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Impact of Uzdrowisko Uniejów Park (Health Resort Uniejów Park) on tourism in the neighbouring municipalities

Abstract: Health tourism is part of the tourism market. To ensure proper functioning of a health resort, competition on the market of tourism services is a necessary prerequisite. In its developmental stage, a health resort has a limited impact on tourism functions in the region. In view of considerable differences in values referring to tourism intensity and tourist accommodation, the authors attempted to evaluate the impact of the health resort Uniejów on tourism development in the region. For the purpose of the present paper, the potential for economic activity was assessed based on the economic burden index, unemployment rate, persons employed, natural persons conducting business activity and tourism function index by Baretje, Schneider and Charvat, surveys and the analysis of tourists' place of origin. Tourist accommodation of the study area is significantly imbalanced. The tourist and social potential of the Poddębice county remains uneven, highly polarized, with Uniejów municipality holding a dominant position. Tourism attracts private investors to Uniejów and adds up to a counter-productive dispersion of tourism destination.

Keywords: health resort, tourism function, Uzdrowisko Uniejów Park (Health Resort Uniejów Park)

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1995) "*Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.*" *Tourism is linked to a large number of areas of economic and social life* (Warszyńska, 1999; Gaworecki, 2007; Kurek and Mika, 2007; Alejziak, 2008), with all its positive and negative implications.

Conditions for development and optimal use of territorial capital require territorial and functional planning (Nowakowska and Rzeńca, 2016). Human activity and its implications as well as policies aiming to enhance territorial

cohesion, building institutional partnership, integration of public bodies operations all shall be taken into consideration (Nowakowska, 2015).

Health tourism is part of tourism market; it responds to its needs. Services available at health resorts serve the therapeutic needs of tourists. Tourist needs are often satisfied based on the infrastructure of the neighboring areas (Panasiuk, 2013). Proper functioning of a health resort requires competition on the market of tourism services and the offer shall comprise a broad range of services regarding preventive healthcare, tourism and recreation.

2. Description of research area

Having a strong potential for medical tourism, Uniejów is a place of active economic activity of non-agricultural nature (Rzeńca et al., 2014). With a thermal pool first opened in 2008 (Kow-

alczyk et al., 2013), Uniejów has contributed to the development of regional tourism. And having obtained a status of a health resort in 2012 its contribution to tourism development

further increased. The picture of tourism development allows a comparison of the number of bed places offered in Uniejów (BDL, 2017). Until the year of 2008 only 46 bed places were available, while in the following years the number increased from 117 in 2009, 160 in 2010, 146 in 2011, 201 in 2012, 323 in 2013, 395 in 2014, 524 in 2015, 556 in 2016 and 512 in 2017. A similar dynamic growth was recorded with respect to the number of bed places provided. Less than 6000 bed places were provided annually, with 13.935 in 2010, 20.951 in 2012 and 60.974 in 2014. According to Gorączko and Gorączko (2016a), with same-day visits (without an overnight stay) being in majority and the number of incoming visitors amounting to 350.000-400.000 per year, statistical data do not reflect the real dynamics of tourism flows in the Uniejów area.

The municipality of Uniejów has a well-earned brand name of a thermal resort. Yet

this tourism product is not fully integrated (Kowalska, 2016). The theory of a tourist area cycle of evolution by Butler (Szromek, 2010) allows to position Uniejów at the development stage (Kowalczyk et al., 2013). At this stage, tourist destinations develop additional tourism features, intensify their promotion efforts, tourism industry is becoming increasingly controlled by external organizations and tourists outnumber local residents. It is necessary to undertake measures to draw up a comprehensive range of tourism and cultural services.

The municipality of Uniejów (Fig. 1) borders with seven municipalities, which are located in two provinces (województwo) and four counties (powiat). This means that the integration and optimization of measures aiming to develop a coherent strategy for tourism development necessitates multiple activities.

