

Well-Being of Locals, Tourist Experiences and Destination Competitiveness

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Abstract For destinations, local residents are important part-time marketers. As an inherent part of a destination they add to tourist experiences. Previous research has documented how important a welcoming attitude is for tourists and how tourist experiences command the competitiveness of destinations. To this formula, the current study adds the well-being component of the locals by the argument that happy people with high level of social well-being tend to be more open minded and social and by that more welcoming. This study examines destination competitiveness through the lens of tourist experiences and well-being and attitudes of local residents. To accomplish this, three objectives are set: (1) to present a local society oriented model of destination competitiveness; (2) to develop instruments for measuring the selected key success factors in determining destination competitiveness; (3) and to empirically test and display findings arising from a study of both locals, living in, and tourists visiting the city of Vaasa in Ostrobothnia, Finland. The findings indicate that well-being of locals had a significant impact on the social attitude dimensions of local's attitude towards tourists, and the tourists considered their encounter with locals as positive and nice. Thus, a significant link between the social attitude dimension and well-being of the locals were also found. Also, there is a strong link between tourist experiences and the destination competitiveness dimension, particularly the educational dimensions, while the other dimensions, esthetic, entertainment, and escapist, were not significant. Future research topics are discussed at the end of the chapter.

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1 Introduction

The importance of host-guest interactions for customer satisfaction and loyalty is well documented in service marketing (Seth et al. 2005) and tourism literature (Eraqi 2006) leaving activities and events, which take places in between service encounters on a destination, out of a marketing perspective, most unexplored in terms of both existence (which are they) and importance (how they affect tourists' experiences). For analyzing these blank spots, the mundane life of locals and their living environment, tourism research has examined regional culture as, an endowed tourism resource (MacDobald and Jolliffe 2003), a branding dimension (O'Dell and Billing 2010), and as an aspect to be discussed in relation to destination management (Dwyer et al. 2004) and sustainable tourism development (Istoc 2012). There are some studies portraying a more complex picture of the amalgamation of place generating tourist experiences. Long (2004), for example, who analyzed the "Foodscape" of Asheville, NC, describes how visitors meet the Appalachian cuisine and food habits in restaurants and festivals, special events, but also in local grocery stores, alongside and in contact with the locals. In this context, the question how to market tourism to local residents is still unanswered.

There is an abundance of research explaining the positive effects of friendly treatments in service encounters on customer satisfaction, and the link there is between service oriented organizations, well-being of the staff, and internal marketing (Kuskuvan et al. 2010). However, less studied is the influence of well-being of locals (residents) reflected in a welcoming attitude, on tourist experiences although they, in terms of marketing, can be categorized as part-time marketers (Grönroos 1990). Hospitality, "the general feeling of welcome that tourists receive while visiting the area", is most often what is remembered after returning home (Mill et al. 1990, p. 28).

Tourist experiences, satisfaction, and travel behavior are interlinked. On an aggregated, destination level positive tourist experiences are a source of competitive advantage. To this end, bringing the well-being and attitudes of locals, tourist experiences, and destination competitiveness together a positive relationship is assumed. Falling back on the notion that this structural model has not been tested in previous research the aim of this study is to explain destination competitiveness through the lens of tourist experiences and well-being and attitudes of local residents. To accomplish this, three objectives are set: (1) to present a local society oriented model of destination competitiveness; (2) to develop instruments for measuring the selected key success factors in determining destination competitiveness; (3) and to empirically test and display findings arising from a study of international visitors and local residents in the city of Vaasa, Finland.

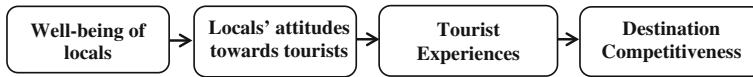


Fig. 1 Local society based destination competitiveness model

2 Literature Review

Departing from service and tourism marketing literature this study devolves into the destination competitiveness literature emphasizing the role of locals for tourist experiences (Fig. 1).

The theoretical framework in use defines four key concepts, well-being and attitudes of local residents, tourist experiences, and destination competitiveness.

