CROSS BORDER URBAN SPORT TOURISM EVENT: THE BETHLEHEM-JERUSALEM RUN

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ABSTRACT

Peace through tourism focuses on the place of tourism in promoting peaceful relations in multidimensional and positive terms. Tourism and sport events are associated in that such events provide tourists with the opportunity to engage in friendly competition and social proximity brings together local sport people, teams and communities in contact with societies from around the world. The main aim of this study is to examine and analyze the potential of a cross border sport tourism event to contribute to the promotion of a message of peace and a more peaceful atmosphere between Israelis and Palestinians in the Holy Land. This case study examines the Bethlehem to Jerusalem Peace Run in which participants were Catholic Italian pilgrims, Israelis and Palestinians. The study also analyzes the organizational-logistic aspect of the run as an international and domestic-regional event in a disputed area, requiring cooperation between both neighbouring city governance (Jerusalem and Bethlehem). The annual Peace Marathon since April 2004, dedicated to the memory of Pope John II is an international unusual sport activity, taking place in the core of a very complicates and tensioned geographical region in the Holy Land; aimed to contribute small but meaningful gesture for aspiring together for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The methodology selected is based on the naturalistic-qualitative approach includes interviews with
the marathon organizers and with a sample of participants; and a content analysis of media materials (newspaper articles and TV news) reporting about this event. The importance of this study is its contribution to the academic debate about the role of tourism in the relevance and success for implementing peace values, and particularly in the case of cooperation between hostile neighbouring nations.