Religious Events And Event Management:
An Opportunity for Local Tourism Development

Stefania Cerutti

Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale
Stefania.cerutti@eco.unipmn.it

Elisa Piva

Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale
elisa.piva@eco.unipmn.it

Religious events represent one of the ancient forms of encounter and should play an important role in enhancing tourism in the areas in which they take place. The aim of the study is to investigate the role of religious events as a key component of local tourism development. The adopted research methodology is primarily based on the gathering and interpretation of qualitative data. The paper considers small and medium sized religious events, analysing their event management process. It focuses on two case studies in northern Italy: the Devotional and Cultural Tourism Exchange of Oropa and the Passion Play of Sordevolo.

Key Words: religious events, event management, local tourism development.

Introduction and methodology

Religion and spirituality are common motivations for travels and experiences, with many major tourist destinations having developed largely as a result of their connections to sacred people, places and events (Raj and Morpeth, 2007). In parallel to large-scale events of international significance, there has been a marked growth in niche events, such as a local and/or themed festivals. These are often initiated at community level and sometimes with the support of the public sector in an attempt to pump-prime such activity, leveraging it as a potential economic development tool (Page and Connell, 2012). With this perspective, the paper focuses on the management of small and medium sized religious events with the purpose of analysing their role and importance in tourism in the areas in which they occur. In particular, the research aims at demonstrating the necessity of a structured management approach to succeed in achieving the goals of local tourism development.

In order to attain the main objective of the study, the research methodology has been structured as follows:

- Identification of relevant studies in the chosen research field.

- Selection of significant case studies in order to test the validity of the research statement.

- Gathering of qualitative data on the management of the selected cases through interviews and meetings with organizers, local bodies and various stakeholders.

- Analysis of collected data, verifying the utilization of the practices of the Event Management Body of Knowledge and their effective utility in the contribution to the local development of tourism.

- Discussion of the results and drawing conclusions.

The paper is organized in three main parts. Firstly, a review of multidisciplinary literature which explores the current knowledge on the topics of event, religious events and event management is outlined. Secondly, the paper presents two religious events as empirical case studies that occur in the province of Biella, Italy (Figure 1): a cultural and trade fair (the Devotional and Cultural Tourism Exchange of Oropa, located in the Shrine and Sacred Mountain of Oropa) and a grand show on the Passion of Christ (the Passion Play of Sordevolo). Lastly, it will be shown how these religious events have contributed positively to tourism development in the local context of Biella province. According to O'Sullivan and Jackson (2002) this process is not automatically guaranteed. Indeed, to achieve these results, the process of event management should be coherent with local tourism policies and strategies. The presented case studies represent

Figure 1 – The Province of Biella, Italy
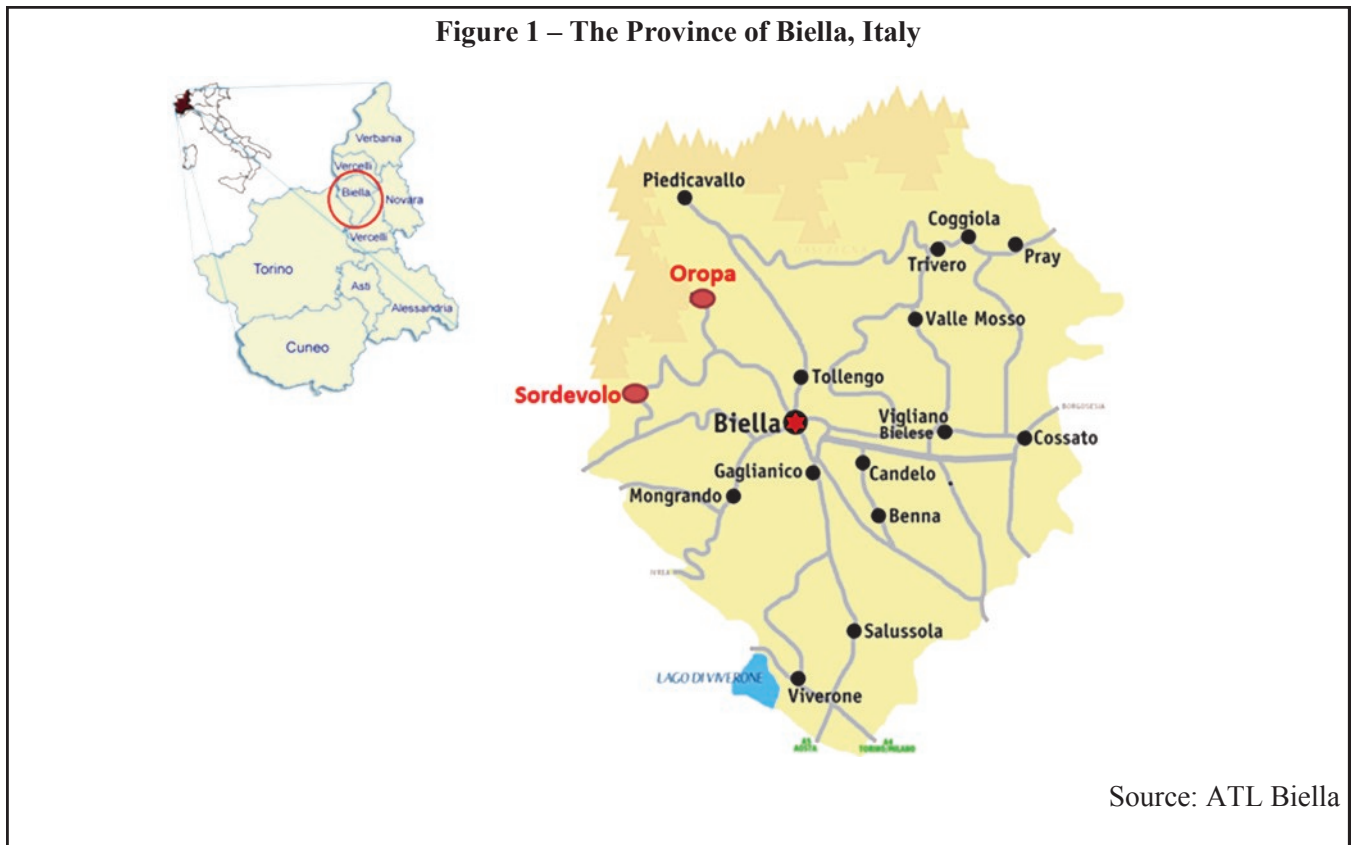
Source: ATL Biella

