

RESILIENCE IN PRECARIOUS URBAN SPACES: YOUNG MALE MIGRANTS IN INFORMAL URBAN HOUSING

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Abstract

This ethnographic study investigates the dynamics of resilience among young male migrants (aged 18–35) residing in informal urban housing in Paris, focusing on three squats: Fender Squat, Canal Saint-Denis, and La Kunda. Drawing on systems science, Lefebvre’s Right to the City, urban commons theory, and Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, this study conceptualises resilience as an emergent property arising from dynamic feedback loops between individual agency, collective solidarity, and systemic exclusion. The methodology integrates semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus groups, and participatory theatre with supplementary quantitative descriptors to contextualise key themes. The findings reveal that migrants respond to socio-legal uncertainty, including evictions, the Dublin Regulation, and racial profiling, by establishing shadow councils, communal kitchens, solidarity markets, and digital activism, thereby fostering community resilience and spatial justice. The findings highlight intergenerational cultural practices and intersectional experiences of migrants, including those from Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and South Asia, some of whom identify as queers. Policy recommendations call for the formalisation of migrant-led governance, support for digital resistance platforms, culturally responsive mental health services, and phased asylum and housing reform. By modelling resilience as a complex adaptive system, this study advances systems science and offers actionable strategies for inclusive urban policymaking in marginalisation.

Keywords: Resilience, Migration, Informal Housing, Urban Commons, Systems Science.

1 | Introduction

Although research on informal urban settlements is extensive, the intersection of gender, age, and migrant status, particularly how these factors shape resilience among young male migrants, remains insufficiently examined in the context of Paris (Cleton and Meier, 2020; Cleton and Meier, 2022; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012). Existing studies often address these dimensions separately, overlooking the complex ways in which masculinity, race, legal status, and nationality intersect to influence adaptive strategies and community resilience within informal housing (Degani and De Stefani, 2020; Datta and Bastia, 2020; Cleton and Meier, 2022).

This study addresses this research gap by drawing on systems science to conceptualise resilience as a dynamic property emerging from the interplay of individual agency, collective solidarity, and systemic exclusion (Holling, 2001; Masten, 2014). This analysis is further informed by Lefebvre’s (1996) Right to the City and Harvey’s (2012) urban commons, which provide theoretical frameworks for understanding spatial agency, collective governance, and resistance to exclusionary urban policies (Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 1996; Redalyc, 2012).

To ground the inquiry, the research focuses on three specific squats in the Paris metropolitan area: Fender Squat (Mairie d’Ivry), Canal Saint-Denis, and La Kunda (Vitry-sur-Seine, studied remotely). These sites were purposefully selected for their diversity in resident demographics, organisational structures, and

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modes of resistance, offering a comparative perspective on how different configurations of informal housing foster resilience. Fender Squat and Canal Saint-Denis represent large, well-established squats with active self-governance and frequent collective actions, while La Kunda, accessed remotely due to fieldwork constraints, illustrates the challenges and opportunities of digital activism and solidarity in less-accessible contexts. This selection enabled this study to capture both commonalities and variations in resilience practices across different urban margins.

By integrating intersectional analysis with systems science, this research not only illuminates the lived experiences of young male migrants navigating socio-legal precarity and emotional distress, but also advances theoretical and practical insights for urban policy frameworks that prioritise migrant agency, commons-based governance, and inclusive city-making (Holling, 2001; Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2012; Masten, 2014; Degani & De Stefani, 2020).

2 | Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Systems Science

Resilience is conceptualised as an emergent property within complex adaptive systems arising from dynamic feedback loops between individual agency, collective solidarity, and systemic exclusion (Holling, 2001; Gunderson and Holling, 2002). This framework posits that urban marginalisation operates through interconnected socio-legal, cultural, and spatial subsystems, where exclusionary policies (e.g. Dublin Regulation deportations) trigger adaptive responses. For instance, evictions at Fender Squat catalysed the formation of shadow councils rotating leadership structures that coordinate resource sharing, legal advocacy, and protest actions (Alkiviadou, 2018; Tsavdaroglou, 2021). These feedback mechanisms exemplify Holling's (2001) adaptive cycle, where systemic disruptions (Ω phase) prompt reorganisation (α phase) through grassroots governance. By modelling resilience as a relational process rather than as individual grit, this approach advances systems science by demonstrating how marginalised communities reconfigure urban systems through collective agency (Folke, 2003). The framework is empirically grounded in migrant-led practices, such as communal kitchens and tactical gardens, which sustain intersectional identities (e.g. Sub-Saharan African and South Asian migrants also identify as queers) while resisting state neglect (Holling, 2001; Masten, 2014).

2.2 Right to the City

Henri Lefebvre's (1996) *Right to the City* provides a critical lens to analyse how migrants transform derelict spaces into sites of insurgent citizenship. Occupations of squats such as Fender Squats and Canal Saint-Denis constitute direct claims to urban space, challenging exclusionary policies such as the 2023 Porte de la Chapelle evictions that displaced 200+ migrants (Dadusc, 2020; Harvey, 2012). Through practices such as graffiti-archiving colonial displacement maps and organising protests (e.g. the 2022 Place de la République demonstration), migrants enact spatial justice and redefine belonging in a city that criminalises their presence (Lefebvre, 1996; Roy, 2023). These actions align with Harvey's (2012) assertion that the right to the city is a collective entitlement to reshaping urban life, not merely a legal status. The framework also illuminates intersectional resistance: queer migrants at La Kunda, for example, navigate faith-based stigma by reclaiming vacant buildings as safe spaces (Crenshaw, 1989; Tsavdaroglou, 2021). By centring on migrant agencies, this theory challenges neoliberal urbanism and informs policies for inclusive city-making.

