62
Criteria of self-sufficiency on the basis of the local community cooperation	75
Total estimate in percentage (%)	58.2%

The overall score of 58.2 (the average of the three criteria) classifies the measures of the Sustainable Development Study for Selnica Municipality as a model of weak sustainability. The common idea with municipality and its residents to create a joint program separates it from the classical model. However, its classicality is reflected in the understanding of the sustainable development as a quantitative-productive economic development. The Sustainable Development Study for Selnica ob Dravi municipality is strongest in the sustainable basis on the level of the local community inclusion, where the weak point is not enough consideration of the ecosystems and strengthening of own responsibility for the environmental development of the municipality. With more awareness, this drawback could have been less prominent.

Table 6: Ranking of the Selnica Sustainable Development Study in the Sustainability Model

Class	Model of sustainability
under 50%	Model 1: very weak sustainability
between 50% and 75%	Model 2: weak sustainability
between 75% and 90%	Model 3: strong sustainability
above 90%	Model 4: very strong sustainability

- Municipal Environmental Protection Program for the Municipality of Poljčane 2008-2013

All the assessments of the criteria are high; the lowest was calculated for the ecosystemic criteria. The assessment of the measures of sustainable basis for the Poljčane Municipal Environmental Protection Program shows that sustainable forms of transport should have more support in the ecosystemic field. This is, however, harder to achieve in this municipality which is away from the main traffic routes. That is why people use cars as the most common means of transport. The assessment obtained is thus the challenge for the local community to organize public transport and in this way reduce depending on cars. Holism and prosperity reach 87.5% of the sustainable design; the deficit can be seen in strengthening the regional identity, which is now understandable due to the municipal allocation of funds for the programs that run throughout the region. Lack of trust in the Podravje region, where the municipality Poljčane belongs, is also visible. There are no evident organised forms of cooperation. Regional identity is very low and will have to be built on the basis of trust and cooperation. A criterion of self-sufficiency is fully represented, since the process of cooperative participation was initiated on the local grounds.

Table 7: Overall assessment of sustainable design as a basis for determining the sustainability model

Sustainable basis	Estimates in (%)
ECOSYSTEMIC CRITERIA	75
CRITERIA OF HOLISM AND PROSPERITY	87.5
CRITERIA OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY ON THE BASIS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY COOPERATION	100
Total estimate in percentage (%)	87.5

All the ratings of the criteria are high and the lowest score was calculated for the ecosystemic criterion. The assessment of the sustainable design and the measures for the Municipality of Poljčane show that sustainable forms of transport should be more emphasized in the ecosystemic field, which is difficult in the Poljčane municipality, since it is far away from the main traffic routes. That is why the car is the most common means of transport for the residents. The assessment obtained is the challenge for organizing joint transport in the local community, thus reducing dependence on cars.

Integrity and prosperity reach 87.5% of the sustainable basis; we see a deficit in strengthening the regional identity, which is now understandable, due to the municipal distribution of funds for programs running across the region. There is also a mistrust present in the Podravje region, which includes the municipality of Poljčane, and in practice, there are no organized forms of cooperation. Regional identity is very low and will have to be built on the basis of trust and cooperation. The self-sufficiency criterion is fully represented, as the process of mutual cooperation on the local ground was initiated.

Table 8: Classification of the Municipal Environmental Protection Program into the sustainability model

Class	Model of sustainability
under 50%	Model 1: very weak sustainability
between 50% and 75%	Model 2: weak sustainability
between 75% and 90%	Model 3: strong sustainability
above 90%	Model 4: very strong sustainability

After considering the criteria of sustainable design, the Municipal Environmental Protection Program for the Poljčane municipality is classified as a model of strong sustainability. The most prominent is the way to live in harmony with nature and the planning and implementation of all activities in this direction (different types of projects are being prepared to achieve the common vision), which is in line with the conclusion that all processes must be connected (achieving secondary and tertiary intersection) and based on the local-regional resources and specificities.

- Bioregion - Region of Natural Diversity

The project “Bioregion – Region of natural diversity” builds on the basis that natural variety is the quality that needs to be preserved. It is our own development understanding that should adapt to this assumption. At the same time, it wants to promote the natural diversity as a value and characteristic which is extremely important for the development - not only as a development obstacle maybe, but also as a development opportunity, which can be exploited

by various industries. Tourism, of course, is one of the most important sectors, e.g. ecotourism. It is therefore a regional project, since individual municipalities are small and it would be more difficult for them to realize the aims and interests of Bioregion project.