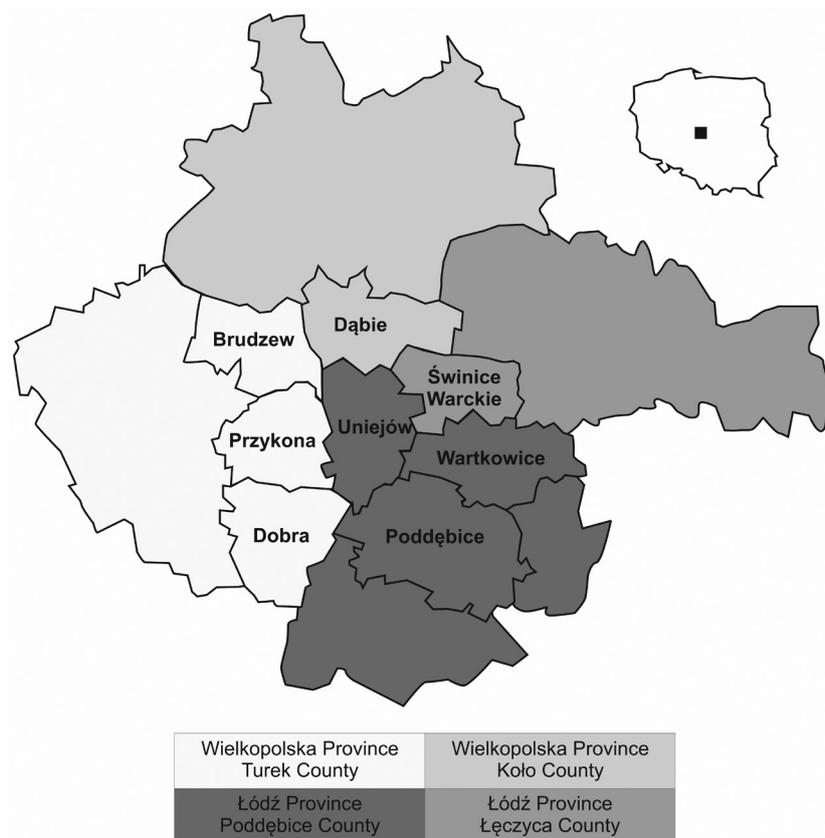


Figure 1. Research area

The potential for tourism is not sufficiently used by none of the municipalities adjoining Uniejów. Świnice Warckie are an important place of religious worship related to the Shrine of the Birth and Baptism of St. Sister Faustina. With no strategy on how to encourage tourists to

stay longer than a couple of hours, the municipal authorities make a poor use of natural and cultural resources (Suliborski nad Kulawiak, 2016). Although Dąbie has good quality thermal water deposits, it remains the poorest municipality in Wielkopolska. The ever-growing adverse finan-

cial situation, diversification of economy and poor education of local residents contribute to a high unemployment rate (Kulawiak, 2016). Only Poddębice has all the necessary potential to develop health and therapeutic functions and

medical tourism (Rzeńca et al., 2014; Nowakowska and Rzeńca, 2016). The role of the Health Resort Uniejów Park in the shaping of the region's tourism potential was analyzed based on data from the years 2008-2017.

3. Research aim and methodology

The immediate impact of a health resort (at the development stage) on the tourism functions of adjoining localities is to a certain extent limited. The aim of health tourism is to improve and maintain health through health-care prevention, rehabilitation and medical treatment. Medical treatment prescribed by a doctor is of primary importance (Białk-Wolf and Taniewski 2010). Due to a significant medical component, engagement of medical doctors, proven efficiency of treatment, resort visitors make little use of surrounding areas at the initial stage of development of a health resort (Januszewska, 2004; Białk-Wolf et al., 2016).

Health potential may become a magnet for the development of tourism functions of adjoining localities provided that the quality of the existing infrastructure be improved, new tourist products developed, natural values of the resort and its surroundings taken care of and appropriate promotional activities undertaken (Gorączko and Gorączko, 2016a). Diversifying services shall be one way, among other things, of attracting tourists. While essentially improvements in the resort's infrastructure alone result in improved quality of care services, they do not, however, increase the number of tourists.

