

Residents' Perceptions of the Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism and Suggested Solutions on the Golden Mile of Durban

Abstract

The social and cultural aspects of destinations are key products in the international tourism market. The extent and patterns of host-visitor interaction depend on residents' attitudes and their level of tourism tolerance which may range from euphoria to tourismphobia, depending on the level of exposure. Tourism is paradoxically viewed as a sector with doubtful advantage producing both socio-economic benefits as well as corrosive socio-cultural externalities. While socio-cultural mixing may yield some desirable results, it may also threaten the fabric that makes families and communities. The aim of the study was to determine the perceptions on the socio-cultural impact of tourism on the residents of the Golden Mile. The study adopted a qualitative approach using 101 household representatives from 10 randomly selected blocks of flats along the Golden Mile. The study found that challenges faced by residents especially during peak holiday seasons included disruptive noise, unbearable traffic congestion, long queues at service centres, altered lifestyles as well as displacement of property owners, leading to the place being mainly occupied by tenants among others. Residents recommended better planning, visitor management, education and improvement of safety and security as measures to improve their socio-cultural lives.

Keywords: Golden Mile, socio-cultural impact, tourism, residents' perceptions

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Introduction

Economic development and growth are often used as global measures to express the impact of tourism. Global international arrivals reached 1.481 million, generating US\$1.461 billion in tourism receipts in 2019 (Liu et al., 2022). In 2022, the travel and tourism industry contributed 7.6% to global GDP, 2.8% below 2019 figures prior to COVID-19. The global tourism market size reached US\$1.9 trillion in 2023, and it is projected that it will reach US\$2 trillion in 2024 (Statista, 2024) surpassing 2019 figures, and continue to be the growth sector over the next ten years (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2023). Consequently, tourism is regarded as a catalyst for socio-economic growth, an engine of massive development, a single largest sector of world trade (Strydom et al., 2019), and a new economic driver (Litheko & Potgieter, 2021), that was dubbed as 'new gold' in Africa by President Cyril Ramaphosa (Koga, 2019) due to its ability to connect people from around the globe and generate massive foreign exchange. Tourism, like other economic activities produces both positive and negative externalities on host communities, making its advantage doubtful as a double-edged sword (Nopiyan & Wirawan, 2021). While Kronenberg & Fuchs (2022) argue in favour of a multidimensional approach to expressing the impact of tourism including environmental, social, economic and institutional dimensions, this paper contends that the socio-cultural impact is equally significant, more so because the 'tourism phenomenon is significantly based on the socio-cultural dimensions of any society' (Artal-Tur, 2018: 180). Further, tourism development induces changes in the character of a destination with complex socio-cultural implications (Zhuang et al., 2019). Destination engagements include host-visitor interactions (Hlengwa, 2021), which if uncontrolled may exceed socio-cultural tolerance levels and generate adverse externalities that may lead to a deterioration of the residents' standard of life through the transformation of values, norms and identities (Nopiyan & Wirawan, 2021), and trigger resident-visitor irritants (Ko & Stewart, 2018). Even though the Golden Mile is regarded as South Africa's most iconic public place with the ability to draw thousands of people at a time, there has not been a study conducted on the impact tourism has on the socio-cultural lives of residents. The paper sought to determine the perceptions of residents on the socio-cultural impacts of tourism, and solicit suggestions to restore a measure of balance in their lives.

Literature review

Tourism is considered a reliable economic sector (Agustí, 2020), a catalyst for economic growth and social advancement, one of the most effective means of job creation, one of the biggest and fastest growing economic sectors globally (Geethika & Gnanapala, 2015; George, 2015) and the largest single sector of world trade (Strydom et al., 2019). However, some studies have noted adverse socio-economic and environmental impacts on host communities (Jehan et al., 2022; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2020). Tourism impacts residents 'directly, indirectly and ideologically' (McKercher et al., 2015: 63), in some cases disrupting traditional and cultural structures as well as behavioural patterns (Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2015; Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2011) as cultural dynamics of residents begin to change and become hard to recognise. Chatzidakis et al. (2018) defined a place as a cultured space that belongs to residents. However, tourism development and related activities induce changes that are directed to and packaged for outsiders more than the residents (McKercher et al., 2015), leading to negative attitudes towards tourism as the place changes (Cloete & Yusuf, 2018) and become unfamiliar and hard to live in. Negative impacts may be indicative of an absence of planning or a lack of community participation (Reindrawati, 2023). Kozak (2015) warned that if tourism is poorly planned, negative externalities may outweigh blessings. Booming tourism destinations tend to foster a high rate of tourists-residents interaction with a host of beneficial exchanges of goods, services, ideas (Bartis & Madlwabanga, 2020), investment