emblematic examples of integration between an event and its territory.

Literature review and theoretical framework

In recent years, the importance of "events" as an industry is beginning to be recognised. In modern societies they have become significantly more complex and elaborate and their audiences have grown exponentially (Ferdinand and Kitchin, 2012). According to Kose *et al*. (2011), the event industry is one of the world's largest employers and contributes major positive economic impact (Theocharis, 2008). The first step towards a full understanding and a conscious management of events is the definition of the event itself. Within the literature several definitions are given (Getz, 1991, 2007, 2011; Davis and Brown, 2000; Eckerstein, 2002; Salem *et al*. 2004; Silvers, 2004; Carter, 2007; Loos *et al*., 2008), however a unanimous view on the key terms and categories to be used hasn't been agreed upon yet. Some authors believe that at the root of the event are its effects and its purposes. Whether public or private, commercial or charitable, celebratory or commemorative, events bring people together to share an experience and produce measurable outcomes (Silvers, 2004); indeed, an event could be any gathering of people for a specific purpose (Carter, 2007). Others base their definition on the manifestation and characteristic uniqueness of the activity, which gathers the target group in time and space, a meeting where a message is communicated and happening is created (Eckerstein, 2002), i.e. an event is an occurrence at a given place and time (Getz, 2011).

When it comes to events a broad overview can be traced, due to the many types of activities that may be involved and to the diversity and size of bodies which can organize an event. As regards the typologies that may fall under the umbrella of the events industry, Arcodia and Barker (2003) recognize three main categories: business event, cultural events and sporting events. Bowdin *et al*. (2006) include business events; festivals, fairs, cultural events; community events; outdoor events; entertainment, live music events, concerts & theatre, shows; sports events, spectator sports; charity events, fundraising, voluntary sector; party planning, wedding planning, social life-cycle events, special events. Getz (2005) introduces the category of religious events within the typology of planned events as a part of cultural celebrations. Raj *et al*. (2013) also propose a classification that shows the different types of events which includes religious events as a distinct category (Figure 2). This suggests that religious events express the need for a tailored management that takes into account the specific characteristics of the religious tourism experience.

Events have always characterized the religious and devotional sphere, constituting a major attraction both for tourists with a predominant spiritual motivation and for those more interested in the cultural aspect that

Figure 2 – Typology of Events
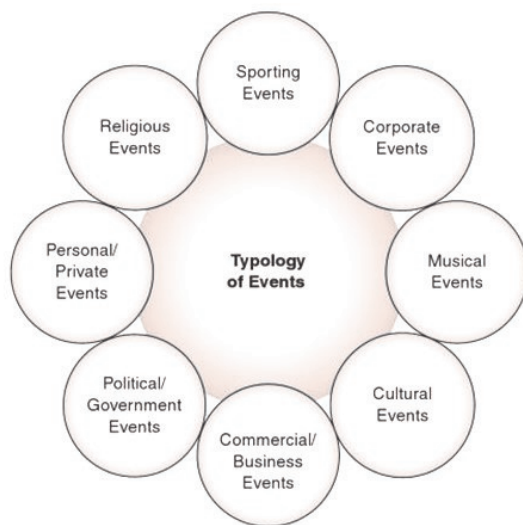
Source: Raj, Walters and Rashid, 2013