2.1 Well-Being of Locals

Well-being, defined as ‘an individual’s sense that his/her life overall is going well’ (Moscardo 2009, p. 162), is a state of mind. Well-being is a personal, holistic state of mind including aspects of self-development regarding life fulfillment (Gilbert and Abdullah 2004). It is an inner process, not ‘out there’, a personal experience to be lived throughout our daily life; work, leisure time, social relationships, achievements, growth, freedom, etc. (Björk 2014). Doxey’s (1975) irritation index explains the close link there is between the locals and the tourists, and how residents’ well-being determines their attitude towards tourists (Ritchie and Crouch 2003; Brunt and Courtney 1999; Diedrich and García-Buades 2008). Well-being of locals can be viewed in terms of subjective well-being (SWB). SWB deals with residents’ overall sense of well-being that can be captured through a variety of concepts such as life satisfaction, positive\negative affect, and overall happiness (Sirgy 2010). Well-being is often described in terms of happiness and is used in different meanings. In classical philosophy, it is typically used as an umbrella term for various aspects of the good life. Social scientists used the word happiness as a synonym for subjective enjoyment of life. Psychologists formally refer to this construct as SWB while economists term it experienced utility (Kahneman et al. 1997).

Happiness has been recognized as an important goal of society, and there has been a growing interest in understanding what makes people happy (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999). Happiness is sometimes more broadly defined as SWB since improvements in objective circumstances have proven to yield limited increases in happiness (Layard 2006). Happiness is most commonly measured by a variant of Bradburn’s (1969) Affect Balance Scale, which measures the extent of positive emotions and the absence of negative emotions to determine levels of happiness. Happiness, therefore, can be considered to contribute to emotional (affective) SWB,

whereas cognitive SWB is largely measured through inventories of satisfaction with life and positive functioning (McCabe and Johnson 2013).

2.2 Locals' Attitudes Towards Tourism

Local residents are the local population and the key stakeholders of tourism developments (Dwyer and Kim 2003). Tourism brings changes that affect local resident's traditional way of life, family relations, and the nature of the local structures functioning. Tourism can develop and grow when local residents have a positive attitude toward it (Puczko and Ratz 2000). Local community support for tourism is, therefore, necessary to ensure the commercial, socio-cultural, physiological, political and economic sustainability of the industry (Dwyer and Kim 2003). Also, local communities play a vital role in demonstrating the level of friendliness to visitors (McCool et al. 2001), which determines the success of tourism in any community (Gursoy and Rutherford 2004) and subsequently offers better tourist's satisfaction (Chandralal 2010). Tourist's experiences are constantly mediated through the interaction with the locals (Selstad 2007; Auld and Case 1997) and are considered as one of the most memorable aspect of tourism experience (Morgan and Xu 2009). In the similar vein, friendly interaction between host-guest in a destination is an important variable in facilitating higher quality tourism experiences and visitor satisfaction (Kusluvan 2003). Conceptually, resident attitudes toward tourism development are often explained from a social exchange theory perspective (Sirakaya et al. 2002). Nawijn and Mitas (2012) argue that recent studies link Quality of Life indicators to perceptions of tourism among residents, rather than how the respondents felt or how satisfied they were with their lives, subjective well-being (SWB). Here this chapter contributes by making an empirical examination of the link between the effects of well-being of locals and their attitude towards tourism.

2.3 Tourist Experiences

Tourist experiences are individual, subjective, and relative; they depart in some way from everyday experiences (Urieli 2005), and are made up of series of events or activities (Smith, 1994; Xu, 2010). A tourist experience is "the subjective mental state felt by participants during a service encounter" (Otto and Ritchie 1996, p. 166). The popularity of Pine and Gilmore's (1998, 1999, 2011) experience economy model has stood out among the various applications of the experiential view of consumer behavior. The model describes four stages of economic progression from commodities to goods to services and finally to experiences with the last stage requiring businesses to create memorable experiences for customers. The model conceptualizes the multi-dimensional nature of consumer experiences and

delineates the four realms of consumer experience: entertainment, educational, escapist, and aesthetic experiences, which they have coined, the '4Es' (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore 2012). Entertainment is passively absorbed through one's senses, generally when viewing, reading or listening for pleasure. Educational experiences involve active participation from the customer by mind or body to increase the knowledge and skills of the customer, for example, ski lessons. Escapist experiences are the opposite of purely entertaining experiences; the participant in an escapist experience is active and completely immersed in it, for example, when visiting a theme park. The last realm is aesthetic experiences that immerse the customers into an environment, for example, visiting a museum (Pine and Gilmore 1999).