The impact of tourism on the region is very difficult to measure in a direct fashion as it is not limited solely to tourist flows, overnight stays provided or the income received from tourism services. In assessing the tourism share in the economic activity of the region, synthetic measures and field studies come in handy. Synthetic measures include the tourism function index by Baretje, Schneider and Charvat. The analysis of indicators measuring social and economic development provides additional information. The tourism function indicators of the municipalities were examined based on the Local Bank Data (Bank Danych

Lokalnych, BDL) (2017) and in line with the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) methodology (2017b):

- the Baretje tourism function index – the ratio of bed places to the total number of residents,
- the Schneider tourist flow intensity index – the ratio of the number of nights spend per year to the number of residents,
- the Charvat tourist flow intensity index – the ratio of overnight stays provided annually to the total number of residents,
- density of accommodation establishments – the ratio of the number of bed places to an area in square kilometers (km²),
- tourist density – the ratio of tourists staying overnight annually to an area in square kilometers (km²),
- index development of accommodation establishments – the ratio of tourists overnight stays to bed places,
- the use index of accommodation capacity – the ratio of overnight stays provided to bed places.

Complementary surveys were conducted in the municipality of Poddębice among the total number of 165 individuals in the period from June to September of 2015. In June and July of 2016 a study into the place of origin of tourists was also conducted in the municipality of Poddębice.

The evaluation of potential for future economic activity concerning the development of tourism functions was based on the economic and social development of municipalities according to the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) methodology (2017a):

- economic burden index
- unemployment rate
- persons employed per 1000 population
- natural persons conducting business activity per 1000 population.

4. Results

Identifying the development of tourism functions of a given area helps to distinguish between areas with tourism as a dominant function and those where tourism is merely one of the many other functions. Tourist flow itself is not a sufficient criterion for an area to be recognized as a tourist destination.

The examined municipalities are located in rural areas with the total population outside urban areas amounting to from 50% (Poddębice, Uniejów) to nearly 100% (Świnice Warckie, Wartkowice, Przykona, Brudzew), which is far above the national average (40%). Population density of the studied municipalities is from twice (Poddębice) to over three times (Przykona) lower than the national average (Fig. 2A). The Baretje, Schneider and Charvat index showed large spatial diversity in the studied area. By far, the largest figures were generated by the municipality of Uniejów (Fig. 2B).

According to the interpretation of Baretje's tourist function index suggested by Boyer (Pearce, 1995), either the tourist flows in Uniejów are low or the tourism function is

still "submerged" in other urban functions. It is, however, important to bear in mind that applying Baretje's index to rural areas may impede the evaluation of the development of the tourism function (Szromek, 2012; Gierńczyk, 2013). The index is based on tourist overnight stays. However, visiting a given tourist attraction does not necessarily entail an overnight stay.

Tourist to population ratio (Schneider's index) is a measure of tourism function development, which seems to be more suitable for rural areas (Warszyńska, 1985; Szromek, 2012). In this case, it is assumed that the area is well developed in terms of tourism when it reaches the value of 500 and more (Warszyńska, 1985). The municipality of Uniejów is approaching this reference value (Fig. 2C).

Charvat index values for the municipality of Uniejów are higher than the national average (Fig. 2D) yet they fail to achieve a threshold for a criterion of a tourist area, which is 5000. In the area of the remaining municipalities (Fig. 2), the figures are 10% below the average values