opportunities (Tichaawa & Mhanga, 2015), as well as cross-cultural interactions that foster intercultural understanding (Mathabathe, 2019). Impacts such as bottlenecks, overcrowding, overdevelopment, overreliance on tourism, prostitution and other signs of social decay, especially in tourism hotspot areas highlight the double-edgedness of tourism as a tool for socio-economic growth and poverty reduction (Akova & Atsiz, 2019; Esler, 2019; Jehan et al., 2022; Nopiyani & Wirawan, 2021; Piuchan et al., 2015).

Culture is a unifying factor that enhances the cohesiveness of a group as a unique collective (Sangchumnong & Kozak, 2018). It is the most basic integrative social parameter at any destination encapsulating the manner of life, through its derivative products, practices, meanings, symbols, representations, and others (Terkenli & Georgoula, 2022). Socio-cultural impacts of tourism are defined as the amalgam of social and cultural aspects that affect the local community as a result of its contact with tourists (Travis, 2011). They denote the ways in which behaviour, individual and community values, community structure, lifestyle and overall quality of life gets altered due to too much exposure to different ways of life that tourists bring into the resident-tourist interaction. These changes may add positive socio-cultural value as residents get progressive influences, global outlook towards things and issues, improved understanding of habits of the people different to them, general acceptance and celebration of difference (Amoiradis et al., 2021). Other positive socio-cultural impacts include the rejuvenation of heritage, practices, products, artefacts, attire, music and dance (Mbaiwa, 2005), archaeological and historical sites, ceremonies (Inskeep, 2017), breathing new life into rituals and inspiring pride in their unique local heritage and culture (Cooper et al., 2018). Revenue realised from tourism can also be invested in the development and maintenance of museums, theatres, and other cultural heritage facilities (Lockwood, 2018). As tourism renews local pride amongst the hosts (Messer, 2016), it has a propensity to promote peace and cross-cultural understanding and tolerance (Artal-Tur, 2018; Fletcher et al., 2015; George, 2015; Sharma et al. 2018). Local pride, cross-cultural understand and peace occur when tourists show interest in and appreciation of culture, rituals, traditional ceremonies, and beliefs of the host community (Ivanovic et al., 2017), which results in the host community revaluing and reviving their culture upon realisation that it has the potential to generate benefits (Tichaawa & Moyo, 2019). Kuščer & Mihalič (2019) observed that many destinations fail to manage tourism and balance it with the normal lives of residents which leads to a lot pressure exerted on the local environments and residents. Amoiradis et al. (2021) caution that global tourism may also yield negative socio-cultural impacts such as destabilisation of cultural values through acculturation, a view supported by Sroyetch (2016) when arguing that mixing of cultures may disrupt social collectivism and (Zhuang et al., 2019) erode morals thus threatening the identity of a community. Unlike the socio-economic impacts, socio-cultural alterations cannot be quantified, but emerge subtly and slowly over time creeping into the fabric of the society's values, beliefs, norms and cultural practises (Copper et al., 2018; Hashimoto, 2017) turning them into something that the community itself cannot recognise as they get more and more alienated with who they essentially are. In a study conducted in Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan, Jehan (2022) observed that the large influx of tourists badly affected the local norms, tradition and culture. They regard cultural and normative disturbance as the most prominent negative externality of tourism.

