

## **Focusing Events and Their Effect on Agenda-Setting<sup>1</sup>**

*(Paper Prepared for the WAPOR Conference, Hong-Kong 2012)<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been supported by the Charles University Grant Agency (GA UK reg. num. 414111). We would like to thank the Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM) for panel and media data from the „Public and Media Agenda“ project it kindly provided to us.

<sup>2</sup> Broadened version of this paper is going to be submitted to international journal with impact factor.

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## **Abstract**

McCombs' and Shaw's seminal *Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media* (1972) opened up new space for social scientists focusing on the relationship between media and public during the process of setting public agenda through media content.

These scholars, however, were paying little attention to the role of focusing events, the only exceptions being J.W. Dearing and E.M. Rogers with their *Agenda-setting* (1996), a classic in which they reviewed studies on policy and media agenda-setting, and T.A. Birkland who, during the last fifteen years, have studied what role is played by focusing events (Birkland, 1997, 1998, 2007). No studies have yet been dedicated to the role of focusing events during the process of setting personal agendas of the members of the public.

With respect to the above mentioned, our research question stands as follows: "Does referring to a focusing event strengthen the effect of a news item on the way the respective issue is set on personal agendas of members of public?" We base our hypothesis on the work of both Dearing and Rogers (1996) and Birkland (1997, 1998, 207), saying that the focusing event will have a positive effect in the process of setting issues on personal agendas.

To explore our hypothesis, we have chosen the *cognitive portrait* research design: we use individual data and study one issue on personal agendas (see the Acapulco typology, Mc Combs, 2004). Our issue is *Church property restitutions in the Czech Republic*, the respective focusing event *St. Vitus Cathedral trial*. We use data from a panel monitoring, each week, the development of preferences for the most important events from April to May 2008. We combine these panel data with results of a content analysis that monitored the total number of news items referring to Church restitutions and St. Vitus Cathedral trial (Vinopal, 2009).

We also lay out an overview of historical events, in which we explain the connection between the Church property restitutions and the Cathedral trial and why they are *de facto* interconnected although there is no connection *de iure* between them. Such an unusual relationship between an issue and its focusing event gives us an extraordinary opportunity to study the effect of a news item referring to a focusing event but not referring to the respective issue. Since we were given this opportunity, we have also had an occasion to raise a second research question: "Does referring to a focusing event as such have an effect on personal agendas or does the respective issue need to be mentioned in the same set of news to get a similar effect?" Our hypothesis says that in our case, the focusing event as such will have its agenda-setting effect.

Our preliminary results support our first hypothesis: the focusing event seems to have a significant positive effect on setting the respective issue onto personal agendas. The same results, however, reject our second hypothesis: the focusing event does not seem to be able to influence the agenda-setting process on its own.

## **Key words:**

Focusing event, agenda setting, quantitative – survey; quantitative – content analysis

This paper concentrates on the effect and role focusing events play in the agenda-setting process. We would like to explore particularly how the frequency of news items that mention the particular focusing event influences respondents' personal agenda. The role of focusing events is commonly studied by scholars concentrating on policy agenda-setting [see Kingdon 1995; Birkland 1997; Birkland 2007] or media agenda-setting processes [e.g. Dearing, Rogers 1996]. The role of focusing events in the process of public agenda setting, however, has not yet been studied thoroughly, the only exception being Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo [2003].

We have chosen to verify our hypotheses on the example of setting the *Church property restitutions* issue and the *St. Vitus Cathedral property rights* focusing event. We are using panel data that have been mapping the development of respondent preferences concerning the most important events from April to May 2008. We have combined these panel data with the results of a content analysis that monitored, day by day, the frequency of news items concerning the problem of Church property restitutions and the St. Vitus Cathedral trial focusing event. We are going to demonstrate that the effect of news items concerning the Church property restitutions is stronger if these simultaneously refer to the focusing event.