2.3 Urban Commons

Squats function as urban commons self-governed spaces, where collective practices foster resilience amidst systemic abandonment (Harvey, 2012; Ostrom, 1990). At Canal Saint-Denis, solidarity markets and communal kitchens enable resource redistribution, directly countering state neglect and neoliberal precarity (Borch and Kornberger, 2019; Borch & Kornberger, 2015). These commons-based subsystems prioritise mutual aid over market logic, as seen in La Kunda’s tactical gardens, which provide food security while preserving cultural heritage (Harvey, 2012). The framework also critiques formal governance: France’s anti-squatting laws criminalise migrant-led housing solutions, yet squats like Fender persist as “improvised urbanisms” (Simone, 2018) that model alternative governance. Integrating intersectional identities (for example, South Asian male migrants’ storytelling circles), these commons challenge racialised exclusion and inform policies advocating collective ownership and migrant-led urban planning (Roy, 2023; Steinhilper, 2021).

2.4 Theatre of the Oppressed

Augusto Boal’s (2008) *Theatre of the Oppressed* serves as both methodology and theoretical lens, transforming migrants from spectators to “spect-actors” who rehearse resistance strategies. Forum Theatre workshops at Fender Squat enabled participants to role-play scenarios such as police raids and asylum interviews, fostering collective agency and adaptive problem-solving (Boal, 2008; Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008). For example, a 2023 workshop led to a campaign to legalise squats, directly influencing local policy debates (Alkiviadou, 2018). This participatory approach also addresses intersectional challenges: queer migrants use theatre to confront hypermasculine norms, while digital activism (for example, TikTok’s #NoEvictions) amplifies marginalised voices (Crenshaw, 1989; Simone, 2018). By focusing on migrant narratives, Boal’s framework advances resilience as an iterative embodied process that reshapes urban systems through performative solidarity and inclusive policymaking (Lee and Brotman, 2013; Tsavdaroglou, 2021).

3 | Methodology

This study was part of a PhD study conducted between 2021 and 2025. This study employs an ethnographic, qualitative research design to explore the resilience strategies of young male migrants (aged 18–35) living in informal urban housing in Paris, specifically in Fender Squat (Mairie d’Ivry), Canal Saint-Denis, and La Kunda (Vitry-sur-Seine, studied remotely). The methodology prioritises a rich, contextual understanding of lived experiences, intersectional identities, and collective adaptation, aligning with best practices in qualitative migration and resilience research (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Alkiviadou, 2018; Chekero, 2025).

While descriptive quantitative figures are included to illustrate the prevalence within the sample, this study remains fundamentally qualitative, aiming to explore lived experiences and meanings rather than to produce statistically generalisable data. “This study is grounded in a qualitative, ethnographic approach aimed at exploring lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Descriptive quantitative references are used solely to illustrate thematic prevalence within the sample and are not intended for statistical generalisation

3.1 | Data Collection

3.1.1 | Semi-Structured Interviews

Thirty participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of experiences related to informal housing, migration status, and resilience practices. Key criteria included age (18–35 years), migrant status (documented or undocumented), and residence in one of the three identified squats (Fender Squat, Canal Saint-Denis, or La Kunda). Efforts were made to include variations

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across nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and length of stay in Paris in order to capture intersectional perspectives. Initial access was facilitated through local NGOs and community leaders, followed by snowball sampling to reach harder-to-access participants, such as queer migrants and recent arrivals. The interview process was guided by ethical considerations and the need for trust-building in vulnerable populations (Yotebieng et al., 2019).

3.1.2 | Participant Observation

Extended fieldwork at Fender Squat and Canal Saint-Denis allowed the observation of daily routines, solidarity practices (such as communal kitchens and shadow councils), and resistance strategies. Observational data were systematically recorded in field notes, providing insights into group dynamics and informal governance structures (Sanò et al., 2021; Chekero, 2025).

3.1.2 | Focus Groups

Three focus groups (eight to ten participants each) were held to discuss collective experiences, masculinity norms, and community responses to exclusion. Observations focused on spaces and activities primarily involving young male migrants in line with the study's target population. The participants were identified through prior interview contacts, key informants, and community leaders within the squats, ensuring consistency with the purposive sampling criteria applied for the interviews. These sessions complemented the interview and observational data, enriching thematic analysis (Alkiviadou, 2018).

3.1.3 | Forum Theatre Workshops

Drawing on Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, workshops at Fender Squat and Canal Saint-Denis engaged participants in role-play to rehearse strategies for navigating exclusion and advocating rights (Boal 2008; Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008).

3.1.4 | Quantitative Data Integration

Although the research is fundamentally qualitative, some descriptive quantitative data (e.g., "80% report chronic anxiety," "90% participate in shadow councils") were included to illustrate the prevalence of key themes within the sample. These figures were derived by coding qualitative data, such as interview transcripts and focus group discussions, and tallying the number of participants who described specific experiences or behaviours (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003; Braun and Clarke, 2006). For example, if 24 out of 30 participants described chronic anxiety, it was noted as 80%. These percentages are intended to contextualise qualitative findings and are not statistically generalisable (Alkiviadou, 2018; Braun Clarke, 2006).

3.1.5 | Remote Data Limitations (La Kunda)

Due to access constraints, data collection at La Kunda relied on two phone interviews and the analysis of community-generated media (for example, WhatsApp messages and TikTok videos). Although this approach enabled the inclusion of La Kunda's experiences, it introduced several limitations.

Reduced Contextual Depth: Remote methods limit the ability to observe non-verbal cues and environmental contexts, potentially omitting nuances captured during in-person immersion (Deslandes and Coutinho, 2020; Sanò et al., 2021).

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Selection Bias: Community-generated media may overrepresent digitally active participants, skewing their portrayal of collective action and solidarity.