As culture becomes a prominent product for international tourism with cultural activities accounting for 40% of international arrivals (Artal-Tur, 2018), packaging, staging and commodification of culture becomes more prevalent, compromising cultural authenticity and integrity (Cohen, 2016; Cooper et al., 2018). Pearce (2019) concurs that mass production and cheapening of artefacts as well as pseudo performance of religious or historical ceremonies on demand for monetary reward are corrosive, and the staged can eventually be regarded as authentic replacing the original which will lead to a loss of meaning and significance over time. Sangchumnong & Kozak (2018) observed that in Thailand many cultural changes occurred due to tourism. There is also a contradiction between convincing tourists of authenticity and ensuring that the tourists do not manage to penetrate behind the stage curtains (Archer et al., 2015). Singla (2018) regards cultural staging as the demonstration effect of adjusting and changing values and modes of behaviour to satisfy tourists, making the exchange superficial and culturally degrading (Fletcher et al., 2015). Alamineh et al. (2023) go further to state that the packaging and massification of artefacts give tourists fake and shallow experiences that have little in common with the authentic. Alamineh et al. (2023) described the socio-cultural crisis in Amhara as the practice of commodifying, selling and opening everything to tourists permeates the society leaving nothing as sacred.

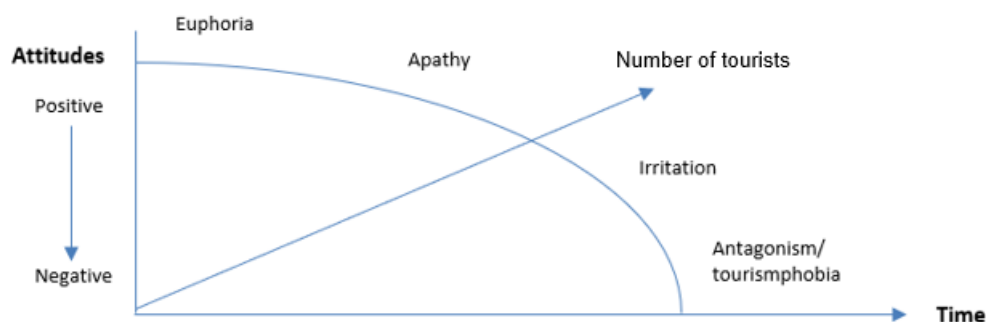


Figure 1: Residents' attitudes towards tourism
 Adapted from Szomek et al. (2020: 4)

The staging effect and confusion also includes the desire to emulate exotic cultures (Bello et al., 2017; Dogan, 2019) which are presented out of context and as jumbled as the cultures that tourists represent, meaning that an unknown culture will emerge in relationships within families and communities (Sroyetch, 2016). As Liu (2003); Meekaew & Srisontisuk (2016) pointed out, cultural mutation and evolution produces alien practices that belong to no community. When this happens, a community loses its identity (Kabote, 2015) forever. Andereck & Vogt (2019); Elser (2019) respectively cited the cases of Venice and Barcelona as examples where residents' quality of life was negatively impacted by tourism, leading to anti-tourism movements, tourismphobia, and campaigns against tourism. Sentiments such as 'tourism is like a plague it destroys people, culture, heritage, and environment' (Zhuang et al., 2019: 3) emerged as the negativity levels reached antagonism and tourismphobia (Figure 1). A corroded culture loses its objective of being a unifying factor as it is made more colourful, dramatic, and spectacular as a commodity for financial transaction with tourists (Cooper et al., 2018). In a study conducted in China, Jaafer et al. (2015) found that tourism exposed residents to different value systems and lifestyles that gave rise to many socio-cultural decays such as prostitution, gambling, drug abuse, higher cost of living (Reindrawati, 2023), and absenteeism from school (Nyaupane, et al., 2016) among others. Szromek et al. (2020) illustrated the feelings and attitudes of residents towards tourism over time in Figure 1.

Negative attitudes towards tourism can result from exceeded social and tolerance carrying capacity limits. Residents lose the ability cope with and adapt to changes that take place as their cityscape transform into a theatre backdrop to accommodate the predatory nature of modern-day tourism. Eventually unrestrained development creates a divide between the tourist city and the city for locals (Doxey, 1975; Szromek et al., 2020). For tourism to live up to expectations of being the economic driver, sunrise sector, new gold, etc., it must be planned and managed responsibly by local tourism authorities (Litheko & Potgieter, 2021) in collaboration with local communities. If not properly planned, considering the social-cultural aspects of local residents (Litheko & Potgieter, 2021), tourism and related activities can do more harm than good by changing the social fibres of the local community forcing them to adjust their lifestyles to adapt tourism-related disruptions. Even though Helson (1964) vouched that when people are exposed to an unchanging sensory stimulus its effect dissipates over time, it stands to be seen if the residents of the Golden Mile will agree.