### **The Agenda Setting Theory and the Concept of Focusing Events**

The agenda-setting theory describes a process during which the society defines its priorities by striving to find a consensus about which issues need to be solved first. It is only logical that the society first allocates means to public issues of prior importance. Roger W. Cobb and Charles D. Elder define an *issue* as a “conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources“[1983: 32 quoted according to Dearing – Rogers 1996: 2].

A set of issues sorted according to their significance is called agenda. Agenda transforms dynamically, either because a particular problem has been solved or because it is no more as pressing as it was at the moment it penetrated to the agenda, because society has gotten used to it (and, hence, no more considers it as urgent) or else because other problems appeared that are even more urgent and to which means need to be allocated. Agenda is not a concept applicable only to society as a whole: various subsystems also have their own agendas [Dearing, Rogers 1996: 1–2]. If we wanted to break down the system into small parts, the last link would be individuals. They, too, have their own agendas (let's call them *personal agendas*). [McLeod, Becker, Byrnes (1974) 1991]. In order to solve priority issues, subsystems either strive to find their own resources or try to push their agenda on the agenda of the society and, doing so, to engage the entire society in the process of solving.

The agenda-setting theory applies to three key subsystems: media, public and politics. All three of them have their own agendas, interlinked through dense relationship networks. These three agendas are also influenced by events taking place in real (i.e. not mediated) world, by actor's personal experience and by interpersonal communication [Dearing, Rogers 1996: 5–6]. In this text, we would like to concentrate mainly on the relationship between the public and the media, leaving other aspects apart. We conceive the media and the society as a whole and, therefore, do not structure these subsystems more thoroughly.

Intensity of attention given to a particular problem is a common denominator defining the position of the problem within any kind of agenda. *Media agenda* is usually defined as the number of news items consecrated to a particular cause. *Public attention* is usually defined as the proportion of people who consider the problem as one of the most important lately [Dearing, Rogers 1996: 5–8]. Research projects working with micro-level data (as ours, for example) talk also about *personal agenda*: agenda of a particular individual reflecting which public issues s/he considers as important [Kalvas 2009: 33, 40–41].

### *Focusing events*

Literature gives two definitions of *focusing events*: a broad and a narrow one. Let us firstly outline their common features: all focusing events “call attention to the problem” [Kingdon 1995: 94-95], no matter whether it is new or dormant. Thomas Birkland is the most influential scientist preferring to work with the narrow definition of focusing events, seeing them as crises or disasters [e.g. Birkland 1997]. He states that his aim is to “to avoid post hoc definitions of any particular event as being focal” [Birkland 2004: 181]. Birkland is concentrated around *disaster management* [Birkland, Nath 2000], around the problem of how crises or disasters form policies and how *policy-makers* react to them [e.g. Birkland 1997]. In this kind of research, the notion of a focusing event must not overpass the narrowly defined boundaries (otherwise it would become worthless): broader definition would be matched by a number of events related to the studied *issue*, the role of which, however, is not of interest.

If, on the other hand, we stick to the narrow definition of the focusing event notion outside crises and disasters, we risk missing a whole range of events playing an important role even though they do not have the character of crises and disasters. Birkland [2007] implicitly admits this when he mentions, in a paper describing a broader application of the concept, the O.J. Simpson murder case or the Rodney King beating by L.A. police officers. These, no doubt, are not catastrophic events: their major significance consists in the fact that they “call attention to the problem” [Kingdon 1995: 94-95].

John Kingdon [1995: 96], author of the *focusing event* term, talks about two basic variants of focusing events: 1. personal experiences made by policy makers and 2. impact of powerful symbols. Kingdon introduces the notion of focusing events, because he wants to better describe what mechanisms form policies and political decision-making. A politician having made a personal experience with an issue will a lot more likely pay attention to it. On the other hand, powerful symbols, according to Kingdon [1995: 97–98]: “catch on and have

important focusing effects because they capture in a nutshell some sort of reality that people already sense in a vaguer, more diffuse way”.