underlies the religious event. Today we see that, all over the world, more and more people are travelling to sacred sites, taking part in religious festivals and events (Blackwell, 2007). Vukonić (1996) define religious events as "large-scale gatherings on the occasion of significant religious dates and anniversaries". According to Raj *et al*. (2013) events, including those with a religious nature, can enormously vary in terms of their scale and complexity and the numbers of stakeholders involved. The larger the event, the more objectives to achieve it will have, due to its numerous sub-events and stakeholders (Figure 3).

This paper will focus on small-scale religious events, considered as a lever for local development that actively involves local stakeholders in the decision-making process. Bowdin *et al*. (2011) describe these type of events as *"local or community events"*, which are generally small and linked to a particular geography as well as the case studies that will be presented. Although there are much less stakeholders compared to the so called *major* or *mega-events,* this does not mean that small events do not require a

Figure 3 – Size and complexity of events
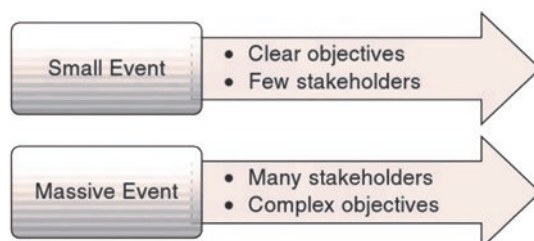
Source: Raj, Walters and Rashid, 2013

meticulous approach for their management.

Over the last few decades, with the contribution of some pioneering studies (Goldblatt, 1990; Getz, 1991; Hall, 1992), the practice of event management has been rising and evolving as a formal discipline. According to Getz (2007) the rise of this new profession and academic subject reflects a fundamental need within all societies for the professional management of events in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. In particular, since the late 1990s, a group of event management professionals that includes scholars, consultant and practitioners has recognized the need for an aggregation of fragmented theories and practices into a common event management framework known as the *Event Management Body of Knowledge* (EMBOK). Starting from the methodological principles provided by the Project Management discipline, this model has been conceived in order to develop and professionalize the event management practices, synthesizing its fundamentals. The EMBOK model (Figure 4) includes a definition of the phases, processes, and core values as well as the functional areas and categories (domains) to which these are applied. In particular, the **Phases** illustrate the sequential nature of event management, highlighting the criticality of time in any event project; the processes illustrate both a sequential and iterative system that promotes a comprehensive course of action as well as a dynamic approach to the changing nature of events. The **Core Values** specify those principles that must be infused throughout all decisions regarding every element, phase, and process of an event to ensure these decisions facilitate successful and sustainable outcomes. The **Domains** represent the overarching areas of activity or functions within event management. They illustrate the full scope of the responsibilities assigned to event organizers as well as categories suitable for an organizational structure or effective knowledge management (Silvers, 2012).

This model arises from a corporate organizational and managerial context which is therefore strongly marked by the development of events by private companies. However, it is also at the territorial level that events have become increasingly important, especially within the politics of local development and tourism promotion where religious tourism can have wider longer-term benefits as a local development agent (Curiel and Gil, 2008). When it comes to this local perspective, it should be considered that regional scale events not only respond to economic and business-oriented objectives, but also to those concerning the territorial complexity, the cultural identity and the tourist development of a place. The research intends to provide empirical evidence of the validity of the application of the EMBOK model in the field of religious events. However, it is necessary to adopt a wider perspective that does not focus all the attention on an individual event but that inscribes it into the

Figure 4 – EMBOK Model
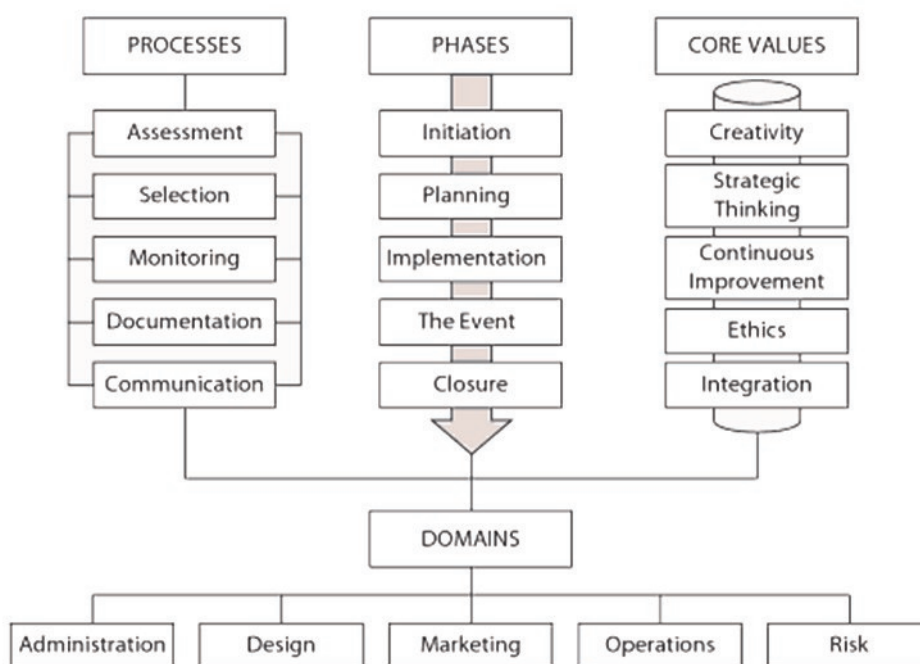
Source: Silvers, 2012