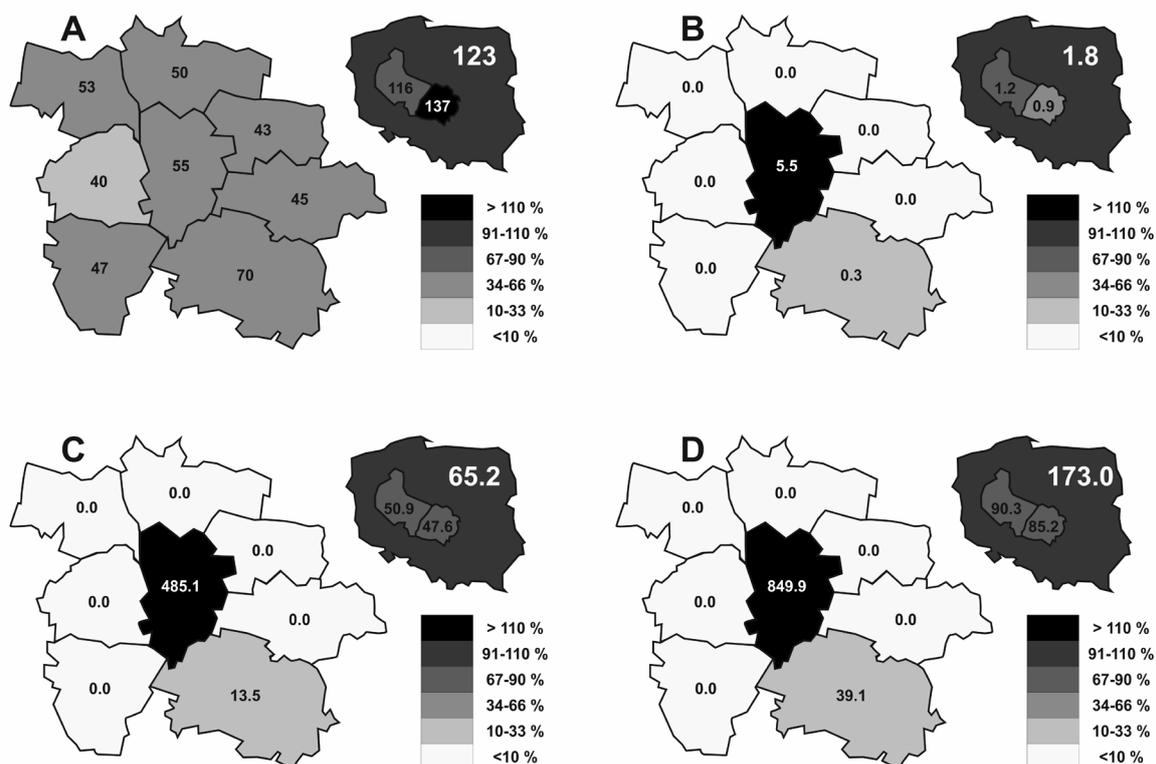


Figure 2. Tourism intensity rate and population density of the study area: A – population density, B – Baretje's index, C – Schneider's index, D – Charvat's index (authors' own elaboration based on data obtained from BDL, 2017)

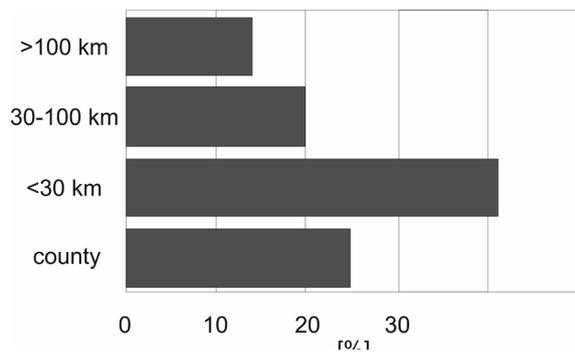


Figure 5. The place of residence of the respondents, 15.06.2015-15.09.2015, Poddębice (authors' own elaboration)

It was impossible to clearly determine tourists' intention for the visit because out of the answers received none was decisive. 27% of the survey respondents wanted to spend their time actively, 25% were visiting their family, 10% were passing through. For the majority of the respondents Poddębice are moderately attractive in terms of monuments of material culture, catering facilities, service facilities, sports and recreational facilities and events. Tourist accommodation, cultural events and facilities, tourists routes and tourism services were rated less favorably. Natural values, transportation accessibility, residents hospitality and relaxing atmosphere received the highest scores. Actions aiming to develop tourism function taken thus far by municipalities were not properly perceived. Average and bad scores of the infrastructure

confirm this fact. The survey respondents appreciated the natural environment value and the relaxing atmosphere. The greatest attractions of the municipality included: Zoo Safari (82%), thermal pools (73%), forests (47%) and the *Napoleonów* nature reserve (22%). Besides Poddębice, the survey respondents visited Uniejów (80%), the beach in Pęczniewo (74%), Łódź (52%), Wartkowice (26%) and Zadzim (19%).

The analysis of the number plates carried out in June and July of 2016 in the vicinity of the greatest attractions of the municipality of Poddębice helped to determine tourists place of residence (Fig. 6). Residents of the following provinces, in order of appearance, were in majority: Łódź Province (52-56%), Wielkopolska Province (11-12%), Mazowieckie Province (9-10%), Kujawsko-Pomorskie (8-10%), Lower Silesia Province (6%) and Silesia Province (4-6%). The structure of the survey respondents by place of residence (Fig. 5) proves the local interest of the tourist attractions of the municipality, with 66% of the respondents residing up to 30 km away from Poddębice.