In a broader sense and speaking about studied subjects, focusing events may be defined as events that call attention to problems. If, like Kingdon, we concentrate on policy-agenda setting and on policy-makers, the notion of focusing events will roughly correspond to Birkland’s narrow definition. But if we focus on the members of public, the notion will expand dramatically meanwhile it will maintain its purpose. It will, first of all, be enriched by personal experience made by members of public, the study of which has a long tradition in agenda-setting research, dating back to Raye G. Funkhouser’s classics [1973].

It will, furthermore, be enriched by events related to strong symbols: the influence of such focusing events has, until today, been researched on two occasions only [Kwansah-Aidoo 2003; Walker, Waterman 2008]. Until these days, however, no research has been conducted focusing on what effect the intensity of media coverage of events related to strong symbols has on the introduction of an issue on personal or public agenda.

The principle of the focusing events influence is same in the policy and personal agenda-setting process: catastrophic events, personal experience and symbols draw people’s attention to issues related to the event. We believe that news referring to such events will captivate recipients’ attention in a stronger way. If attention paid to a particular issue grows, grows also the chance that a particular person (and, as a result, public as a whole) will consider the issue as important. This is why we assume that a news item talking about the focusing event will promote the setting of the issue on public agenda.

*H<sub>1</sub>: News items referring to the focusing event help to set the issue on personal agenda to a larger extent than news items mentioning the issue but not referring to the focusing event.*

In the analytical part of this text, we will be confronted with an issue (Church property restitutions) related to a focusing event (St. Vitus cathedral trial). At the moment this research

was conducted, the above mentioned issue had been drawing the Czech public's attention for 16 years. At the same time, this dispute represents the basic dimension of the Church property restitutions problem in the Czech Republic (see Kalvas, Váně, Štípková, Kreidl [2012]) on which the media focused at the time we conducted our survey. The St. Vitus cathedral trial draws the public's attention (as will be shown later on) and it is a very powerful symbol that has the capacity to make a complex issue more easily understandable.

Further in the text, we will also describe more into detail that the issue and focusing event we have chosen offer us a very unusual chance: it is possible to refer the event (Cathedral trial) without mentioning the issue (Church property restitutions). This gives us a unique opportunity to test whether a news item talking about the focusing event has an independent effect or whether a reference to the event only strengthens the effect of referring to a particular issue. We assume that news items talking about the focusing event have an independent, net effect (no theory postulates or justifies that it is necessary to explicitly refer to an issue in order to get a functioning focusing event).

*H<sub>2</sub>: News items referring to a focusing event help to set the issue on personal agenda even when they do not refer to the particular issue.*

## **The Story of the Church Property Restitutions in the Czech Republic**

This issue is related (from both the topical as well as temporal point of view) to the problem of the St. Vitus property rights (representing so the above mentioned focusing event). The dispute over the form of Church property restitutions represents a recurring theme of the Czech Republic's modern history (after November 1989). The Church property restitutions are a specific process in which the State tries to deal with the wrongdoings of the Communist regime (besides the Church property restitutions, there also restitutions of property seized to natural persons were carried out) [comp. Šmídová 2007].

Before the Czech Republic was founded in 1993 as a result of the split of Czechoslovakia, the Federal Parliament introduced a Church Restitution Bill which, however, lacked several votes to be passed. Another attempt to settle the issue of the Church property restitutions was made in 1996/1997: the Czech Republic government then offered to carry out a so called free-of charge transfer of defined real estate to Churches and ecclesiastical legal entities, which, however, the Social Democratic opposition refused. The period between 1997 and 2007 was characterized by episodic attempts to solve the problem.