evolving dynamics of the tourist destination in which it takes place. In summary, this reveals that religious events require an effective and participative management that is consistent with the policies of tourism development and territorial planning brought forward by local contexts.

Case study 1: The Devotional and Cultural Tourism Exchange of Oropa (Biella, Italy)

The Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange is an event which started in 2005 with the aim of bringing together all the players involved or interested in the niche of religious tourism, which brings millions of people every year to famous and less famous sites all over the world, for reasons ranging from profound faith to the desire to combine moments of inner serenity with opportunities for cultural discovery.

The Exchange of Oropa proposes itself as a B2B (Business to Business) event strongly influenced by the theme of transition towards digital technology and it seeks to facilitate a fruitful dialogue between supply and demand. Since the first edition, the Exchange of Oropa has distinguished itself in the international tourism scenario because of its unique location, the Sanctuary and Sacred Mount of Oropa. The intention is to hold this event directly at the destination to be promoted, and not in an exhibition centre, so that tour operators and the media can have the possibility of living the same experience that they are going to offer

to their customers, and being in direct contact with the local community and the young students of the local educational institutes.

The Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange makes use of three main instruments:

- Fairs for Institutional Exhibitors, which actively promote the creation of a regional network;

- Workshops, that aim to bring together Italian sellers and operators with international buyers, and:

- Conferences.

In particular, the first occurrence of the event (2005) emphasized the link between devotional sites and their landscape through the setting up of educational tours reserved for international buyers to the Sacred Mount of Oropa and other Piedmontese Sacred Mounts (Varallo and Orta). For the second edition, held from 21 to 24 June 2007, in the wake of the success of "Olympic Turin", which confirmed the inclusion of Turin and Piedmont in the international cultural tourism circuit, the emphasis was laid on the theme of raising awareness of devotional sites by linking them with other regional sites of historic, cultural and artistic excellence. At the third edition, (18th-21st June 2009) the event asserted its reputation for quality and credibility in the regional and national panorama of events in the religious field. Among the 2009 edition novelties were the presence of buyers from Turkey, Russia, Australia and Taiwan, while

Figure 4 – The Devotional and Cultural Tourism Exchange of Oropa (Biella, Italy)

Source: www.lastampa.it

attendance from the United States, China and Eastern Europe continued to be relevant. With the fourth edition, held from 23 to 26 June 2011, the Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange confirmed its role as an opportunity to highlight and promote at an international level the tourist potential, the quality and the unique nature of the sites, together with the cultural and leisure attractions available when visiting and staying at places of worship in Piedmont and Italy. However, the 2013 edition was not carried out mainly due to economic issues that led to the postponement of the fifth edition to June 2014. This most recent edition includes the presence of 15 operators specializing in religious tourism from European markets (France, Germany, Switzerland, Lithuania, Malta), Eastern Europe (especially Poland) and South America (Argentina, Mexico Brazil), while the virtual workshop had as its protagonists the long-haul markets, including Japan, China, India, Korea, and USA.

The numbers attending the four previous editions of the event are testament to its success: B2B workshops were attended by a total of over 160 international tour operators - with an average of 20 represented countries in each edition - and about 600 organizations and operators from all the provinces of Piedmont and from many other Italian regions and provinces. Fairs for Institutional Exhibitors recorded an average of 50 exhibition stands assigned at each edition and a total of 9500 attendances.

A co-marketing agreement was confirmed and consolidated in an ever more cooperative way in each instance of the Exchange with the development of the *100 Italian Cities Tourism Exchange*. A fruitful collaboration has also been established with the *European Association of Vie Francigene*. The 2009 edition saw the intervention of the *International Transromanica Association* while synergies have developed with other national and regional networks - *Sentiero Frassati*, *Italian Alpine Club, Europassion Italy* and since 2011 the *Italian Environment Fund*. Since the first edition, the event has benefited from the "High Patronage" of the President of the Italian Republic together with patronage of the Ministry for Cultural Activities, ENIT (Italian Government Tourist Board) and TCI (Italian Touring Club) and since 2011 also the prestigious patronage of the Italian Representative of the European Commission.