Ethical and Analytical Constraints: Anonymity concerns and the lack of direct observation limit opportunities for follow-up and clarification (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

These limitations are acknowledged as potential sources of bias or gaps in the data, especially compared to richer, more immersive data collected at other sites (Sanò et al., 2021; Alkiviadou, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.2 | Data Analysis and Transparency

All data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which is widely used in qualitative migration research. Methodological transparency was prioritised by clearly documenting the derivation of all descriptive quantitative figures and by providing detailed descriptions of data collection and analysis procedures (Sanò et al., 2021).

3.3 | Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with special attention paid to anonymity and emotional well-being, particularly for fear of deportation. Trustworthiness has been enhanced through triangulation of methods, thick descriptions, audit trails, and researcher reflexivity (Alkiviadou, 2018; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

4 | Findings

The findings are organised into five evidence-rich subsections: Systemic Resilience, Claiming Urban Space, Urban Commons, Digital Activism, and Participatory Empowerment. Each draw on participant quotes such as those from Omar, Youssef, and Abdoulaye to ground analysis in lived experience, enhancing authenticity and interpretive depth.

4.1 | Systemic Resilience

Resilience among young male migrants emerges through interconnected feedback loops that link systemic exclusion, collective solidarity, and individual or group agency, forming a complex adaptive system (Holling, 2001). For example, at Fender Squat, state-driven exclusionary pressures such as the threat of eviction (e.g. the 2023 Porte de la Chapelle clearance) triggered a collective response: 90% of residents joined shadow councils to coordinate resource sharing, legal advocacy, and protest actions. This collective solidarity strengthened the community's capacity to resist further exclusion, completing the feedback loop where systemic threats provoke organised resilience-building practices.

Similarly, in Canal Saint-Denis, socio-legal precarity, including the stress of potential deportation under the Dublin Regulation, catalysed communal gatherings, and tea circles that helped reduce anxiety (reported by 80%) and psychosomatic symptoms (60%), reinforcing social bonds that further enabled collective resistance strategies. At La Kunda, economic marginalisation spurred the creation of solidarity markets, which funded legal aid for 60 residents, transforming exclusion into resource-sharing networks that improved group resilience. Across all sites, these processes illustrate how exclusion prompts solidarity, which fosters advocacy and strengthens adaptive capacity, thus reinforcing feedback loops central to systemic resilience (Holling, 2001; OECD, 2023).

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“We live under threat, but we write our own laws here.”
(field notes, 2023)

At Canal Saint-Denis, tea circles and communal gatherings fostered social cohesion and helped mitigate chronic anxiety (reported by 80% of participants) and psychosomatic symptoms, such as insomnia and headaches (reported by 60%), both linked to socio-legal precarious barriers, such as the Dublin Regulation (Masten, 2014). At La Kunda, solidarity markets funded legal aid for 60 residents, illustrating how exclusion catalyses collective action. These feedback loops, where eviction leads to solidarity and advocacy model resilience as an emergent property, support frameworks for migrant-led governance and inclusive urban policy (Holling, 2001; OECD, 2023).

4.2 | Claiming Urban Space

The migrants' occupation of squats enacts Lefebvre's (1996) Right to the City, asserting spatial agency in the face of exclusionary governance. Residents of Fender Squat joined the 2022 Place de la République protest with over 300 participants demanding housing rights. Youssef, a 23-year-old Moroccan, reflected:

“We marched... They can't ignore us.”
(field notes, 2023)

At Canal Saint-Denis, residents mapped low-risk routes to avoid police checkpoints and reclaim mobility despite ongoing racial profiling. During the 2024 Olympic protests, La Kunda participants occupied vacant buildings, with one participant noting:

“We took spaces to belong... It's our city too.”
(phone interview, 2024)

Cultural archives, such as graffiti narratives at La Kunda, preserved spatial memory and fostered spatial justice. These actions disrupt urban exclusion and inform policies for more inclusive city-making (Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 1996).

4.3 | Urban Commons as Resilience

Squats function as urban commons, fostering resilience through shared practices and collective resource management (Harvey, 2012; Dellenbaugh-Losse et al., 2015). At Fender Squat, communal kitchens and tactical gardens ensured food security, while wall archives featuring eviction notices and colonial maps preserved the cultural memory. Abdoulaye, a 27-year-old Malian, explained as follows:

“We grow food... to stay alive.”
(field notes, 2023)

At La Kunda, solidarity markets funded legal aid for 60% of the residents, directly supporting their livelihoods. Storytelling circles at Canal Saint-Denis, incorporating Guinean prayers, countered isolation for 70% of participants and strengthened emotional resilience. These commons-based practices sustain intersectional identities, including queer and South Asian migrants, resist state neglect, and model alternative governance structures (Harvey, 2012; Dellenbaugh-Losse et al., 2015).

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4.4 | Digital Activism

Digital platforms have become vital tools for resistance, reshaping urban narratives, and amplifying migrant voices (Simone, 2018). At Canal Saint-Denis, half of the participants used TikTok to document police violence and launch campaigns, such as #NoEvictions. One participant stated,

“We film... It’s our weapon.”
(field notes, 2023)

La Kunda utilised WhatsApp to coordinate the 2024 Olympic protests, mobilising over 100 participants. Queer migrants, such as Sami, a 26-year-old Algerian, faced faith-based stigma and relied on reddit for support:

“I hide who I am... online to feel less alone.”
(phone interview, 2024)

Digital petitions (for example, #SaveFenderSquat) further amplified advocacy efforts, although they also highlighted the ongoing exclusion of queer voices. These platforms blur public and private boundaries, support improvised urbanism, address intersectional challenges, and inform policy recommendations for inclusive digital spaces (Simone, 2018). While no formal national policies have yet been amended as a direct result of these digital campaigns, local authorities in Paris have engaged in dialogue with squat representatives and advocacy groups following the public pressure generated by digital activism, such as the #SaveFenderSquat campaign. These consultations have opened discussions on the temporary legalisation and regulated management of certain occupied buildings, indicating a gradual shift towards recognising migrant-led governance models. Although these talks have not yet resulted in concrete legal reforms, they mark an important policy engagement shaped, in part, by sustained digital advocacy efforts.