Theoretical framework

Adaptive level theory

Adaptive Level theory (AL theory) is a Gestalt-type theory (Edwards, 2018) that was used to buttress this study. AL theory considers stimulation and context to explain human behaviour. Adaptation is the process by which individuals and communities become better suited to surroundings and circumstances, and (Heim et al., 2020) a habituation to some physical intensity or new situation, which will require subjects to unlearn and relearn new paradigms. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2022) equates adaptation to adjustment, acclimatization, transformation, readjustment and harmonization. Behaviour tends to be adaptive and explained through past outcomes, and then purposive future prospects (Perry et al., 2013). As alluded in the introduction, tourism as an economic activity yields a mixture of blessings and vices for local communities. This is the doubtful advantage of tourism which is significantly and immediately visible on destination communities (Hall & Page, 2016), with the capacity to permanently alter individual and social value systems and the quality of life as vices outweigh the benefits (Sharpley, 2014). Most amenities that visitors use, are inherently part of the city and accommodate multiusers (Koens et al., 2018; Stors et al., 2019).

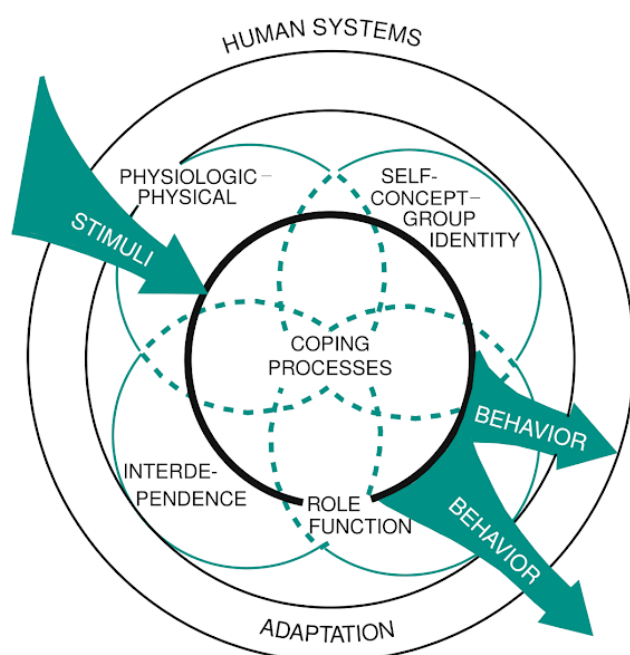


Figure 2: Adaptation model
Source: Roy (1976)

The AL theory holds that humans can return to baseline level of operation following a destabilizing event (Price et al., 2018). The implication is that humans can adapt to almost any situation based on their frames of reference and relativity (Lucas, 2007). Figure 2 illustrates the physiological, role function, self-concept, group identity, and interdependence as five human systems that characterize individuals, families and communities at tourism destinations. At the centre of these systems are the coping processes. When a stimulus (positive or negative) gets into the system, there is a disturbance forcing coping processes to work hard to enhance behaviour that will activate adaptation and restore the equilibrium.

Stimuli are created by various factors in the external environment, such as too many visitors descending on a destination at the same time forcing residents to quickly read and interpret patterns in the environment and adapt to survive. Roy (1976) points to three types of stimuli, namely focal (that confront individuals and demand attention, contextual (surrounding factors that contribute to the impact of focal stimuli), and residual (other existing factors whose effect is unclear). That is why individuals respond differently to the same stimulus such as the presence of too many tourists in their place at the same time. The defining features of adaptation are applying existing knowledge and techniques to the problem and shifting the ways people live and work. Adaptive challenges require identifying philosophical, scientific and cultural assumptions (Kuluski et al., 2021; Roy, 2009). Cultural assumptions were the main concern of this study as cultural perspectives may eventually differ from those of the original culture, especially due to mixture of cultures in a setting.