The central role in the management of this event belongs to the ATL (*Agenzia Turistica Locale - Local Tourist Agency*) of Biella which has developed over the years an ad hoc expertise in structuring the Exchange, articulating the management process according to the practice of Event Management (Table 1). Alongside the ATL of Biella are other public authorities, including the Department of Tourism and Environment of Piedmont Region, the Managing Body of the Sacred Mountains, the various Piedmontese ATLs, diverse local educational institutes and other local bodies. Through the collaboration of these agencies, the organizational process that made the Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange possible has been developed.

This Initiation phase consists of a series of activities that have been accomplished under the guidance of the ATL of Biella:

- the analysis of the primary objectives of the event;

- the individuation of the possible strategies and resources needed;

- the definition of the main activities and their location;

- the submission of a preliminary project proposal by ATL of Biella to the Department of Tourism and Environment of the Piedmont Region.

It is, therefore, a process of *ex ante* assessment that involves the EMBOK domains of Administration, Design and risk. After the first stage, the event has been gradually implemented, through different actions:

- creation of a marketing & communication plan;

- budget preparation;

- establishment of a steering committee handled by ATL of Biella;

- establishment of an organizing secretary at the Department of Tourism and Environment of Piedmont;

- collaboration with other Piedmontese ATLs and Departments of Tourism of other Italian regions;

- organization of training courses for different operators.

The EMBOK processes of Selection and Communication enabled the organizers to reach the phase of the event in which the scheduled activities were carried out:

- fair exhibitions;

- Workshops;

- conferences and seminars;

- educational tours dedicated to international buyers;

- cultural events for visitors and attendees.

The management of the event closes with the documentation process which involves the *ex post* evaluation through the use of assessment forms given to international and Italian buyers, post-event meetings with local educational institutes and

	Table 1 – Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange of Oropa (Biella, Italy)				
EM Phases	**Principal activities**	**Processes**	**Domains**	**Managing actors / Organization**	**Core values**
Initiation	Definition of objectives, strategies, resources, activities.	Assessment	Administration, Design, Risk	ATL Biella; Department of Tourism and Environment, Piedmont Region.	
Planning	Marketing & communication plan; Final design of the format; Formal commitment by the Region.	Selection, Communication	Administration, Design, Marketing	Department of Tourism and Environment, Piedmont Region; ATL Biella	
Implementation	Establishment of a steering committee; Activation of a collaboration with other Piedmontese ATLs; Training courses for the workshops; Definition of the final program of the event.	Selection, Communication	Administration, Operations, Marketing	ATL Biella; Department of Tourism and Environment, Piedmont Region; Local bodies; Piedmontese ATLs system; Local educational institutes.	Creativity Strategic thinking Ethics Integration
The Event	Realization of the scheduled activities.	Monitoring	Operations, Marketing	ATL Biella; Department of Tourism and Environment, Piedmont Region.	
Closure	Ex post evaluation; Post-event meetings with local educational institutes; Management of post exchange international contacts.	Documentation	Administration, Risk	ATL Biella; Department of Tourism and Environment, Piedmont Region.	
				Source: personal elaboration on the data of ATL Biella	

management of post exchange contacts with all the international buyers.

The case of the Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange of Oropa constitutes a well-structured and valuable event for the Religious Tourism Product of Biella province and for the entire Piedmont Region. However, it doesn't represent the core element of the destination of Oropa, focused instead on the Sanctuary and the Sacred Mount. The Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange was conceived as a point of reference for national and international tourist operators active in the religious field and as an instrument that helps to enhance and promote the Piedmontese devotional sites.

Case study 2: The Passion Play of Sordevolo (Biella, Italy)

The Passion Play of Sordevolo is an event of ancient origin which involves the entire community in the staging of the sacred representation of the Passion of Christ. Since 1850, (this is the date of the first document in the archives but the tradition goes much further back) the whole village, normally every ten years, has developed and represented the Passion of Christ with organizational and artistic autonomy. The three hour performance consists of a prologue and 29 scenes, with an overall participation of about 400 actors and walk-on characters:

- 400 actors (40 spoken roles and 360 extras) between the ages of 5 and 80;

- 300 people "behind the scenes";

- 31 shows in 97 days, of which 3 performed by children;

- each show last more than 2 hours and has 29 scenes;

- an amphitheatre of more than 4000 square metres.

