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The impacts of Hosting Major Sporting Events: Resident's Perceptions of the Mediterranean Games 2013 in Mersin

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the residents' perceptions of the Mediterranean games (MG) 2013. Data was collected by questionnaire survey of 1700 residents of Mersin by applying quota sampling. A structural model to assess the factors on residents' perceptions of the impacts of the 2013 MG and how these perceptions affect their support is tested. The findings confirmed the five factor model that is consisted of economic benefits, economic costs, social benefits, social costs and image enhancement and revealed that there is a strong support for 17th MG. Image enhancement and economic benefits are the main factors that determine the residents' support.

Keywords: Residents' Perceptions, Mediterranean Games, Mega Events, Social Exchange Theory
JEL Classification: L83

1. INTRODUCTION

Event tourism is representing a specific type of tourism and major sporting events are becoming increasingly popular means for tourism development in a region. International sports events have environmental, social and economic impacts on the destination which they take place and therefore are receiving academic attention. As large-scale tourism events, countries or cities use sports events to attract visitors and enhance their image in the global arena. Events presenting opportunities for such purposes to governments or planners, they may also come with some challenges. However, special events will be continued to be seen as a popular means to increase tourism earnings, so it is vital to consider all effects of events - both positive and negative - on the local community.

As tourism impacts are not universal, it wouldn't be surprising that different host cities or countries have different perceptions and attitudes towards hosting special events (Zhou and Ap, 2009). Most of the literature on hosting a major event focuses on marketing/management skills and evaluation of economic benefits, social, cultural and environmental effects of events have been neglected (Getz, 2008. p. 410). By considering local support's importance for tourism development to be sustainable, it can be inferred that host community perceptions should be taken into consideration by local authorities while planning for such an organization.

The Mediterranean games (MG) are a sports competition organized every 4 years among the countries of the Mediterranean Basin. These competitions are organized with the aim of contributing to the mutual understanding and social and cultural rapprochement among the citizens of the Mediterranean Countries. In 2013 Mersin is handed over the hosting rights of MG after Greece relinquished due to its financial crisis. 3049 participants from all 24 member countries are expected to compete in total of 29 sports (two are disabled sports) in 17th MG which will be held in Mersin. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the perceived impacts of 2013 MG on residents of the host city, and to evaluate the factors that may affect residents' overall support for the Games.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mega events are large-scale events, which have a great appeal and interest and attract international attention. They are global

in their nature and are organized in a particular place at a time after a bidding process. It is widely known that mega events have substantial impacts on host communities. They attract investments for infrastructure thus providing opportunities for urban renewal, they have social and cultural impacts as important as their economic impacts and they contribute to image enhancement of the region.

The first study that provides a conceptual framework for Olympic events was conducted by Ritchie and Aitken in 1985. In their frequently cited study examining the changes in residents' perceptions towards the 1988 Olympic Winter Games over the 12-month period, they found that there was little change in the level of support between two time periods. Respondents in 1984 had a higher level of awareness than 1983 (Ritchie and Aitken, 1985).

Different theoretical frameworks are applied in the literature to explain the impacts of mega sporting events on residents and residents' perceptions toward the mega-event. Among them, a sociological perspective, social exchange theory is widely used by researchers. It implies people form their perceptions based on what they expect to occur and tend to take part in an exchange if they believe positive outcomes outweigh the negative ones (Lorde et al., 2011. p. 350). According to the theory, residents evaluate events as either positive or negative in terms of perceived benefits or costs (Waitt, 2003), so they support the event when they can benefit more than they lose. It is based on the principal that people are reward seeking, thus they analyze contact in a way to mutually benefit from exchange relationships (Yutyunyong, 2009. p. 7).

The other theory utilized in studies is social representations theory which assumes representations that refer to mechanisms or interpretations people use to understand objects or events in everyday life, determine how they see the world, but are simultaneously determined by their interactions and communications within society (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000. p. 767). Thus, a social phenomenon shapes the contents of individuals' mind, and at the same time it is also a product of communication and interaction between individuals' minds. This approach provides a suitable framework to investigate the extent to which actual level of impact and underlying value systems contribute to residents' perceptions (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000. p. 61).