As many as 95% of the respondents did not use the municipality tourist accommodation. Almost all the respondents declared a same-day stay. Over 50% of them considered the promotional activity as poor or very poor, while 30% ranked it as average.

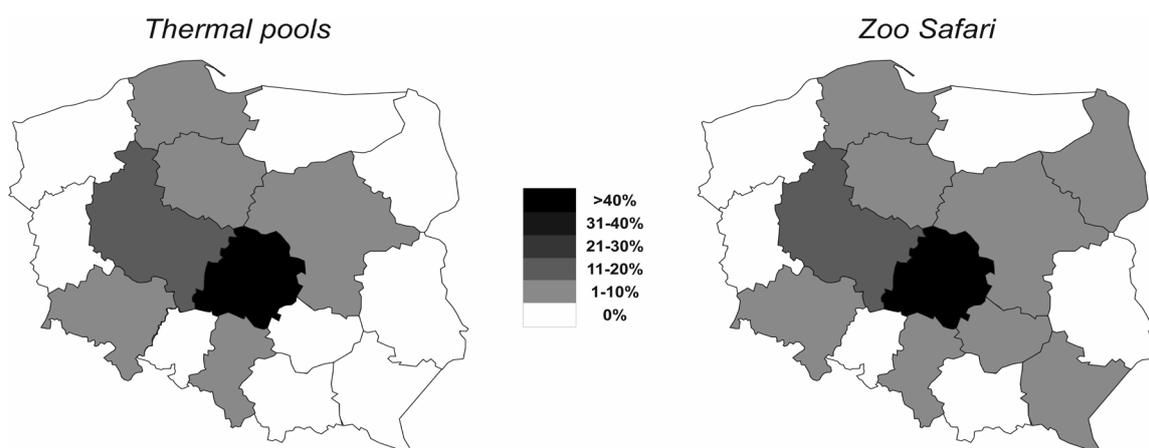


Figure 6. Place of residence (by province) of tourists visiting thermal pools and Zoo Safari in June and July of 2016 (authors' own elaboration)

In the remaining municipalities, the tourist function does not play an important role, which is also the case with respect to Świnice Warckie, a place visited by several thousands of people a month for a few months of the year

(Suliborski and Kulawiak, 2016). Poor use of local resources is to blame.

Economic growth indicators provide a great deal of information regarding the ability of municipal authorities to manage economic

problems and engage local community. Tourism development is difficult to measure at regional scale based on the GUS (Main Statistical Office) data because the way it is obtained does not allow a too detailed analysis at a rural level (Gierańczyk, 2013). It is therefore necessary to factor in many measures of economic growth, which may be debatable. For the purpose of the present paper, the potential for economic activity was assessed based on the economic burden

index, unemployment rate, persons employed, and natural persons conducting business activity (Fig. 7). This region like the rest of the country is marked by the economic burden and a higher unemployment rate. Unfavorable situation is made still worse by the fact that in the municipalities of Uniejów, Poddębice, Świnice Warckie and Wartkowice the number of persons with lasting unemployment is greater than the average in Poland.