The play is performed in an open air amphitheatre with a covered seating area for 3000 spectators. As already mentioned, in an area of 4000 square meters a piece of Palestine is recreated (The last supper, Sanhedrin, Gethsemane, Herod's Royal Palace, Pilate's Palace, Calvary) where 400 characters, including Sanhedrin's guards and Roman soldiers on horseback, bring to life the Sacred Drama. The scenery is meticulously constructed and the great music and special effects are exceptionally powerful. The text of the play dates back to the late 15th century, and was written by the Florentine Giuliano Dati, a chaplain of the Church "dei Santi Martiri" in Rome.

At present, the community of Sordevolo, with an ever-new team spirit, is undertaking the setting up of the 2015 edition of the Passion: a popular work which will revive in gestures, songs and words the historical event. The Passion Play of Sordevolo is a very significant event that has become a tourist attraction not only for the Biella district, but also for the region of Piedmont as well as other domestic and foreign markets. There are only two other places in which the Passion of Christ is represented: in Oberammergau, Germany and Kuopio, Finland.

Initially, the organization and the management of this event was entrusted to the ancient Popular Theatre Committee of Sordevolo Passion, founded in 1816. Afterwards it was replaced (in 1991) by Sordevolo Popular Theatre Association, an independent non-profit organization, aiming to preserve, to perpetuate and to hand down this traditional expression of an olden-day sub-alpine culture - which dates back to the origins of this small community. Special focus has to be placed on the deeply free and independent spirit of this genuine local culture and on the great involvement of the modern heirs of this tradition, who approach the various aspects of the staging utilising local human resources and techniques: overall organization, costumes and set-making, scenery planning, direction,

Figure 4 – The Passion Play of Sordevolo

Source:www.passionedicristo.org

drama school, stage setting, etc. The Passion of Sordevolo is certainly the greatest choral play performed in Italy by amateur actors who work and prepare themselves for this big event with devotion. Its importance is evident by the creation of a museum dedicated solely to it. The Museum of the Passion, set in the sacristy of the Church of St. Martha, was inaugurated in August 2005 with the intent of exhibiting the objects as witnesses to time, and above all to tell stories about people. Visitors can admire documents about the history of the Passion of Sordevolo, a collection of films, photographs, texts and objects that illustrate the glorious past of this sacred representation of popular theater. The story of the Passion, as presented in this museum, is at the heart of the village of Sordevolo. This is not an occasional event in the life of *Sordevolesi*, instead, it represents an *event* in the strongest sense of the word, a moment of life that involves the inhabitants of an entire town and a profound experience for tourists.

The Passion Play is part of a territorial dynamic that also involves public institutions, among which the most important is the ATL of Biella. Thanks to the ATL, the Passion of Sordevolo is now promoted at an international level and inserted in the circuits of tourist offering of some major tour operators. In particular, the event has been presented in New York by *The Italian National Tourist Board*, the highest governmental tourism body promoting Italy to the world. They bring together hundreds of people, including journalists and

travel agents who have been presented the programme of the Passion 2015, and the possibilities offered to tourists. An important partner in the initiative is represented by *Central Holidays*, who included the Passion of Sordevolo into the most important catalog of travel in North America, distributed in more than 6000 travel agencies overseas. The process to achieve this goal was quite complex: after forming the *Passion Tours* and organizing seminars, meetings with European travel agents were set up during which the Passion was presented with the related packages. Since January 2014, a communication campaign was started in the Brazilian market with the collaboration of Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York, who has pledged to promote the event through the American dioceses. The goal is to highlight not only the event, but to promote the entire territory of the Biella province and Piedmont Region, with particular emphasis on the territorial impact in light of Expo 2015 (in Milan).

The case of the Passion Play of Sordevolo is another emblematic example of an event which is organized and structured in line with the Event Management principles (Table 2).

After the phase of Initiation - which also includes the definition of objectives, strategies and resources, and the definition of the various activities - the process of event management contemplates the selection of the actors, the identification of people "behind the scenes"

Table 2 – Passion Play of Sordevolo (Biella, Italy)					
EM Phases	**Principal activities**	**Processes**	**Domains**	**Managing actors/ organization**	**Core values**
Initiation	Definition of objectives, strategies, resources, activities.	Assessment	Administration, Design, Risk	Sordevolo Popular Theatre Association; Municipality of Sordevolo; Parish of Sordevolo.	Creativity Strategic thinking Ethics Integration
Planning	Selection of the actors; final design of the format of the event.	Selection	Administration, Design,	Sordevolo Popular Theatre Association; Municipality of Sordevolo; Parish of Sordevolo; ATL Biella.	
Implementation	Implementation of scenography, soundtrack, costumes, casting, sound and light systems; implementation of the marketing and communication campaign.	Selection, Communication	Operations, Marketing	Sordevolo Popular Theatre Association; Municipality of Sordevolo; ATL Biella; Piedmont Region; Local bodies.	
The Event	Staging of the scheduled performances of the Passion Play.	Monitoring	Operations, Marketing	Sordevolo Popular Theatre Association; Municipality of Sordevolo; Parish of Sordevolo; ATL Biella; Local bodies.	
Closure	Gathering of data on customer satisfaction	Documentation	Administration, Risk	Sordevolo Popular Theatre Association; ATL Biella.	
Source: personal elaboration on the data of ATL Biella					