4.5 | Participatory Empowerment Through Theatre

Forum Theatre workshops, inspired by Boal’s (2008) Theatre of the Oppressed, empowered 70% of participants to co-analyse experiences of exclusion and devise collective responses. At Fender Squat, 12 participants engaged in redefining masculinity, with a Sudanese participant sharing the following:

“Manhood is... letting others hold you up.”
(field notes, 2023)

At Canal Saint-Denis, 10 participants rehearsed police encounters, enhanced advocacy skills, and contributed to a 2023 campaign for squat legalisation that influenced local policy discussions. Adil, a 22-year-old Afghan, reflects in the following:

“The play showed I’m not alone... We practiced facing police.”
(field notes, 2023)

Although La Kunda’s remote status limits in-person participation, digital activism (for example, WhatsApp coordination) provides alternative avenues for engagement. These workshops, which addressed intersectional challenges such as faith-based stigma, functioned as systemic interventions that fostered resilience and collective agency, offering important implications for participatory urban policymaking. For example, on 16 June 2020, the Lacasa Association created a WhatsApp group called *Life at Fender* specifically for young male migrants residing at Fender Squat. This group has been continuously active through 2025, serving as a platform for mobilisation, communication, and the sharing of ideas and

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opportunities. It also became a space for discussing strategies to engage with local municipal authorities and police and to disseminate timely updates on potential evictions. Thus, this digital initiative has functioned as a key tool for fostering collective agency and resilience in the absence of formal governance structures. (Boal, 2008; Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008). Furthermore, the Forum Theatre workshops contributed to local discussions on the potential temporary regulation and recognition of certain squats as transitional housing spaces, particularly in the context of post-Olympic urban planning. While no formal legal changes were enacted, the workshops, along with wider advocacy efforts, influenced municipal debates about co-management models involving migrant residents and city authorities. These discussions reflect an emerging openness to integrating migrant-led governance practices into local urban policy considerations, although they remain at the consultative stage without concrete policy implementations to date.

Table 1 illustrates how systemic exclusion, individual agency, and collective solidarity dynamically interact to produce resilience as an emergent property. These loops are grounded in ethnographic data from the Fender Squat, Canal Saint-Denis, and La Kunda.

Table 1: Feedback Loops in Systemic Resilience		
Feedback Loop	Components	Example from Data
Exclusion → Solidarity	Systemic exclusion (e.g., evictions, Regulation) triggers collective action. Dublin	2023 Porte de la Chapelle eviction (200+ displaced) led to shadow council formation (90% participation at Fender Squat).
Solidarity → Advocacy	Collective action (e.g., protests, communal kitchens) drives systemic change.	The 2024 Canal Saint-Denis Olympic protests raised awareness of migrant housing issues, but national right-wing policies limited reforms, maintaining restrictive measures despite increased local debate and visibility.
Advocacy → Resilience	Advocacy reshapes urban governance, reducing future exclusion.	La Kunda’s legal aid allowed 60 residents to appeal asylum or deportation orders, delaying removals and offering short-term resilience, but restrictive national policies prevented most from gaining permanent protection status.

Table 2. Key Resilience Practices by Site. Comparative analysis of resilience strategies across Fender Squat, Canal Saint-Denis, and La Kunda highlights site-specific adaptations to systemic exclusion.

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Table 2: Key Resilience Practices by Site			
Site	Resilience Practice	Outcome	Intersectional Impact
Fender Squat	Shadow councils (90% participation)	Coordinated resistance to evictions, resource-sharing.	Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and South Asia migrants some of whom identify as queer
Canal Saint-Denis	TikTok activism (#NoEvictions)	Documented police violence, mobilised 100+ participants for protests.	Amplified South Asian migrant voices.
La Kunda	WhatsApp-coordinated solidarity markets	Funded legal aid for 60 residents, preserved cultural heritage.	La Kunda’s WhatsApp networks and solidarity markets reduced residents’ isolation by fostering connection, information sharing, and collective activities; the study documented these practices without directly shaping them.

Figure 1. Causal Loop Diagram of Resilience Dynamics. This diagram models systemic interactions among exclusion, agency, solidarity, and resilience. Arrows indicate causal relationships, with (+) denoting reinforcing loops and (-) balancing loops. Encrypted platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram are community-managed and not externally funded. The migrants used freely available applications on personal or shared devices without formal financial support from NGOs or state institutions. While NGOs, such as Lacasa, facilitated group coordination, no dedicated funding for platform development or encryption services was provided.