Methodology

The Golden Mile of Durban stretches for approximately 8 km from Umngeni River mouth to the end of the sea-front promenade marked by the south pier (Hlengwa, 2021). The study focussed on the residents along this stretch. Anyone who did not reside along this stretch was excluded from the study. A questionnaire composed of qualitative question items was disseminated to household representatives of blocks of flats. The blocks were first purposively selected because of their proximity to the busiest part of the Golden Mile. Once the blocks were segmented, 10 were randomly selected using a table of random numbers. The number of households was unknown, so the researcher selected 101 household representatives from 10 selected blocks of flats. Ten questionnaires were disseminated per block with only 1 block receiving 11 questionnaires. The questionnaires were handed to the supervisors of each block [as no access was granted] and were collected within a week from the supervisor. All 101 questionnaires were returned and deemed usable for the study.

Results

The study found that only 26% of the participants were property owners, and the remaining 74% were tenants. Just below 3% had been living on the Golden Mile for 11 years and above, 5% had been residents just over 5 years and the majority (42%) had been staying there for 6-10 years. This indicated the high attrition rate of owners along the Golden Mile. All the participants stayed within 2 kilometres of the bustle of the tourism activities of the Golden Mile because those flats were purposively sampled. The implication was that participants were directly affected by tourism activities along the Golden Mile. The majority (59%) highlighted congestion which made them late for work because they could hardly move, 57% indicated that crime was the biggest factor, 50% pointed out the issue of noise implying that they had to keep their doors and windows closed to shut it out. This also agitated the children because they were not allowed to go out. Another 37% stated that their lives were altered as they could not even venture out because of overcrowding on their doors especially during peak holiday seasons. About 32% of the participants expressed that they were irritated and were contemplating to move. Kuščer & Mihalič (2019) argued that too much concentration of visitors at the same time, can cause negative feelings and attitudes among residents who feel stifled. On the same note, Doxey (1975); Szromek et al. (2020) described resident-tourist feelings as a continuum between euphoria, apathy, annoyance, and antagonism depending on the level of impact. The feelings of apathy, irritation and antagonism were reflected in such responses as ‘annoying,’ ‘hard,’ ‘irritating,’ ‘stressful,’ ‘frustrating,’ ‘unsettling,’ ‘no peace of mind,’ ‘no freedom,’ ‘disruptive,’ ‘numb,’ ‘disturbing,’ and others captured in Figure 3. These responses were indicative of the effects of the stimulus on their coping processes, possibly because of the duration of exposure and exceeded adaptive capacity.



Figure 3: Perceptions of residents on socio-cultural impacts of tourism

Some participants stated that ‘the noise level was so bad that it was hard to hold a conversation inside the flat,’ and that it ‘made them uncomfortable in their own spaces.’ The participants who felt that it was hard for them to cope elaborated that ‘the congestion made their lives uneasy,’ as they were too close to the bustle, and that they were the most adversely affected. Some participants shared that they could not even ‘pray properly due to the noise levels,’ they ‘could not perform their cultural activities in peace’ since it was always packed around their homes (4%), it was ‘easy to copy the culture of tourists and forget their own’ (3%), and that they ‘could not even go to church on Sundays due to the congestion.’

There were divergent perceptions of those views were contrary as they thought that it was ‘not bad,’ for them (15%). Those who thought that it was not bad gave such reasons that they ‘had not been living along the Mile for long,’ they were ‘still new to the place,’ and that there was nothing they could do about it, so they had learnt to cope with such challenges. Their biggest challenge was that they had ‘no control over it,’ their ‘complaints were ignored by the local municipality,’ and that ‘the rate of crime was quite high.’ It was clear that some of the participants had gone beyond the euphoria and apathy stages in Szromek et al. (2020) model as they had reached the irritation, antagonism and tourismphobia stages. These feelings were negative towards mass visitation and resultant challenges to their daily lives during peak tourism seasons. Residents tried to cope by ‘limiting time outside their flats,’ ‘avoiding busy places,’ ‘locking their doors,’ ‘going away,’ ‘phoning securing’ in case of a disturbance and ‘doing nothing.’ They also highlighted drug and alcohol abuse expressing concern that ‘visitors were displaying bad behaviour’ in front of their children who would later find it difficult to differentiate between good and bad. Feelings of helplessness could be detected as some residents felt trapped in the place as relocation would be too costly for them. The majority (72%) stated that there were no socio-cultural benefits that accrued to them from staying on the Golden Mile, 11% argued that they learnt about different cultures and another 11% enjoyed meeting new people and building relationships.