and the final design of the format of the event (number of performances, dates, etc.). This phase of planning involves the EMBOK domains of Administration and Design and it is carried out mostly by the Sordevolo Popular Theatre Association, the Municipality of Sordevolo, the Parish of Sordevolo and ATL of Biella. Subsequently the process continued with the implementation of the activities related to the staging of the performances (scenography, soundtrack, costumes, casting, sound and light systems, etc.) and of the marketing and communication campaign for the event. The moment that the scheduled performances of the Passion Play happens, the process of Event Management closes with the gathering of data on customer satisfaction.

This case reveals an extremely different process compared to the previous case of the Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange of Oropa. Indeed, the Passion Play represents the core element of the destination of Sordevolo. Tourists experience in this event a profound and unique religious and cultural experience. Without this event, the town of Sordevolo does not have a deep religious identity that justifies its presence in the circuits of religious tourism. It is the Passion Play which qualifies Sordevolo as a destination, becoming the primary motivation for many Italian and foreign tourists. In other words, it could be argued that the "Passion Play" event becomes the destination itself, identifying Sordevolo and contributing to its strategic positioning in the religious tourism market.

Key Findings and Conclusions

The case studies represent two examples of small/medium religious events that have been developed in accordance with the objectives and practices of the event management discipline, following its EMBOK framework. Indeed, the leading subject, i.e. the ATL of Biella, has managed these events in a suitable manner. In particular, the EMBOK model has been used as a useful "lens" through which to read the events' elements, enabling us to understand more clearly the structure and organization of the events, to assign specific roles and responsibilities to the various stakeholders, to monitor the activities and to assess impacts. However, while these religious events can easily carry out phases and processes, it is more difficult to enclose the activities within specific domains. This is due to the fact that these events are part of a pattern of territorial development and do not respond only to specific functional areas as is the case of events organized by private companies. For the same reason, the core values are also not easily identifiable, since there is no management that defines the guiding principles of vision and mission.

These events, despite constituting two separate instruments with different specific objectives, are both aimed at achieving the general objectives of tourism development prefigured by local actors. They have become two driving events, on which the network of local stakeholders has decided to focus in order to develop its religious and cultural tourism offer.

The importance of religious tourism in this area, also attested by the data from the Observatory on Tourism in Biella province, revealed that for the majority of the local accommodation facilities the motivation "pleasure / holiday" is the main reason for their customers to travel. Of these visitors, almost 60% are motivated by religious tourism and religious events.

From the conducted interviews and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data clearly emerges an understanding of how these events have, over time, become part of a process of coordinated territorial development, managed by a single leading subject. It is this organizational capability and unitary management that has allowed a number of significant benefits for local tourist development in the Biella province.

The most evident success of these events is a growth in the number of tourists and the increasing ability to attract different profiles of visitors. This is particularly visible in the Passion Play of Sordevolo, that in its last edition of 2010 showed a steady increase of 10% in visitors compared to the previous 2000 and 2005 editions. Also the Devotional and Cultural Tourism Exchange of Oropa has registered good performance as a tool for the promotion and enhancement of the territory, showing over the course of its various editions a rise in interest of international buyers that originate from ever more countries. Both events have achieved significant growth in foreign visitors, multiplying the benefits of international visibility for the territory.

Thanks to the communication ability of the organizers, these events - originally oriented towards the devotional and religious niche - have captured the attention of other types of visitors, mostly driven by motivations related to cultural tourism. These events were promoted through local and national media, but afterwards the communication process has been strengthened by the use of new technologies related to the web and social networks, which allowed an international reach. As an example, the Exchange of Oropa used a single regional hashtag (#borsadioropa) which obtained 6 million "impressions" on Social Media, giving visibility to the event and to the entire System of the Sacred Mountains. It is also important to emphasize that the communication of one event has affected the other: the effective communication of the Exchange of Oropa has increased also the visibility of the Passion Play of Sordevolo among international buyers, allowing its subsequent insertion in the international tourist circuits.

The proper management of the two events has certainly helped to generate other positive socio-cultural impacts which directly affect the local community. The organizers stated that the involvement of local communities in the implementation of these events contributed to reinforce local identity and revitalize traditions, creating a mutual sense of belonging.