Fredline and Faulkner (2000) examined perceptions of residents' of two major sporting events (Gold Coast Indy Car Race, Australian Formula One Grand Prix) by adopting social representations approach which allows simultaneously investigate the extent to which actual level of impact and underlying value systems contribute to residents' perceptions of the impact. They have identified five clusters: Negative, moderately negative, ambivalent, moderately positive and most positive and identification with the theme of the event, level of contact with the area in which the event is held perception of justice, and community attachment is the most important variables in discriminating between residents' attitudes.

Waitt (2003), employing social exchange theory, examines the changes in enthusiasm between 1998 and 2000 towards Sydney's Olympics, and the results indicated that over the period that a higher degree of skepticism and uncertainty emerged on economic impacts; however the majority of respondents perceived gains as outweighing costs.

Kim and Patrick (2005) investigated residents' perceptions on the impacts of the FIFA 2002 World Cup before and during the event. The study resulted in eight impact factors namely; tourism resource development and urban revitalization; image enhancement and consolidation; economic benefits, interest in foreign countries or their cultures and tourism infrastructure development, negative economic perspective; disorder and conflicts; and traffic problems. They concluded that residents' perceptions can vary over time. Residents tend to perceive the event negatively after the event passed.

Gursoy and Kendall (2006) developed and tested a model based on social exchange theory, for assessing the key factors on residents' perceptions of the impacts of the 2002 Winter Olympics as a tourism mega-event. The model revealed that community support for mega-events is affected directly or indirectly by the level of community concern, ecocentric values, community attachment, perceived benefits and perceived costs. Results showed that perceived costs have insignificant effect on support; emphasizing support is based on perceived benefits rather than costs.

In their study on the perceived social impacts of the 2006 FIFA World Cup on residents of Munich in Germany, Ohmann et al. (2006) found that the impacts perceived were generally positive in terms of urban generation, increased sense of security, positive fan behavior and the general atmosphere surrounding the event, and negative related to increased crime, prostitution, and displacement of local residents. The study also revealed that perceptions are not dependent on socio-demographic factors such as age, gender or length of residence.

In a study conducted by Zhou and Ap (2009) residents' perceptions toward the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games are investigated by using social representations theory. Results showed that majority of the residents' have perceived the impacts very positively and they can be classified into two groups named embracers and tolerators. The study findings also showed that among 15 independent variables (age, gender, income level, education level, mode of transportation, length of residency, employment status, event information source, proximity to event, tourism work experience, event work experience, family benefits, attitude on having more tourists, attitude on general government performance) variables such as residents' perceptions toward government performance, work experience in tourism and attitude on tourism development in Beijing have effect in forming residents' social representations towards the Games, thus determining cluster membership.

Lorde et al. (2011) analyzed the impacts of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007 in Barbados. The study revealed that the perceived impacts include seven dimensions: Benefits of cultural exchange, economic benefits, natural resource and cultural development, social problems, traffic congestion and pollution, price increases and construction costs.

As aforementioned, there are numerous studies on residents' perceptions towards the impact of mega-events. Some of these have one-time approach - examining residents' perceptions at a certain time - (Zhou, 2010; Bull and Lowell, 2007; Amenumey and Amuquandoh, 2010; Bob and Swart, 2009; Ohmann et al., 2006), some have made comparisons between pre-and post-perceptions (Ritchie and Aiken, 1985; Soutar and McLeod, 1993; Twynam and Johnston, 2004; Kim and Petrick, 2005; Kim et al., 2006; Waitt, 2003; Hiller and Wanner, 2011). Many of these studies employing social exchange theory, investigate the differences between perceptions by the levels of independent variables such as age, gender, level of education, others adapting social representations perspective, identify residents with similar perceptions by using cluster analysis and examines the values that creates these perceptions such as proximity, level of contact, involvement in tourism, use of recreational facilities, community attachment.