Table 9: Overall assessment of sustainable design of Bioregion - Region of natural diversity

SUSTAINABLE BASIS	Estimates in (%)
Ecosystemic criteria	50
Criteria of holism and prosperity	100
Criteria of self-sufficiency on the basis of the local community cooperation	50
Total estimate in percentage (%)	66.7

Table 10: Classification of Bioregion - Region of natural diversity into the sustainability model

Class	Model of sustainability
under 50%	Model 1: very weak sustainability
between 50% and 75%	Model 2: weak sustainability
between 75% and 90%	Model 3: strong sustainability
above 90%	Model 4: very strong sustainability

The Bioregion program falls into a model of weak sustainability. The benefits of Bioregion are the integration of activities, cooperation of municipalities; it will be necessary to increase the concern for sustainable mobility and motivate people to participate in the planning of sustainable programs. Ecosystemic criteria were also assessed with partial sustainability.

- Municipal Environmental Protection Program for the Municipality of Maribor 2007-2013

In the ecosystemic area, the Municipal Environmental Protection Program for the Municipality of Maribor has a weaker program; because there are no measures to promote the diversity of the environment or natural and sustainable elements in the city, therefore the common assessment of the ecosystemic criterion is zero. In the field of holism and prosperity, there are measures to support social activities, but there is no connection between them. At workshops, the public encouraged the preservation of green areas and areas without noise, but such measures/activities are not present in the Municipal Protection Program for the Municipality of Maribor.

Table 11: Overall assessment of the sustainable design of the Municipal Environmental Protection Program for the Municipality of Maribor as a basis for determining the sustainability model

SUSTAINABLE BASIS	Estimates in (%)
Ecosystemic criteria	0
Criteria of holism and prosperity	25%
Criteria of self-sufficiency on the basis of the local community cooperation	0
Total estimate in percentage (%)	8.3%*

*Average value

Sustainable design of the Maribor Municipal Environmental Protection Program is weak; there are no measures to reduce the pressures on nature and the environment and to increase the ecosystemic services, so the common estimate of ecosystemic criterion is 0%. There is insufficient emphasis on the local environment, on measures in the field of culture and involvement of the interested public, which, with the absence of other measures, contributes a total of 25%. In assessing the sustainability model, this represents only 8.3%, which places the Municipal Environmental Protection Program for the Maribor Municipality among classical models with very weak sustainability.

Table 12: Classification of the Municipal Environmental Protection Program for the Municipality of Maribor in the model of sustainability

Class	Model of sustainable development
under 50%	Model 1: very weak sustainability
between 50% and 75%	Model 2: weak sustainability
between 75% and 90%	Model 3: strong sustainability
above 90%	Model 4: very strong sustainability

5. Interpretation of the selected programs in terms of sustainability models

Evaluation of measures in the local and regional programs shows that the weakest basis of the assessed programs is the ecosystemic criterion (common score is only 37.5%), which is far below the anticipated level. There are, however, great differences between the programs: e.g. MEPP* for Poljčane and the SDS* for Selnica have estimates of 75% and 50%, while the ecosystemic aspect in the MEPP* for Maribor Municipality and the RDP* for Podravje is modest. When searching the reasons for such a low presentation of ecosystemic elements, we find that: with the current measures the diversity of living spaces is being reduced, there are not enough natural and sustainable elements, the building -up of land is increasing, the consumption of non-renewable resources is growing, the mobility with cars is rising, and the fertile land is being reduced.

The only positive factor in the ecosystemic field is reducing the input of harmful substances into the air, water and soil (however, the local inputs are increasing). The current regional policy has not been oriented towards these ecosystemic approaches; on the contrary, co-financing from regional funds has fostered the build-up of municipal areas, asphalt roads and energy consumption. So we must look for the reasons for this bad ecosystemic state of affairs not just on the local level, but also in the national and European policy.