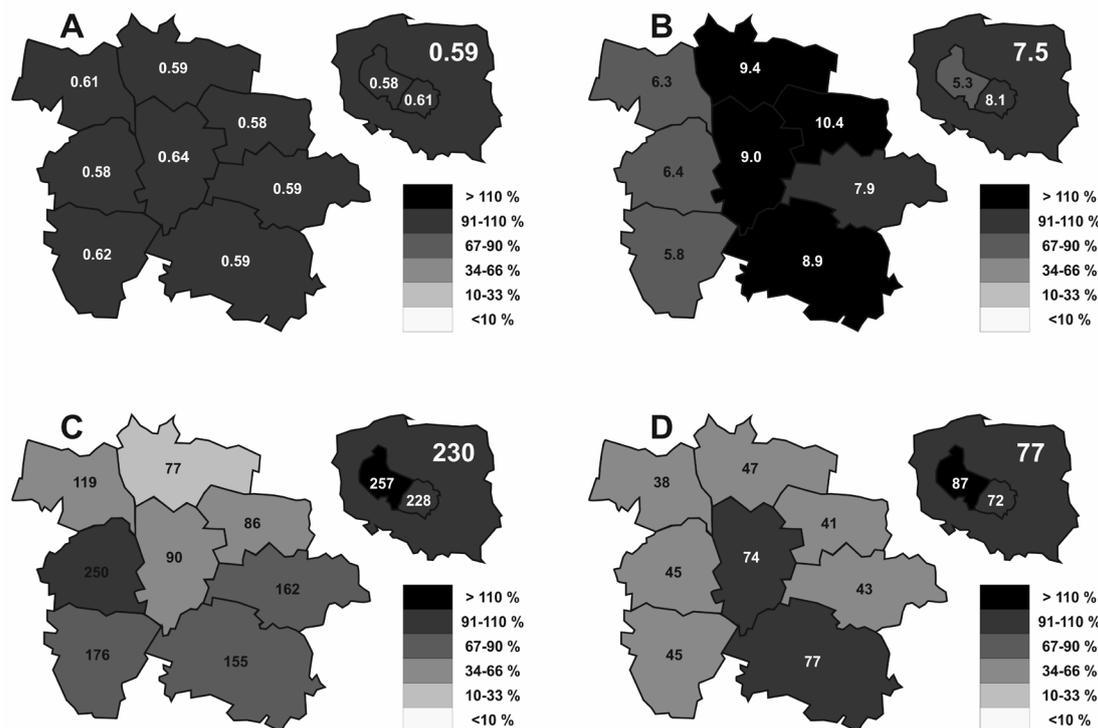


Figure 7. Economic and social development of municipalities in the study: A – the economic burden index, B – unemployment rate, C – Persons employed per 1000 population, D – natural persons conducting business activity per 1000 population (authors' own elaboration based on data obtained from BDL, 2017)

Economic and social development of the municipalities in the study is of little benefit and shows a low potential for the prospective economic activity linked to tourism function development (Fig. 7). According to the BDL data (2017), municipalities of Dąbie, Świnice Warckie, Dobra, Poddębice and Wartkowice

have the lowest income per capita. While the municipalities of Uniejów and Przykona have the highest income per capita, amounting to 140-170% of the national average. The income of Przykona is linked to the mining industry in the area (Kozera et al., 2016) and strong economic connections with Turek.

5. Conclusions

Health tourism becomes increasingly popular. This type of tourism compared with other sectors of the industry reaches a smaller audience due to its narrow specialization. A cooperation between business and municipal actors is a necessary prerequisite to gain a competitive

advantage on the market of health tourism services and to maintain and develop the tourism function (Kornak 2002; Panasiuk 2013; Białk-Wolf et al., 2016; Tosek 2016).

The usage of thermal resources may focus on the heating sector, balneology and recreation.

It is vital though that the measures undertaken include diverse functions and are not exclusively limited to developing health tourism. By allowing a wider and more diverse services based on natural values helps reach a broader audience and extend the duration of stay in a given location.

This is particularly important in the case of the Health Resort Uniejów Park and the neighboring municipalities. Transportation accessibility and a convenient location in the vicinity of A2 motorway makes the place easily accessible for people living in the region, including in particular the residents of the city of Łódź (approx. 60 km) and also for the residents of large agglomerations like Warsaw (approx. 170 km) and Poznań (approx. 150 km). Opening up to tourists from Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Lower Silesia Province seems to matter as they account for a significant proportion of visitors.

Further development of tourist accommodation in the area is possible based on rural tourism development. Natural environment as well as a quiet and peaceful atmosphere of

a place are values much appreciated by tourist nowadays. Favorable conditions for recreation can be the region's hallmark. To allow a wider choice of tourist attractions, including regular cultural and theme events as well as natural trails will make the region more attractive for tourists.

A coherent promotion strategy for the neighboring localities of the Health Resort Uniejów Park is a key factor for the brand's promotion, image consolidation and improved place recognition. It is crucial to stress the role of the geothermal water springs in the production of local cosmetics and mineral waters. Local products (e.g. cosmetics mineral waters) help reach a broad public.

Health resort may become an opportunity for the development of the region. The wealth of the region with its diverse natural environment, unique religious buildings, numerous architectural structures and good transportation accessibility provide multiple options for their use.

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