Social exchange theory is the most frequently used approach for evaluating the perceptions regarding impacts of events. Social representations theory is utilized for identifying values that contribute to the perceptions rather than actual impacts of the events. Both of them have strengths and weaknesses. The difference between these perspectives is emanated by etic and emic paradigms they are adopted. Emic perspective is based on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society, while the etic perspective is based on the extrinsic concepts and categories that have meaning for scientific observers (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000. p. 778). It can be inferred that social exchange theory involved an etic approach, while social representations theory involved an emic approach.

Although it has some weaknesses such as being ambiguous and assuming that human beings are systematic like computers, social exchange perspective is utilized in this study for examining the influence of expected costs and benefits of 2013 MG. It is preferred because of its popularity, flexibility, suitability in making comparisons (Amenumey and Amuquandoh, 2010. p. 43), and it is believed to provide a general and convenient framework for evaluating the perceived impacts of a mega-event.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The purpose of this study was to advance theoretical understanding of local residents' support for mega events by developing a theoretical mega event support model that contributes to the existing models. Proposed hypotheses were tested to identify the strength and direction of the proposed relationships utilizing a structural modeling approach on a data set collected from a sample of the residents of Greater Mersin which has a total population of 1.682.848. The sample population consisted of 1700 individuals and selected by using quota sampling method considering municipality boundary, age, sex, and education level criteria.

3.2. Questionnaire Design

Survey instrument used in this study was developed following the procedures recommended by Churchill (1979) and DeVellis (1991) for developing a standardized survey instrument. A number of items to measure each construct were identified from the literature. Using a back translation approach, items were translated into Turkish. Afterwards, a group of tourism experts assessed the content validity of these items. They were asked to provide comments on content and understandability of those items. They were then asked to edit and improve those items to enhance their clarity and readability. They were also asked to identify any of those scale items that are redundant and to offer suggestions for improving the proposed scale. After making sure that the survey instrument had content validity, two pretests were conducted on local residents in Mersin, Turkey. Based on the results of the pretests, the survey instrument was finalized.

The survey instrument consisted of 3 sections. However, this study utilized data from three sections that focused on perceptions of mega events and support for mega events. A total of 31 items were used to measure local residents perceptions of mega event impacts and 5 items were used to measure support for mega events. Items that were used to measure perceptions of mega event impacts and support for mega events were adopted from Prayag et al. (2013), Gursoy and Kendall (2006) and Kim et al. (2006). These items were measured on a five-point Likert type scale with "strongly disagree" at the low end and "strongly agree" at the high end.

3.3. Survey Method

Data for this study were collected using personal interviews from the residents of Mersin utilizing an intercept approach. A number of trained interviewers were instructed to intercept residents at the most frequented locations geographically distributed in the survey areas. The interviewers were properly identified with the badge and tablets were used for data collection. Interviewers were asked to approach every tenth person passing through. They were instructed to ask the person if s/he was interested in participating in a survey that measures local residents' perceptions of the 17th MG. If the answer was a no, interviewers were instructed to intercept the next person and ask the same questions until they identified an individual who agreed to participate in the survey. After the individual agreed, the purpose of the study was explained in detail by the interviewer and a personal interview using a structured survey instrument was conducted as far as the quota reached in each segment. Each question was asked to the respondent by the interviewer and his/her responses were recorded on a tablet. A total of 1700 valid questionnaires were obtained from 1740.

3.4. Methods

The proposed model and hypothesized paths were tested utilizing the data collected from the residents of Mersin. The fit of the measurement model and the fit of the structural model were tested using the LISREL 8.7 structural equation analysis package. The maximum likelihood method of estimation in combination with the two-stage process was utilized to analyze the data (Nunkoo et al., 2013). As fit indices, the chi-square statistics (and associated P values) were examined first. However, because of the large effect of sample size on the chi-square values (and associated P values), other fit indices were also selected to assess the fit of the models (Nunkoo et al., 2013). These fit indices were the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted GFI (AGFI); the normed-fit index (NFI), the non-NFI (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the incremental