2.4 Destination Competitiveness

Destination competitiveness refers to the ability of the destination to attract and satisfy tourists (Enright and Newton 2004) and to deliver goods and services that perform better than those offered at other destinations (Dwyer and Kim 2003). Both comparative advantage (natural and artificial resources) and competitive advantage (tourism infrastructure) are used to explain the overall competitiveness model (Crouch and Ritchie 1999). Destination competitiveness is also associated with the long-term economic prosperity of the residents of an area (Ritchie and Crouch 2003), the ultimate goal of competitiveness being to maintain and increase the real income of the inhabitants (Dwyer and Kim 2003). Tourism thrives on the pleasant attitudes of hosts towards tourism, which contributes to satisfying memorable tourism experiences (Morgan and Xu 2009), and it is necessary to attempt to sustain that congenial social ambiance. Without, it, the goals of developing tourism will be either not realized or will be accomplished at tremendous social costs. Indeed, friendly hosts may command even higher popularity through the dissemination of positive image through word of mouth (Sirgy and Samli 1995). Thus, clear friendliness and a spirit of hospitality enhance a destination's competitiveness (Ritchie and Crouch 2003).

3 Method

Guided by the theoretical framework two instruments for data collection was constructed for piloting. This study aims for a two-pronged data-sampling procedure, one directed at the locals in designated destination and one to measure tourist experiences and perceived destination competitiveness in the same area. Taking inspiration from previous studies on human well-being, attitudes, tourist experiences and perception of destination competitiveness four sets of questions were developed. A cross-sectional survey design using a questionnaire was employed.

The final local resident questionnaire was organized into two sections. The first section gathered the socio-demographic information of the respondents (eight demographic variables: age, gender, mother tongue, number of years lived in Vaasa, education level, current family situation, field of occupation and net monthly income). The second section consisted of 11 measurement items exploring subjective well-being (happiness and life satisfaction) and 12 items measuring local residents' attitude towards tourism. This study merges two types of scales measuring subjective well-being (Bradburn's Scale of Psychology Well-being 1969; Lyubomirsky Subjective Happiness Scale for happiness 1999; Diener et al. Satisfaction with Life Scale 1985) and adapts the scale items to be useful in a Finnish context. Questions about local residents' attitude were included to assess whether there is a link between tourism and local residents SWB. Twelve items representing four dimensions of attitudes towards tourism (social, economic, cultural, and natural) were adapted from Brunt and Courtney (1999) and Diedrich and García-Buades (2008).

The final tourist questionnaire contained three socio-demographic variables (age, gender, and nationality), seven travel-trip characteristics (purpose of visit, main tourist destination in Finland, length of stay, travelling companion, number of previous visits to Vaasa, type of accommodation, primary transportation, and number of people in the travel party), 12 items measuring tourist experiences, and 3 items measuring destination competitiveness. The 4Es (tourist experiences) were measured by 12 items adapted from Oh et al. (2007) study, which was previously adapted successfully by Hosany and Witham (2010) and Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013). Likewise, the 3-item scale measuring destination competitiveness was drawn from Meng's (2006) study. All items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was in English, Finnish and Swedish. Special attention was paid to the process of translating the proposed items from the original English into Finnish and Swedish, to adapt them to the Finnish context and to seek meaningful equivalences as regards meaning, nuances, and connotations. The final questionnaire was concluded after a pilot test with ten local residents and ten tourists visiting Vaasa. Changes in item wording were made to enhance face validity. The validity of the content was guaranteed, thanks to the three-phase pre-test process: working out the questionnaire from the theory and the previous literature, double revision and correction, and the pilot test.