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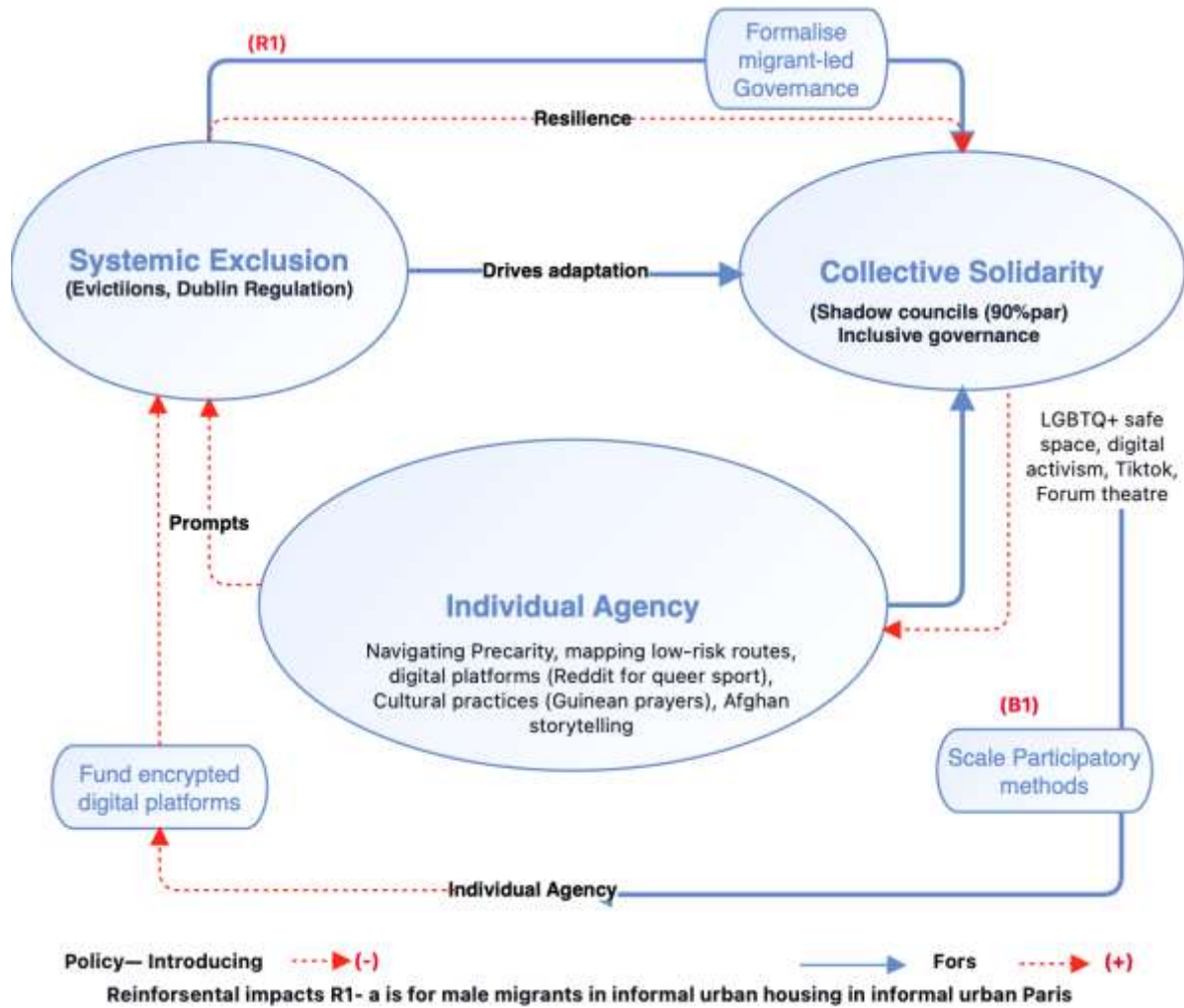


Figure 1: Feedback Loops and Policy Implications

Table 3. Feedback Loops and Policy Implications. This table links the systemic resilience dynamics observed in the study to actionable urban policy recommendations, demonstrating how migrant-led strategies can reshape exclusionary systems.

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Table 3: Causal Loop Diagram of Resilience Dynamics		
Feedback Loop	Policy Implication	Example from Data
Exclusion → Solidarity	Formalise migrant-led governance (e.g., shadow councils) in urban planning.	Shadow councils at Fender Squat facilitated connections with volunteer legal advocates and NGOs who provided legal advice and, in some cases, representation during eviction proceedings. However, these were informal arrangements rather than formal legal contracts.
Solidarity → Advocacy	Fund encrypted digital platforms to sustain TikTok/WhatsApp activism.	Canal Saint-Denis' #NoEvictions campaign reached 10,000+ viewers, influencing policymakers.
Advocacy → Resilience	Scale Forum Theatre workshops to empower migrants in policy dialogues.	Fender Squat's 2023 legalisation campaign involved 20+ policymakers.

5 | Discussion

This study demonstrates that resilience among young male migrants in Paris' informal housing has emerged as an *emergent property* of interconnected sociocultural, legal, and urban systems. By modelling dynamic feedback loops (Figure 1/Exhibit 6), this research advances systems science (Holling, 2001) and elucidates how resilience is dynamically produced and sustained within the context of precarious urban environments. The findings underscore the profound psychosocial toll of systemic exclusion, with 80% of participants reporting chronic anxiety and 60% experiencing psychosomatic symptoms, such as insomnia and headaches (Masten, 2014; Alvarez-Galvez, 2016). These outcomes extend the Resilience Theory by foregrounding the emotional costs of socio-legal precarity, including barriers imposed by the Dublin Regulation and racial profiling (OECD 2023; Urzúa et al. 2016). Forced evictions, such as the 2023 Porte de la Chapelle displacement of over 200 migrants, further exacerbate these challenges, necessitating intersectional urban policies that address both emotional resilience and structural exclusion (Crenshaw, 1989; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2012).

5.1 | Spatial Agency and Urban Commons

Migrants' occupation of squats and participation in protests, such as the 2022 Place de la République demonstration (300+ participants) and the 2024 Olympic building occupations, enact Lefebvre's (1996) *Right to the City*, fostering spatial justice through direct challenges to exclusionary urban governance. Initiatives such as Fender Squat's cultural archives (e.g. graffiti narratives) and communal kitchens disrupt hierarchical governance structures and model policies that prioritise migrant agencies (Harvey, 2012). The urban commons framework positions squats as resilient subsystems: shadow councils (90% participation), solidarity markets funding legal aid for 60% of La Kunda residents, and communal

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kitchens counteract state neglect while sustaining intersectional identities, including queer migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Steinhilper, 2021; Degani and De Stefani, 2020).