Suggested solutions

The participants highlighted possible solutions that could change their perceptions towards tourism. Figure 4 illustrates tourism planning, management, education and safety and security perceived possible solutions.

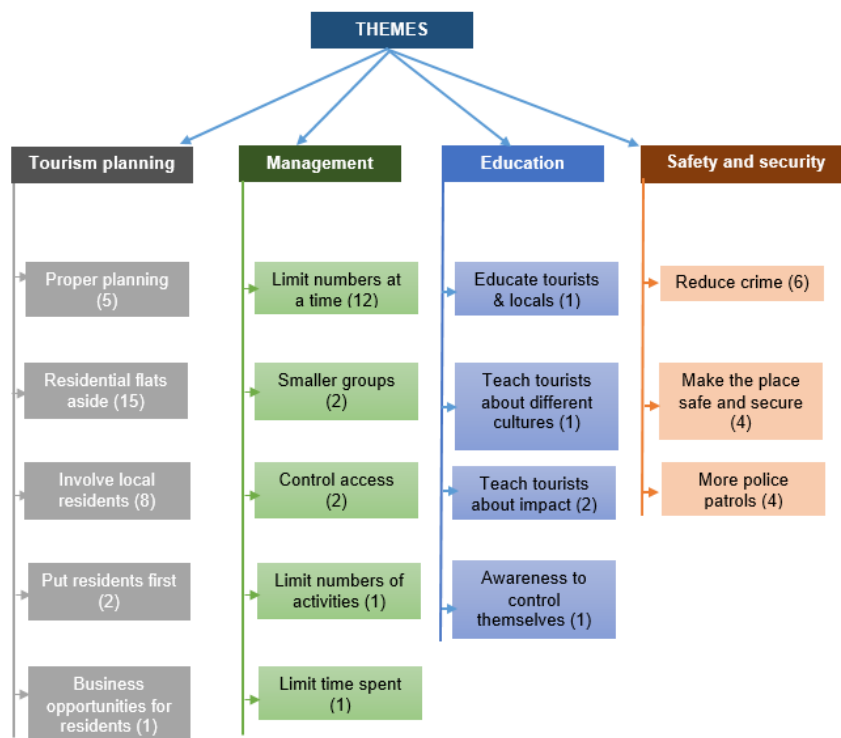


Figure 4: Suggested Solutions

Under planning, participants seemed to think that proper planning separating residential flats from the tourist rendezvous would help. They wanted to be involved in tourism planning and to be considered first for tourism business opportunities, as per the argument by Jehan et al. (2022). They expressed the belief that better management in terms of limiting the numbers at a time, installation of controlled access, and a limit to the number of activities and duration spent would help reduce the extent of their exposure. Education for both residents and tourists on how to behave, tourism impacts, different cultures and how to exercise control were recommended. The issue of safety and security made them perceive tourism negatively, and they felt that more police patrols would help in alleviating the problem and sway their perceptions. As Brown & Giles (2016), Hammitt & Patterson (2017), and Soontayatron (2016) put it, residents reorganise their daily lives to protect themselves from negative socio-cultural impacts using covert resistance (Schliephack & Dickinson, 2017) and try to reaffirm their identities as residents.

Implications and conclusion

As per the literature reviewed, tourism has a potential to produce great positive multipliers for local residents if properly planned and managed. The opposite can also be true if tourism development is poorly planned excluding input from local residents. The positive impacts may include improvement of quality of life through capital injection, better inter-community understanding and tolerance, improved educational values, cultural renewal and pride. The negative externalities may include higher prices and a standard of living that is out of reach of local people, increased crime rates, alien lifestyles, weakened moral fibre, high school dropout rates, as well as displacement of local residents as demonstrated by 74% of residents on the Golden Mile being tenants – establishing foreign zones that locals cannot even associate with. In short, tourism can corrode the very place attributes that it was built on, thus killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Tourism developers have to take the voices of the residents seriously if they want to avoid resident-tourist tensions, high owner attrition rate and tourismphobia. It is clear from the responses that the tourism phenomenon as a stimulus generated different coping processes and resultant behaviour. In cases where group identity and interdependence were unimportant, people left the place, while others decided to adapt because moving was costly.

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