On January 23, 2008, the government discussed and approved a Bill prepared by the Ministry of Culture, which sought to bring a final solution to the problem of Church property restitutions. This Bill outlined a gradual separation of the Church and State to take place during the 20 years to come. This Bill proposed to settle the property issues between the Church and the State by giving compensations for the seized property, which should have been partially returned to Churches and partially compensated financially. Church authorities were supposed to be returned 51 billion of Czech crowns worth land and buildings. The Bill also defined exceptions, mainly buildings, to be set by the law as exempt from restitution claims. The Chamber of the Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, however, did not pass this Bill (the session of April 29, 2008 was suspended and adjourned). The Chamber of the Deputies asked that the Bill be completed and established, on June 13, 2008, a temporary committee to have it reviewed and commented. On April 27, 2009, the committee recommended to reject the Bill [Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, 2009].

We believe that the St. Vitus Cathedral cause represents an event that draws the public's attention to the Church property restitutions cause, the core of which lies in a 1954 government decree according to which the Cathedral "belongs to all Czechoslovak people". The Religious Fund (Náboženská matice) issued, on December 30, 1992, a declaratory action (St. Vitus Cathedral versus the Office of the President of the Republic). The first ruling came

on December 19, 1994: the Prague 1 District Court ruled that the Church belongs to the Catholic Church. Followed a row of legal peripeteia, in the end of which the Supreme Court abolished, on January 31, 2007, previous rulings of both the Prague 1 District Court and Prague Municipal Court (according to which the Cathedral belongs to the Church) and the case returned to the District Court. On April 24, 2007, the State takes the Cathedral over and the litigations go on until January 24, 2008, when the Catholic Church representatives and Prague Castle representatives sign a contract on joint usage of the St. Vitus Cathedral. Ever since the very first law suit concerning the Cathedral (1992), the media coverage of this issue overlapped with the issue of unfinished settlement of property-related problems between the State and the Church. Attention the media have paid to Church property restitutions cause significantly coincides with the attention they have paid to the Cathedral during the researched period (April/May 2008).

We believe that this focusing event is rather specific, representing all three dimensions of the Church property restitutions issue, which were being taken into consideration by the media during the period in which we analyzed our data. František Kalvas, Jan Váně, Martina Štípková and Martin Kreidl [2012] have demonstrated the following three dimensions of the Church restitutions issue: (a) the Church felt morally entitled to have its property returned, (b) politicking, (c) the dispute over criteria according to which it will be decided about property to be returned and about what sum shall be paid for property that will not be given back to the Church.

The dispute over the Cathedral illustrates well various points of view on Church restitutions. (1) The question whether or not the Church has the moral right to seek the return of the Cathedral that has such a tremendous symbolic value. The St. Vitus Cathedral is not perceived solely as a place of worship but it is seen as a cultural monument of great public (not only religious) value. (2) The dispute over the Cathedral has been politicized and

strategic steps made by both parties have been discussed. (3) Discussions concern also criteria that would enable or exclude the return of the Cathedral [Kalvas et al 2012].

### **Data and variables**

The data file analyzed in this text was created as a combination of data from several sources: (1) CVVM panel survey carried out in frame of the *Public and Media Agenda* project, (2) quantitative media content analysis carried out by the Inno Vatio association upon order of the CVVM and (3) content analysis we carried out ourselves, using a corpus of texts published in various media targeting the problem of Church property restitutions. The CVVM research provided data on the frequency of the Church property restitutions issue (talking about the above mentioned as about an important event concerning the society as a whole) and data on socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The media analysis provided data on the media exposition of the theme of Church property restitutions and St. Vitus Cathedral trial.

The panel survey covered a total of 658 citizens of the Czech Republic above 18 years old. The data covered a period of 12 weeks (April 20, 2008 – July 6, 2008). The sample was constructed as a simple random sample. Respondents were asked to fill in a questionnaire on each Sunday during the 12 weeks of the research and send it by mail to the address given by the organizers. The questionnaire included a question asking what two events respondents considered as „the most important countrywide events of today“. We then constructed a dichotomic independent variable based on the answers to the above mentioned question.