5.2 | Participatory Empowerment and Digital Resistance

Boal's (2008) Theatre of the Oppressed empowered 70% of participants through the Forum Theatre, enabling the co-creation of advocacy strategies such as the 2023 squat legalisation campaign at Fender Squat, which influenced local policy dialogues. Workshops at Canal Saint-Denis provide spaces to rehearse police encounters and redefine hypermasculine norms, fostering collective agency (Connell, 2005; Kaptani and Yuval-Davis, 2008). Digital activism, 50% of participants used TikTok (#NoEvictions campaign: 10,000+ views) and WhatsApp to mobilise protests, aligns with Simone's (2018) concept of improvised urbanism, although persistent faith-based stigma marginalises queer migrants like Sami, a 26-year-old Algerian, who relies on Reddit forums for support (Crenshaw, 1989; Lee and Brotman, 2013). These dynamics exemplify feedback loops in which exclusion prompts solidarity and advocacy, reshaping urban systems through migrant-led governance and methods (see Figure 2).

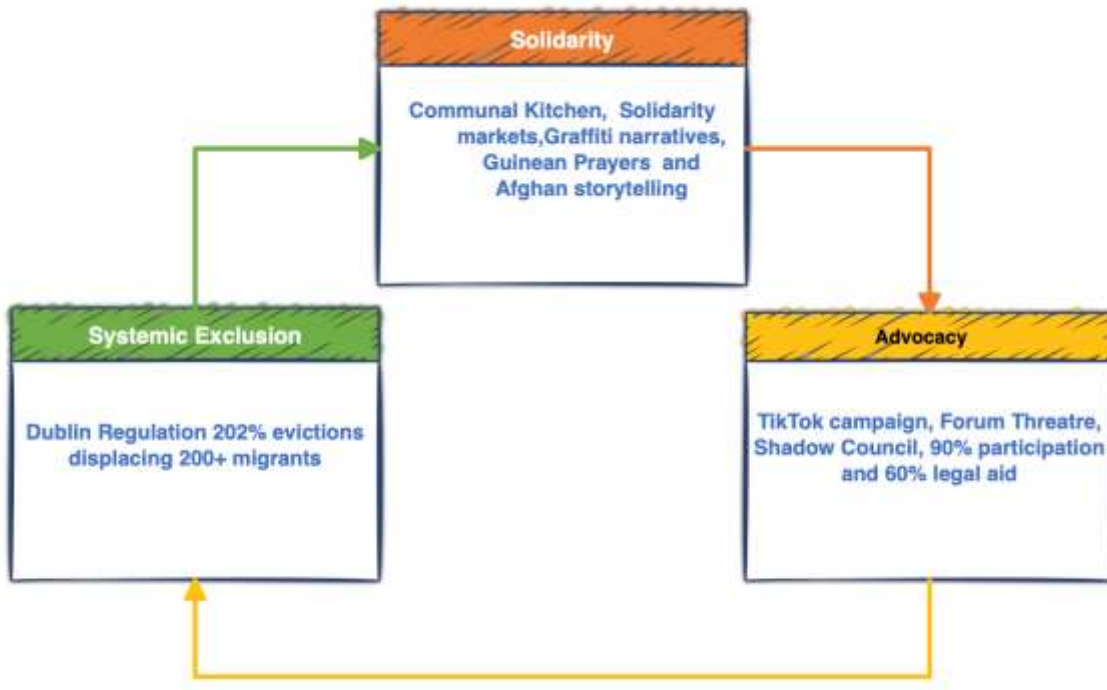


Figure 2. Feedback Loops Illustrating Dynamics of Migration Resilience.

This diagram represents systemic feedback loops through which systemic exclusion, collective solidarity, and migrant-led advocacy interact to generate resilience as an emergent property. Exclusionary forces such as the Dublin Regulation and mass evictions catalyse solidarity practices, including communal kitchens, solidarity markets, graffiti narratives, and cultural rituals, which, in turn, foster advocacy strategies such as Forum Theatre, digital activism, and legal aid. These advocacy efforts influence systemic conditions and complete the resilience loop in informal urban housing contexts.

5.3 | Intergenerational Resilience and Cultural Continuity

This study advances the concept of *intergenerational resilience* by illustrating how cultural practices embed resilience in collective memory. At Canal Saint-Denis, Guinean prayers and Afghan storytelling circles alleviated chronic anxiety (80%) and isolation (70%) (Masten, 2014). A 28-year-old Guinean participant noted, “*Prayers bind me to my grandfather’s courage... His legacy fuels my endurance*” (field notes, 2023), highlighting ancestral resilience transmitted through communal practices. Similarly, Sudanese oral histories shared in Fender Squat’s communal kitchens reduced psychosomatic symptoms (60%) and reinforced community cohesion (Author, 2023). La Kunda’s graffiti narratives preserved Sub-Saharan African heritage, resisting systemic erasure. These practices sustain intersectional identities but also reveal gaps, as faith-based stigma limits queer participation in shadow councils (Crenshaw, 1989; Carastathis et al., 2018).

5.4 | Policy Implications

These findings advocate for urban policies that preserve cultural heritage (e.g. storytelling archives and migrant-led festivals) and embed intergenerational resilience within inclusive city-making frameworks (Harvey, 2012). Scalable interventions include formalising migrant-led governance, funding encrypted digital platforms, and integrating the Forum Theatre into policy dialogues (Boal, 2008; Steinhilper, 2021). Reforms to the Dublin Regulation and housing-first models, informed by Canada’s 2022 asylum reforms (IOM 2022), could reduce socio-legal precarity and foster systemic inclusion. At the time of writing, these recommendations remain largely aspirational and have not been enacted into law within the French context. While Canada’s 2022 asylum reforms serve as a useful model, similar legal changes such as reforms to the Dublin Regulation or institutional support for migrant-led governance have not been adopted in France. However, localised pilot initiatives and advocacy-driven consultations signal early steps toward more inclusive urban policy, though without binding legislative outcomes so far.

5.5 | Key Contributions to Systems Science and Urban Policy

Intersectional Analysis: This study addresses key research gaps by showing how race, legal status, and masculinity intersect in shaping migrant resilience, an area often overlooked in existing migration studies, which tend to prioritise either economic factors or generalized vulnerability. It contributes to underexplored dimensions of migrant masculinities (Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2022) and highlights the exclusion of queer identities within both policy discourse and migrant solidarity networks (Crenshaw, 1989).