Table 1: Measurement scale properties

Constructs and indicators	Completely standardized loadings	Variance extracted	Composite reliability
Support for mega events		0.63	0.87
32 contribution to economic growth of the city	0.87	0.76	
33 contribution to development of the city	0.86	0.74	
34 positive effects exceeds negative effects	0.71	0.50	
35 Support to host MG in Mersin	0.72	0.52	
Economic benefits		0.53	0.77
1 increase in employment	0.74	0.55	
3 new sports facilities	0.72	0.52	
4 increase in investments	0.72	0.52	
Economic costs		0.42	0.68
2 increase prices in entertainment & accommodation sectors	0.74	0.55	
5 increase prices in real estates	0.58	0.34	
14 increase overall price level	0.61	0.37	
Image		0.52	0.81
22 Improved nationwide image	0.68	0.46	
26 improved international image	0.73	0.53	
27 increased international publicity of Mersin	0.79	0.62	
31 increased international publicity of Turkey	0.69	0.48	
Social benefits		0.38	0.81
9 increase efforts of local government for hosting events	0.64	0.41	
10 improvement of city's roads, pavements and etc.	0.63	0.40	
11 improvement of community attachment	0.61	0.37	
15 increase in protection efforts of tourism resources	0.61	0.37	
17 stimulates the arrangements of cultural activities	0.61	0.37	
19 improvement of general conditions of the city	0.63	0.40	
24 increase residents' interest in international events	0.58	0.34	
Social costs		0.26	0.63
6 increase in crimes	0.52	0.27	
8 increase in traffic	0.52	0.27	
12 increase in alcohol consumption	0.62	0.38	
16 cultural conflict	0.39	0.15	
18 increase in prostitution	0.46	0.21	

Table 2: Estimated standardized coefficients for the hypothesized model

Constructs	Support
Economic benefits	0.34*
Economic costs	−0.02
Image	0.52*
Social costs	−0.01
Social benefits	0.01
R^2	0.64

*Significant at 0.05 probability level

fit index (IFI) and the relative fit index (RFI). Two indices that are proposed to measure the parsimony of the model were also reported: Parsimony GFI (PGFI) and parsimony NFI (PNFI).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Measurement Model

Details on the properties of the measurements are provided in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, all of the composite reliabilities were above 0.70, indicating that each construct had acceptable reliability. The overall fit indices of the measurement model were as follows: χ^2 (284) = 1,672.81 (P = 0.0); GFI = 0.93; AGFI = 0.91; the NFI = 0.97; the NNFI = 0.97; the CFI = 0.98; the IFI = 0.98; the RFI = 0.97; the PGFI = 0.75; and the PNFI = 0.85. Further, the indicators of two residuals, root mean square residual (RMR), standardized RMR and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were 0.061, 0.044, 0.053 respectively.

Two types of validity measures, convergent and discriminant validity were examined. Convergent validity was tested by examining t values of each item's factor loading on its underlying construct (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). All t-values associated with each completely standardized factor loading for each indicator were found to be higher than 1.96; suggesting significance at 0.05 significance level, which indicated that convergent validity of all the indictors were established. Discriminant validity was tested by comparing intercorrelations of factors with the square root of the average variance (i.e., variance extracted estimate) for each factor (Hatcher, 1994).

4.2. Structural Model

Most of the goodness-of-fit statistics of the proposed theoretical model were found to be above the recommended threshold values. The χ^2 value with 284° of freedom was 1,672.81 (P = 0.0), which was lower than the acceptable level. However, all other fit indices indicated that the proposed hypothesized structural model fits well to the data: GFI = 0.93; AGFI = 0.91; the NFI = 0.97; the NNFI = 0.97; the CFI = 0.98; the IFI = 0.98; the RFI = 0.97; the PGFI = 0.75; and the PNFI = 0.85. Further, the indicators of residuals, RMR, standardized RMR and RMSEA were 0.061, 0.044, 0.053 respectively.