Two doctoral students were involved in distributing the self-administered questionnaires at random to locals and visitors in various tourist sites in Vaasa. They had received information and precise instructions about the aim of the study and how to select the interviewees and gather the data. Convenience sampling technique was justified as the study's population required individuals to have lived and visited the destination. The respondents were briefly introduced and were kindly asked for their (anonymous) participation. Respondents filled out a self-report questionnaire, the contents of which are discussed above. The sampling frame included locals and tourists visiting Vaasa. The city of Vaasa is located on the west coast of Finland. Vaasa has over 65,000 inhabitants, and it is today the

educational, cultural, and tourist center of Western Finland (City of Vaasa 2016). The data was collected in summer 2015 for analysis.

4 Results

Findings from two studies are summed up and discussed simultaneously in this section. The profile of the local residents and visitors to Vaasa is first presented. Then local residents' well-being and attitude towards tourism and the tourists' experience of Vaasa is discussed. Finally, the path model discussed in the theoretical section is tested.

A total of 50 local and 50 tourist responses were collected and used in the data analysis (Table 1). The profile of the local sample included somewhat more females

Table 1 Mean scores for statements (local sample)

Statement	M	SD
<i>Subjective well-being</i> (Bradburn 1969; Diener et al. 1985; Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999)		
In general, I consider myself very happy	5.58	1.12
Compared to my friends, I consider myself happier	4.58	1.05
<i>During the last weeks I have</i>		
Felt please as I accomplished something	5.20	1.14
I am on top of the world (been over the moon)	3.90	1.38
Felt that things are going my way	4.68	1.23
Felt bored	2.62	1.72
Felt depressed	2.32	1.72
I am satisfied with my life	5.66	1.59
If I could live my life over, I would change nothing	3.52	0.74
The city where I live is a perfect place for me	5.22	1.72
My physical health is near-perfect	5.00	1.29
<i>Attitudes towards tourism</i> (Brunt and Courtney 1999; Diedrich and García-Buades 2008)		
Tourism brings opportunities for local people	6.08	1.17
Tourism positively influences community life	6.02	0.97
Tourism in my community disrupts my quality of life	2.02	1.64
Tourism brings more jobs to the region	6.00	0.96
Tourism is a strong contributor to my community	5.22	1.25
Tourism benefits other industries in my community	5.24	1.45
Tourism contributes to the preservation of old buildings	5.20	0.94
Tourism has made me aware of my own culture	4.96	1.27
My community's cultural resources are being overused by tourists	2.30	1.23
Tourism poses a threat to my community's natural resources	2.18	1.17
Tourism promotes conservation of wildlife and natural resources	4.60	1.26
Tourism in my community is developed in harmony with nature	4.36	0.94

than males (56 vs. 44%). The largest age group was above 42 years old (46%), and the biggest groups of respondents were Swedish-speaking Finns (56%), followed by Finnish-speaking Finns (36%) and other (8%). In response to the question, number of years that the respondent has lived in Vaasa, majority belonged to more than ten years category (48%), between 5 and 10 years (32%) and less than five years (20%). The majority of the respondents stated that they had attained a university degree (72%). Regarding current family situation, 62% were married, single (24%), co-habiting (14%) and widowed (0%). For occupation, 66% were employed in the public sector, 14% in the private sector, and 20% were students. None of the respondents reported being unemployed or retired. Also, only 2% work in the tourism sector. As for income level, majority belonged to the category 1500–2499€ (66%).

In comparison to statistics from the main population, people living in the city of Vaasa and neighboring counties, the sample of local residents is representative.

A majority of the respondents in the tourist sample were male (58 vs. 42%). 74% belonged to the age group 42 and above, 14% (26–33), and 12% (34–41). They come from 7 different countries. The biggest groups of respondents were Finnish (32%), followed by German (24%), Dutch (22%), Swedish (8%), Norwegian (6%), Danish (6%), and Australian (2%). The majority traveled to Vaasa for pleasure purpose (98%) while visiting friends and relatives was not an important reason to travel to Vaasa (2%). Only 42% mentioned Vaasa as their main tourist destination in Finland. 58% spent 1–2 days in Vaasa, 3–4 days (30%), and more than 5 days (12%). Regarding travel companion, 74% traveled to Vaasa with their husband or wife, 16% were family with children, 8% with friends, and 2% alone. Half of the respondents had traveled to Vaasa for the first time, 22% had visited Vaasa 1–2 times previously, 20% more than times, and 8% 3–4 times. 96% had stayed in tent, caravan, camper or cottage during their visit, and 4% mentioned hotel. 96% traveled to Vaasa by car, 2% by boat, and 2% by other modes of transportation.