MEPP* -Municipal Environmental Protection Program

RDP* - Regional Development Program

SDS* - Sustainable Development Study

Holism and prosperity are mostly represented criterion in the program measures, with 59.9%. Most of the measures include education, support for culture, health and life quality. We identified a deficit in the field of linking the measures, which will be necessary to increase to ensure sustainability. The mean value of sustainability was assessed in the criterion of self-sufficiency and participation of the local community, namely 47.5%. The great differences between the programs are a reflection of different priorities and orientation. Local-targeted programs have received more points here. Regional and urban programs have lower ratings than municipal ones, where there is a greater possibility of people's participation and the motivation for the local community affiliation is bigger.

Table 13: Overall assessment of regional and local programs with regard to the representation of sustainability aspects

SUSTAINABLE BASIS OF THE PROGRAM	RDP Podravje	SDS Selnica	MEPP Poljčane	Bioregion	MEPP Maribor	Common assessment %
Ecosystemic criteria	25	37.5	75	50	0	37.5
Criteria of holism and prosperity	25	62	87.5	100	25	59.9
Criteria of self-sufficiency on the basis of local community cooperation	12.5	75	100	50	0	47.5
Common assessment in percentage (%)	20.8	58.2	87.5	66.7	8.3	48.3

6. Conclusion

The evaluation of measures in local and regional programs shows that the programs are weakest in terms of ecosystemic criteria (total score is only 37.5%), which is far below the expected limit. When searching the reasons for such low representation of ecosystemic criteria, we find that with the current measures the diversity of living spaces is decreasing, that there are not enough natural and sustainable elements in the settlements, that the build-up of the land and the consumption of non-renewable resources is increasing as well as the use of cars and also the fertile soil is being lost. The only positive factor in the ecosystemic field is the reducing of harmful substances in the air, water and soil (as the result of the cleaning systems used).

The current regional policy has not been oriented towards these ecosystemic approaches; on the contrary, co-financing from regional funds fosters the build-up of municipal areas, road regulations and energy consumption. Therefore, we must look for the reasons for this bad ecosystemic state of affairs not just on the local level, but also in the national and European policy. Another reason is also that natural resources as well as nature and the environment are not present enough in the decision-makers' consciousness. They are not aware that these are the main sources, which we must systematically protect. Consequently, we believe that the ecosystemic criteria *must* be the pillar of sustainable basis in all development programs. Providing ecosystemic functions will not be possible unless we primarily protect the ecosystems.

Holism and prosperity are the most represented criteria in the program measures, with 59.9%. Most measures include education, support for culture, health and living quality. We identified a deficit in the field of linking these measures, which will be necessary to increase to ensure sustainability. The mean value of sustainability was assessed in the criteria of self-sufficiency and participation of the local community, namely 47.5%. The great differences between the programs are the reflection of different priorities and orientation. Local-targeted programs have received more points here. Regional and urban programs have lower ratings than municipal or local ones, as the possibility of people's participation and the motivation for belonging to the community are greater. The research has shown that it is necessary and inevitable to take into account all the criteria of sustainability already when the programs are being designed on the local and regional level. It is not possible to expect the achievements of all the objectives if the measures are not interconnected. It is precisely in the interrelation of these measures that this research has proved successful and found the most important key to achieving sustainability on the local and regional level.

We believe that with the quantitative evaluation we managed to point to the problems of the selected programs in terms of sustainable basis. Specifically, this means that the Municipal Environmental Protection Program for Maribor and the Regional Development Program for Podravje both highlight the classical economic growth in their measures. They see the development as, or equate it with, the growth of the GDP (gross domestic product), and most of the measures are planned to improve this state of affairs and most economic and political measures are aimed at increasing the quantitative production and meeting sectoral economic interests. The Bioregion Program and the Sustainable Development Study for Selnica have a strong emphasis on self-sufficiency aspects and thus show great consideration for ecosystemic aspects.

The Municipal Environmental Protection Program for the Municipality of Poljčane was best evaluated, as it included all the criteria of sustainability, since it was based anew and with great awareness of the importance of taking into account the environment, people and the local economy. The Municipality of Poljčane lies in the flood zone of the Dravinja River and has almost 50% of Nature 2000, and 30% of other protected areas. There the "classic" development was not possible. The evaluations of development programs so far have shown that it would be a great benefit to evaluate the prepared programs in advance with sustainable criteria. This would enable to incorporate the ecosystemic aspects, the aspects of self-sufficiency and public participation, and holism and prosperity, early enough into the emerging programs. It would then be much easier later to carry out the planned tasks. The usefulness of such documents would be greater, which is important for all the areas, which need concrete shifts.

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