Table 3: Perceived impacts of 17th MG by residents' profile

Independent variables	n (%)	Mean					Support
		Econobenefit	Econocost	Socialbenefit	Socialcost	Image	
Sex							
Female	892 (51.8)	3.59	3.64	3.57	3.22	3.81	3.80
Male	830 (48.2)	3.63	3.66	3.71	3.19	3.90	3.77
Total	1722 (100)			P=0.00		P=0.02	
				t=3.71		t=2.23	
Marital status							
Single	570 (33.6)	3.55	3.58	3.66	3.20	3.87	3.76
Married	1125 (66.4)	3.64	3.68	3.63	3.21	3.85	3.80
Total	1695 (100)						
Education							
Elementary	433 (25.2)	3.44	3.50	3.55	3.23	3.73	3.55
Secondary	385 (22.4)	3.68	3.71	3.70	3.10	3.93	3.92
High school	552 (32.1)	3.58	3.66	3.62	3.23	3.84	3.78
University	300 (17.5)	3.84	3.77	3.71	3.25	3.98	3.98
Post graduate	47 (2.8)	3.54	3.61	3.67	3.14	3.79	3.75
Total	1717 (100)	P=0.00	P=0.01	P=0.03		P=0.00	P=0.00
		F=8.23	F=4.73	F=2.62		F=5.16	F=11.48
Age							
18-29	497 (29)	3.60	3.64	3.65	3.23	3.87	3.83
30-39	447 (26.1)	3.57	3.66	3.65	3.23	3.88	3.79
40-49	338 (19.7)	3.76	3.72	3.68	3.21	3.88	3.82
50-59	252 (14.7)	3.63	3.63	3.65	3.15	3.87	3.81
60+	179 (10.4)	3.41	3.54	3.47	3.15	3.69	3.54
Total	1713 (100)	P=0.03		P=0.04			P=0.01
		F=3.98		F=2.39			F=3.16
Duration of living in Mersin							
1-9	313 (18.1)	3.71	3.65	3.70	3.18	3.90	3.81
10-19	357 (20.6)	3.54	3.61	3.59	3.26	3.86	3.78
20-29	434 (25.1)	3.60	3.71	3.62	3.22	3.79	3.82
30-39	306 (17.7)	3.50	3.58	3.64	3.16	3.83	3.73
40-49	147 (8.5)	3.78	3.68	3.69	3.17	3.91	3.69
50+	174 (10.1)	3.65	3.67	3.64	3.21	3.91	3.85
Total	1731 (100)	P=0.00					
		F=2.58					
Information about MG							
Yes	1535 (76.8)	3.69	3.72	3.69	3.23	3.91	3.86
No	159 (23.2)	2.93	3.05	3.25	3.04	3.41	3.12
Total	1693 (100)	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00
		t=9.40	t=9.10	t=6.86	t=2.73	t=7.27	t=9.53
Community attachment							
Definitely don't feel attached	133 (7.9)	3.31	3.36	3.42	3.10	3.66	3.49
Don't feel attached	182 (10.8)	3.63	3.68	3.59	3.30	3.82	3.71
Neutral	182 (10.8)	3.36	3.47	3.45	3.17	3.73	3.62
Feel attached	624 (36.9)	3.58	3.63	3.62	3.21	3.85	3.74
Completely feel attached	570 (33.7)	3.80	3.79	3.79	3.20	3.97	4.01
Total	1691 (100)	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00		P=0.00	P=0.00
		F=11.20	F=9.02	F=11.57		F=5.86	F=12.72
Belief for organization's accomplishment							
Yes	1336 (77.6)	3.76	3.75	3.75	3.19	3.97	3.98
No	386 (22.4)	3.10	3.31	3.25	3.25	3.45	3.15
Total	1722 (100)	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00		P=0.00	P=0.00
		t=10.77	t=8.60	t=8.48		t=9.84	t=15.65
Region							
Akdeniz	502 (30.5)	3.54	3.64	3.65	3.29	3.81	3.75
Toroslar	441 (25.9)	3.68	3.67	3.70	3.00	3.92	4.01
Yenişehir	341 (20.2)	3.22	3.36	3.41	3.19	3.58	3.26
Mezitli	403 (23.5)	3.96	3.89	3.77	3.34	4.08	4.04
Total	1687 (100)	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00
		F=37.70	F=22.76	F=15.488	F=14.55	F=25.09	F=56.71

MG: Mediterranean games

The direct estimated standardized path coefficients for the proposed model are presented in Table 2.