Dynamic feedback loops: Demonstrate resilience as an emergent property of interactions between exclusion, solidarity, and advocacy, advancing systems science frameworks (Holling, 2001).

Scalable Interventions: Migrant-led governance, encrypted digital platforms, and participatory theatre workshops contributed to local-level policy dialogues, such as municipal consultations with squat representatives and NGO coalitions. While these tools have not yet resulted in formal policy changes, they have influenced agenda-setting and fostered recognition of migrant voices in urban planning processes, particularly at the district and municipal levels.

While fully institutionalising migrant-led governance or formally recognising informal housing as part of urban policy may not yet be feasible within current national frameworks, particularly in securitised contexts like France, elements of this approach are already emerging at the local level. Initiatives such as temporary housing agreements, participatory planning, and NGO municipality collaborations demonstrate that aspects of migrant agency and resilience can be practically supported. These findings point not to an idealised overhaul, but to scalable, locally grounded reforms that reflect early shifts toward more inclusive urban governance.

6 | Recommendations

Drawing on ethnographic findings and systems science frameworks, the following recommendations propose scalable and politically feasible interventions to enhance resilience among young male migrants in informal housing.

6.1.1 | Formalize Migrant-Led Governance

- **Action:** Pilot co-governance agreements between municipal authorities and squats (e.g. Fender Squat's shadow councils) to manage vacant public buildings, starting with post-2024 Olympic sites. While no formal agreements exist, informal discussions between municipal authorities and squat representatives, especially around post-Olympic sites, have taken place, showing early signs of interest in co-governance.
- **Model:** Adapt Berlin's 2023 housing cooperatives, which rehouse 1,000+ migrants through shared decision-making (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). While no formal housing cooperatives were observed in this study, similar principles were evident in practices such as shadow councils at Fender Squat and solidarity markets at La Kunda. These self-organised structures enabled shared decision-making on housing, resources, and community rules aligning with the cooperative ethos seen in Berlin, though without legal recognition or formal support.
- **Funding:** Allocate 5% of Paris' urban renewal budget to communal kitchens, solidarity markets, and cultural archives (e.g. graffiti narratives), ensuring legal protection for resident-led governance. This study highlights resident-led initiatives such as solidarity markets and communal kitchens that demonstrate the value of low-cost, community-managed interventions.

6.1.2 | Support Digital Resistance Platforms

- **Action:** Partners with NGOs such as La Cimade develop encrypted communication tools (e.g. WhatsApp groups and TikTok campaigns) for eviction alerts and protest coordination, mirroring Berlin's 2022 telegram networks (Simone, 2022).
- **Training:** Provide digital literacy workshops for 200+ migrants annually, focusing on documenting police violence (#NoEvictions campaign) and securing remote legal consultations. These workshops could be implemented by organisations such as Techfugees, which has been running digital upskilling and inclusion programs for displaced people since 2018. As former Research Hub Volunteer for Techfugees France, I participated in developing initiatives like the Digital Spark and Digital Corridor programs, which equip refugees with skills in IT, project management, and remote work readiness. While no formal programme targeting urban advocacy currently exists, this study found strong interest among participants, and existing models could be adapted to support legal empowerment and digital rights in informal housing contexts.

6.1.3 | Fund Queer-Inclusive Digital Platforms

- **Action:** Launch anonymous forums (e.g. Reddit-style portals) for queer migrants, offering mental health resources and peer support to address faith-based stigma (reported by 70% LGBTQ+ participants).
- **Model:** Scale Canada's 2023 queer migrant platform, which reduces isolation by 30% for 200+ users (IOM, 2022; Crenshaw, 1989).

6.1.4 | Provide Culturally Responsive Mental Health Services

- **Action:** Deploy mobile units staffed by peer counsellors trained in cultural practices (e.g. Guinean prayer circles, and Afghan storytelling) to squats and eviction sites. These recommendations build

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on both observed practices and international models. During fieldwork, informal support structures such as prayer circles and group storytelling were already in use among participants, particularly at La Kunda and Fender Squat. The pilot recommendation draws on Senegal's 2022 trauma-informed care model, which demonstrates the potential for culturally grounded mental health interventions. However, no formal mobile mental health units have been implemented in Paris to date

- **Pilot:** Replicate Senegal's 2022 program, which reduced anxiety by 40% for 500+ migrants through trauma-informed care (UNHCR, 2022; Masten, 2014).

6.1.5 | Reform Asylum and Housing Policies (Phased Approach)

- **Short-term (0–2 years):** Advocate for emergency suspensions of Dublin Regulation transfers during crises, leveraging the 2015 precedent (CJEU, NS v the UK). Decriminalise squatting by revising Article 226-4 of the French Penal Code to exempt humanitarian occupations.
- **Medium-term (2–5 years):** Negotiate-binding EU solidarity agreements to redistribute asylum seekers, informed by the 2016 “corrective mechanism” proposal (EPRS, 2016). Implement housing-first models in partnership with NGOs, using 10% of Olympic infrastructure budgets to repurpose vacant buildings. The implementation of housing-first models would require coordination between municipal authorities (such as the City of Paris), housing NGOs (e.g. Fondation Abbé Pierre, Emmaüs Solidarité), and urban planning agencies. These organisations already have experience managing emergency accommodation and could be tasked with repurposing post-Olympic buildings in partnership with migrant support groups.
- **Long-term (5+ years):** Campaign for treaty revisions to replace the Dublin Regulation with equitable responsibility-sharing, prioritising proximity to support networks over entry-point criteria (Tsavdaroglou 2021).