In terms of regional tourism policies, the management of these events has highlighted the creation of a network of subjects which over time has established itself by following an effective path to local governance. This has led to an opening of the regional system and a territorial rooting of the undertaken initiatives.

The cases are particularly emblematic as they constitute part of an integrated territorial proposal that involves the whole Piedmont Region, which has a lot to face in 2015: the exchange of the Holy Shroud in Turin, the bicentenary of the birth of St. John Bosco and the World Exposition Milano 2015.

The research has shown how religious events could play an important role in the promotion and development of a territory. Furthermore, it has demonstrated that for small sized religious events it is essential to refer to structured management framework to generate positive effects on the local system. In particular, the study wishes to contribute to the growing debate on the niche of religious events, of which there is still much to investigate.

References

Allen J, O`Toole W, Harris R and McDonnell I (2011) *Festival & Special Event Management*, 5th edition. Australia: John Wiley & Sons.

Arcodia C and Barker T (2003) *The Employability Prospects of Graduates in Event Management: Using Data from Job Advertisements*. Paper presented at the Riding the Wave of Tourism and Hospitality Research, CAUTHE.

Blackwell R (2007) Motivations for religious tourism, pilgrimage, festivals and events. In: Raj R and Morpeth ND (eds.) *Religious Tourism and pilgrimage management*. Cabi: Cambridge, 35–47.

Bowdin G, Allen J, O'Toole W, Harris R and McDonnell I (2006) *Events Management*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann Elsevier.

Bowdin G, Allen J, Harris R, McDonnell I and O' Toole W (2011) *Events Management*, 3rd edition. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Bowdin G, McPherson G and Flinn J (2006) *Identifying and analyzing existing research undertaken in the events industry: a literature review for People*. Leeds: Association for Events Management Education.

Carter L (2007) *Event Planning*. Indiana: Author House.

Curiel J and Gil AR (2008) Religious Events as Special Interest Tourism. A Spanish Experience. *Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural* 6 (3): 419–433.

Davies J, and Brown L (2000) Tourism: Food, Wine and Festivals - a delectable mix. In: Harris R, Allen J, Jago LK and Veal A (Eds.), *Events Beyond 2000: Setting the Agenda*. Sydney: Australian Centre for Event Management, 161–170.

Eckerstein A (2002) *Evaluation of Event Marketing*. Goteborg University: International Management Master Thesis.

Ferdinand N and Kitchin P (2012) *Events Management: An International Approach*. London: Sage.

Getz D (1991) *Festivals, Special Events, and Tourism*. New York: Van Nostrand Rheinhold.

Getz D (2005) *Event Management and Event Tourism,* 2nd edition. New York: Cognizant.

Getz D (2007) Event tourism: Definition, evolution, and research. *Tourism Management* Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann Elsevier 29: 403–428.

Getz D (2011) *Event Studies Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events*, 5th edition. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann Elsevier.

Getz D, Andersson TD and Carlsen J (2010) Festival management studies: developing a framework and priorities for comparative and cross-cultural research. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 1(1): 29–60.

Goldblatt J (1990) *Special Events: The art and science of celebration,* 1st edition. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Hall M (1992) *Hallmark Tourist Events: Impacts, management and planning*. London: Belhaven.

Kose H, Argan MT and Argan M (2011) Special event management and event marketing: A case study of TKBL All Star 2011 in Turkey. *Journal of Management and Marketing Research* 8: 1–11.

Loos P, Hermes B and Thomas O (2008) Reference Model - Based Event Management. *International Journal of Event Management Research* 4(1): 38–57.

O'Sullivan D and Jackson MJ (2002) Festival Tourism: A Contributor to Sustainable Local Economic Development. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 10(4): 325 –342.

Page S, and Connell J (2012) *The Routledge Handbook of Events*. London: Routledge.

Raj R, and Morpeth ND (eds.) (2007) *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective*. Oxfordshire: CABI.

Raj R, Walters P and Rashid T (2013) *Events Management: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.

Salem G, Jones E and Morgan N (2004) An overview of events management. In: Yeoman, I, Robertson, M, Ali-Knight, J, Drummond, S and McMahon-Beattie, U (Eds) *Festival and Events Management*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann Elsevier.

Silvers J (2004) *Professional Event Coordination*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Silvers J (2012) *Professional Event Coordination,* 2nd edition. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Theocharis N (2008) *Event Tourism: Examining the management of sports events from a physical approach.* Athens: Synergy Forum.

Vukonić B (1996) *Tourism and Religion.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Web references

http://www.atl.biella.it/en/

http://www.borsadioropa.it/

http://www.passionedicristo.org/en/

Author Contribution

This paper is the result of a joint effort of the two authors. In particular, Stefania Cerutti wrote section 4 (case study 2), and Elisa Piva wrote section 3 (case study 1). The other sections were written by both authors.