It is revealed that although there is high level of support for MG (4.03) in the hope of economic benefits (3.61), social benefits

(3.64) and image enhancement (3.86), residents also have some reservation concerning economic and social costs of the event (3.65; 3.21). The results of the analysis conducted to find the mean differences of residents' perceptions regarding impact factors and overall support by socio-demographic variables are shown in Table 3. Significant differences were detected by such factors as age, education level, having information about Mersin's hosting of MG, community attachment, belief about organization's success and municipality region on impact factors and overall support. Social costs have lower scores than economic costs.

Variables that differentiate the mean scores of all factors are municipality region and having information about 17th MG. As illustrated in the Table 3, residents who do not have information about 17th MG to be held in Mersin have notably low scores and there are also significant differences among the different municipality regions. Community attachment is the other variable that has considerable effect on mean scores. Residents who feel themselves attached to the community and believe that the organization will be accomplished have higher scores than the other groups

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at identifying the opinions of residents' of the impacts of 17th MG and the factors affecting the support for the Games. Although Mersin was entitled to host the Games after Greece's relinquishment, similar to previous residents' perceptions studies, there is positive perceptions and high level of initial support for 17th MG to be held in Mersin. A measurement model consisted of five impact factors (economic benefits, social benefits, economic costs, social costs and image enhancement) and a structural model which is designed to measure the effect of these factors on residents overall support for the Games is tested and verified using structural equation modeling. The results indicate reasonably strong support for the five-factor model and revealed that the main factors that affect the residents' support are image enhancement and economic benefits which explain 64% of the total variance.

17th MG is perceived to make contributions to the improvement of image and economic situation of Mersin. The factor that has the greatest effect on residents' support for MG the image enhancement. This is not surprising because Mersin's image is associated with terror for the last two decades. Because of the terrorist activities in the Eastern and Southeastern region of Turkey, Mersin got massive immigration from these regions. People migrated are low-skilled and poorly trained, thus had difficulties in finding jobs and adapting the changing situation and culture. These hardships caused them to be prone to radicalism, violence and illegal activities including terrorism. Therefore Mersin's reputation had distorted over time. Most of the residents feel disturbed by this negative image of the city.

17th MG is the biggest international organization held in Mersin. Such a big organization will attract public attention at national and international level. Mersin, which has been appearing in media with terrorism activities frequently, is going to be mentioned with such a huge event throughout the Games.

The second factor that has an influence on the residents' support is economic benefits that will be created by MG. This factor consists of new investment and employment opportunities induced by MG. As aforementioned, due to the migration, unemployment rate in Mersin exceeds by far the Turkey's average. It can be inferred that MG is seen to be an opportunity to create new jobs. Additionally, the construction of new sport facilities, swimming pools, and roads are seen as gains for future development of the city.

The model also indicates residents' perception of economic and social costs associated with MG. but there is no remarkable effect on overall support of residents; notwithstanding these factors have negative relationship with overall support. Residents believe that benefits of MG outweigh its costs and thus they have positive perceptions relating to Mersin's hosting the Games. There are apparently high expectations among residents that economic and social benefits and image enhancement are realized from hosting MG. Residents' support depends mainly on perceived benefits rather than costs. Consistent with the social exchange theory, the findings of this study support the results of the previous studies (Kim and Patrick, 2005; Waitt, 2003; Gürsoy and Kendall, 2006, Amenumey and Amuquandoh, 2010; Lorde et al., 2011).

In addition, significant mean differences are found according to some independent variables. It is obvious from the study that demographic variables have significant influence on residents' perceptions on the impact of mega events. Results of this study indicated that residents from different socio-demographic background evaluated the perceived effects of the MG differently. As far as the community attachment concerned, the mean difference of support scores between residents who feel attached and do not feel any attachment is noteworthy. This result highlights the migration fact, and of vital importance for local governors.

The current study aims to identify the perceptions of residents' before the Games. This study provides information to planners and government bodies about the residents' concerns, but it is important to note that residents' perceptions alone cannot provide a true reflection of the actual impacts of the Games. In order to make a better assessment on the actual impacts, financial and economic data should be collected and a longitudinal study should be conducted including post-data collection. The study does not focus on measuring image and the actual impact level of the Games on the image. It is strongly recommended to measure actual image enhancement level and make comparisons before and after the Games for the forthcoming events.

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