The residents of Vaasa that we sampled were fairly happy and satisfied with their life (Table 1). Average positive affect is higher than negative affect; most respondents were satisfied with their lives in general. Regarding attitudes towards tourism, many considered tourism as a source of job opportunity, had a positive impact on community life, and contributed to more jobs in the region. The received perceived impacts of tourism and their mean score indicate that residents generally perceive tourism to have positive impacts.

The sampled tourists to Vaasa considered their encounter with locals as positive and nice (Table 2). Also, tourists stated that they would recommend Vaasa to their friends and were willing to make a repeat visit in near future.

Given the limited sample size (50), multiple linear regression (MLR) was conducted using SPSS. MLR was chosen to explore the relation between well-being of locals and local's attitude towards tourists (H1), interaction with locals towards tourists and destination competitiveness (H2) and tourist experience and destination competitiveness (H3). Variables with higher regression coefficients were considered more important. Estimation of the multiple regression models was determined through the overall explanatory power of all the independent variables.

Table 2 Mean scores for statements (tourist sample)

Statement	M	SD
<i>Tourist experiences</i> (Oh et al. 2007)		
The locals I met in Vaasa are welcoming	5.06	1.10
To interact with locals is nice	5.04	1.13
Vaasa as a tourist destination is ordinary	3.80	1.14
Vaasa as a tourist destination is very exciting	4.29	1.25
I really enjoyed watching activities and what others are doing	3.82	1.51
Watching others perform in Vaasa is captivating	3.71	1.25
Being in Vaasa I feel completely escaped from reality	3.51	1.80
I felt that I am different person in Vaasa	3.04	1.49
When I think of Vaasa, I get a positive feeling	4.84	1.17
I have learned a lot during my stay here in Vaasa	3.86	1.12
<i>Destination competitiveness</i> (Meng 2006)		
In comparison to destinations I have visited, Vaasa is attractive	4.51	1.02
I will have many good experiences from my visit here in Vaasa	4.71	1.22
I would recommend Vaasa to my friends	5.27	1.32
I would like to come back to Vaasa in near future	5.27	1.12
Hospitality experienced in Vaasa is a competitive advantage	4.59	1.15

Table 3 Effect of well-being of locals on local's attitude towards tourists (n = 50)

	Model 1 Beta (t-values)
H1: Well-being-attitude	0.26 ^{N.S.} (1.80)
H1a: Well-being-social (attitude dimension)	0.32* (1.89)
H1b: Well-being-economic (attitude dimension)	0.04 ^{N.S.} (0.29)
H1c: Well-being-cultural (attitude dimension)	0.18 ^{N.S.} (1.28)
H1d: Well-being-natural (attitude dimension)	0.08 ^{N.S.} (0.60)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; N.S. Non significant

In the first model (Table 3) well-being of locals had a significant impact on only the social attitude dimension of local's attitude towards tourists ($\beta = 0.32$; $p < 0.05$), which at the same time indicates that well-being of locals had no significant impact on other dimensions of local's attitude towards tourists (economic, cultural, and natural) ($p > 0.05$).

In Model 2 (Table 4) welcoming attitude and interaction between locals and tourists (statements 1 and 2 from Table 2) had a significant impact on destination competitiveness ($\beta = 0.49$; $p < 0.001$).

In the last model (Table 5), only the educational dimension of the tourist experience had a significant impact on destination competitiveness ($\beta = 0.43$; $p < 0.01$). Out of a destination management perspective, this clearly indicates how important it is to facilitate and involve tourists in learning processes on destinations,

Table 4 Effect of interaction with locals and destination competitiveness (n = 50)

	Model 2 Beta (t-values)
H2: Interaction with locals-destination competitiveness	0.49 ^{***} (4.02)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; *N.S.* Non significant

Table 5 Effect of tourist experience on destination competitiveness (n = 50)

	Model 3 Beta (t-values)
H3: Tourist experience-destination competitiveness	0.40 ^{**} (2.94)
H3a: Esthetic (TE)-destination competitiveness	0.05 ^{N.S.} (0.37)
H3b: Entertainment (TE)-destination competitiveness	0.16 ^{N.S.} (0.15)
H3c: Escapist (TE)-destination competitiveness	0.08 ^{N.S.} (0.60)
H3d: Educational (TE)-destination competitiveness	0.43 ^{**} (2.23)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; *N.S.* Non significant

and to foster an atmosphere of hospitality. For this to take place a welcoming attitude of the locals is deemed critical.