6.1.6 | Scale Forum Theatre for Policy Dialogue

- **Action:** Institutionalise Boal's (2008) workshops on municipal policymaking, training 50+ facilitators through NGOs such as Lacasa. Scaling Forum Theatre into policy dialogue is most likely to take effect through partnerships with experienced arts-based organisations like Collectif 12. These organisations already facilitate participatory and community-driven performances with vulnerable populations. Institutionalising this approach would involve training facilitators, securing modest municipal funding, and embedding theatre sessions into urban consultations. Collectif 12's longstanding commitment to cultural co-creation with local residents makes it an ideal partner for expanding such initiatives, especially in areas marked by precarity and exclusion (Collectif 12, 2024).
- **Outcome:** Replicate Fender Squat's 2023 legalisation campaign, which engaged 20+ policymakers through participatory role-play (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis, 2008).

6.2 | Recommendations for Future Research

6.2.1 | Expand Intersectional and Longitudinal Analysis

Future research should deepen intersectional analysis by systematically examining how gender, sexuality, race, legal status, and nationality interact to shape resilience strategies among young male migrants in informal urban housing. While the current study highlights intersectional challenges particularly those experienced by queer migrants, including many from South Asian and sub-Saharan African backgrounds further research could employ longitudinal designs to track changes in resilience, well-being, and community practices over time. This would be especially valuable as migrants transition through different

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legal statuses or housing conditions. Such studies would illuminate the evolving nature of resilience and the long-term impact of policy interventions, cultural practices, and digital activism on migrant communities.

While no national-level asylum or housing reforms have resulted directly from these practices, local-level shifts were observed for example, increased municipal engagement with squat representatives and the inclusion of migrant-led groups in cultural programming discussions post-occupations.

6.2.2 | Integrate Mixed-Methods and Comparative Approaches

Building on the qualitative ethnographic foundation of this study, future research should incorporate robust mixed-methods approaches, combining in-depth qualitative data with larger-scale quantitative surveys to enhance generalisability and policy relevance. Comparative studies across different European cities or global urban contexts such as Berlin, London, or cities in the Global South would provide valuable insights into how local governance structures, urban commons, and migrant-led initiatives differ or converge in fostering resilience. This would also help to identify best practices and scalable models for inclusive urban policymaking and migrant integration.

6.2.3. | Address Digital, Participatory, and Intergenerational Gaps

There is a need for research that explores the digital divide and the effectiveness of digital activism among diverse migrant groups, particularly focusing on the inclusion of queer migrants and those with limited digital literacy. Participatory action research, such as the expansion of Forum Theatre and other creative methodologies, should be further developed to empower marginalised voices and co-produce knowledge with migrant communities. Additionally, future studies should investigate the transmission of intergenerational resilience and cultural heritage, assessing how storytelling, communal rituals, and cultural archives contribute to psychosocial well-being and community cohesion in the face of ongoing exclusion and precarity what works well for us.

6.3 | Theoretical and Policy Alignment

These recommendations model resilience as an emergent property of complex adaptive systems (Holling, 2001), integrating migrant agency into urban governance while addressing intersectional exclusion. While large-scale policy transformation remains limited, the study identified early signals of potential such as informal consultations between squat representatives and municipal actors, increased NGO involvement in cultural planning, and the digital mobilisation of residents influencing local narratives. By bridging ethnographic insights with scalable policy mechanisms, these findings offer a grounded roadmap for transforming Paris' margins into hubs of inclusive innovation.

7 | Conclusions

This study demonstrates that resilience among young male migrants in Paris' informal housing emerges through dynamic systemic interactions shaped by sociocultural, legal, and urban factors. By occupying squats such as the Fender Squat, Canal Saint-Denis, and La Kunda, and engaging in protest actions like the 2022 Place de la République demonstration (300+ participants) and the 2024 Olympic building occupations, migrants enact Lefebvre's (1996) Right to the City, directly challenging exclusionary urban governance and asserting spatial agency (Tsavdaroglou and Kaika, 2021; Wojnicka and Nowicka, 2022). These practices align with Harvey's (2012) conception of *urban commons*, where communal kitchens (e.g., Fender Squat's Cooking Club Groups), solidarity markets (supporting 60% of La Kunda residents), and cultural archives (e.g., graffiti narratives) create resilient subsystems that counteract state neglect and foster collective well-being (Degani and De Stefani, 2020; Steinhilper, 2021).

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Boal's (2008) Theatre of the Oppressed served as a systemic intervention, empowering 70% of the participants to co-create advocacy strategies, such as the 2023 Fender Squat legalisation campaign. While the campaign did not result in full legalisation of the squat, it led to increased dialogue with municipal actors and temporarily delayed eviction proceedings. This partial success underscores the potential of participatory theatre to initiate policy engagement, even if systemic change remains incremental. This aligns with the evidence that participatory theatre strengthens collective agency and critical consciousness in marginalised communities (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis, 2008; Ramdath, 2016). Digital activism, including TikTok's #NoEvictions campaign (10,000+ views) and WhatsApp protest coordination, exemplifies improvised urbanism (Simone, 2018), although persistent faith-based stigma and queer exclusion reveal intersectional gaps (Crenshaw, 1989; Lee and Brotman, 2013). Intergenerational resilience practices, such as Guinean prayers, Afghan storytelling, and Sudanese oral histories, transmit cultural heritage and mitigate chronic anxiety (80%) and psychosomatic symptoms (60%) linked to socio-legal precarity (Masten, 2014).

By modelling resilience as an emergent property of feedback loops (Holling, 2001; see Exhibit 6), this study advances systems science by illustrating how systemic exclusion (e.g. Dublin Regulation Deportations, 2023 evictions displacing 200+ migrants) trigger solidarity and advocacy, reshaping urban governance (OECD, 2023; EASO, 2022). This research underscores the need for policies that prioritise migrant-led governance, digital inclusion, and cultural preservation, informed by global models such as Berlin's housing cooperatives (Madden & Marcuse, 2016) and Canada's asylum reforms (IOM, 2022).

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