5 Conclusion

Previous studies on subjective well-being and tourism addressed the perspective of tourist only. Our study adds to the existing literature on subjective well-being and tourism by examining the effects of well-being of locals on their attitude towards tourism, as a dimension to strengthen destination competitiveness. The results indicate that Vaasa residents in our sample are relatively happy and satisfied with their life, and tourism impacts are viewed positively. The well-being of locals had a significant impact on the social attitude dimensions of local's attitude towards tourists, and the tourists considered their encounter with locals as positive and nice. Also, tourists stated that they would recommend Vaasa to their friends and were willing to make a repeat visit in near future. On the contrary, if residents in a community perceive the effects of tourism as negative, these residents may communicate a negative attitude towards tourists. Therefore, all destinations need a welcoming attitude, and should recognize local residents as a key resource, which is not in focus in all tourism marketing strategies.

This chapter promotes local residents as part-time marketers. In term of tourist experience, the 4Es were not of equal importance to tourists, and only the educational dimension weighs heavily in their evaluation of tourism experience and impacts destination competitiveness. Today, there is a shift from active holidays to holidays as an experience that provides "new knowledge" and individuals wish to participate in many different activities, especially those in which they explore their talents and capabilities (Otto and Ritchie 1996). Travel experiences offer a myriad

of unique learning opportunities for the tourist that comes in the form of practical skills and knowledge (Chen et al. 2014) acquired through interacting with locals to taking an interpretive tour of a historic site (McKercher and du Cros 2002).

Mathieson and Wall (1982) assert that the nature of planning tourism destinations is complex. Destination managers are often confronted with paradoxical effects when assessing alternative policies. Questions arise concerning how to maximize benefits and at the same time minimize the cost for residents in the tourism destination. The findings of this study are of importance to destination managers in the tourism community. The results show that well-being of locals had a significant impact on the social attitude, that is, positive-negative feelings, towards tourists. Also, visitors mention welcoming attitude of locals and positive feeling while interacting with them, although locals' attitude had no significant impact on the tourists' experiences. Moreover, the study also reveals that as residents' perception of the economic impact of tourism increases, it is more likely to influence their overall subjective well-being and attitude towards tourists. Therefore, an optimal satisfaction of tourists needs should be balanced with the health of the local economy, the local environment, and finally the subjective well-being of local communities. Lastly, given that 'satisfying memorable experiences' and 'destination resident well-being' are claimed as a condition for destination competitiveness (Ritchie and Crouch 2003), tourism developers and marketers should know how resident perceive tourism and how it affects their subjective well-being, to influence attitudes of residents towards tourists, on the other hand, focus on the educational dimension, to enhance the destination's competitiveness, within the context of this study.

Recent studies indicate that those involved in the tourism industry are likely to report a favorable attitude towards tourism (Chhabra 2008). Future studies should analyze and compare the link between attitudes of locals (both, those involved and not involved in the tourism industry) and tourist experience. Residents perceiving more positive (benefits) than negative (costs) effects arising from tourism are likely to support further tourism development and be involved in social exchange (Gursoy et al. 2002). Like most resident attitude studies (e.g., Sirakaya et al. 2002), this study is a cross-sectional study. Longitudinal studies are required to offer better understanding of the influence of tourist experiences and well-being and attitudes of local residents on destination competitiveness. The findings of this study show that residents of Vaasa hold positive attitudes towards tourism, although the city is less dependent on tourism economically and/or have different seasonal fluctuations in tourism arrivals. Sheldon and Abenoja (2001) assert that residents at a mature destination have mostly positive attitudes toward tourism. Future studies should study local residents attitude towards tourism in a mature destination and those in the development stage or depend less on tourism economically as a comparative study in terms of cause and effect.

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