This variable was called “**Mentioning of restitutions**” and its value is 1 if the respondent said, in the relevant wave of polling, that he/she considered the „St. Vitus Cathedral“ or „Church restitutions“ as one of the most important events lately. Since the answer given in one wave of polling may influence the answer given in the following wave of

polling, we introduced the “**Previous mentioning of restitutions**” control variable. This value is assigned 1 if the respondent said that the Church restitutions or the Cathedral were an important topic in the previous wave of polling. For table frequencies of these variables see Appendix No.1. When it comes to control socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, we took into account the following: gender, age, education and religion. For their frequencies see Appendix No.2. Respondents answered respective questions in the first wave of the polling only: their values, therefore, remain the same for the entire survey.

We also use variables describing the frequencies of news items covering the Church property restitutions and Cathedral trial. They cover 240 news items from 1 tabloid, 4 elite newspapers, 3 national TV broadcasts, and 2 national radio broadcasts in the period from April 18 to May 25 in 2008.

The „Media total“ variable assigns, to each data entry (i.e. to a respondent in the particular polling wave), the number of news items concerning Church property restitutions, the Church/State relationship or the St. Vitus cathedral that occurred in the media within the 7 days preceding the day on which the respondent filled in the questionnaire.

We have also separated the “Media total” variable to three variables which assign to each respondent, in each polling wave, a precise number of respective news items within the seven days preceding the filling of the questionnaire. The “Restitutions only” variable assigns the news items mentioning the *issue* itself (Church restitutions) only. The “Cathedral only” variable assigns the news items mentioning the Cathedral trial only. And „Cathedral and restitutions” assigns the news items mentioning both Church property restitutions and the Cathedral trial. Summing up, for a chosen respondent within a particular wave of questioning, the values of the „Restitutions only“, „Cathedral only“, and „Cathedral and restitutions” variables, we will get the value of the „Media total“ variable.

We only used the results of the second to sixth wave of the panel survey. Furthermore, we discarded respondents who did not fill in their personal data, those who did not respond in all five polling waves we tracked and those who did not stick to survey calendar.<sup>4</sup> The number of news items (the “Total media”, “Cathedral only” and “Cathedral and restitutions” variables) were assigned to respondents day by day so they are not influenced by the shift of the questionnaire filling time. Having made the above mentioned adjustments of the sample, we got a data file comprising of 369 respondents who completely filled the total of the five questionnaires.

## **Method and results of the analysis**

### *Analysis: Strategy*

Since we used multilevel-structure panel data, we use, in order to analyze them, multilevel regression models with a dichotomic dependent variable. Respondents and their characteristics represent, in fact, stable macro-contexts in which answers are given within particular polling waves. Answers, on the other hand, along with the development of media content (transforming each week) represent the micro level of observations. It is important to point out that answers given by a particular respondent across the time span of the survey resemble more than answers given by various respondents. Multilevel models have the capacity, unlike classical linear or logistic regression, to take this similarity into consideration, which means that coefficients and, especially, standard error, may be estimated more precisely [Kalvas, Kreidl, Váně, Štípková 2009].

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<sup>4</sup> In order to be able to keep as many number of observations as possible, we decided that we would consider that a questionnaire that was filled in on relevant Friday, Sunday or Monday (instead of in Sunday) would be considered as an acceptable one.

We use the population-averaged (GEE) models and conditional logistic regressions. Let us model, in the following section of the paper, present and interpret results we obtained through both modeling methods. All calculations were made with the STATA 12.1 statistical program („xtlogit“ command). In case of marginal models, we speculated on the basis of serial correlated error with first-order auto-correlation.

### *Results*

We have assessed a total of nine models (for the assessment of statistical tools suitability and detailed characteristics see the Table 2 below). The Table 1 summarizes values of assessed effects for all nine models. First three of them explore what influence the „Media total“ variable exercises on the willingness of respondents to mention Church restitutions as an actual societal topic. All three models approve the agenda-setting hypothesis: the chance that the particular respondent cites Church property restitutions as one of the most important events grows with each news item talking about the issue or about the focusing event.

Let us now see the strength of the effect for Models 1, 2 and 3. The 0.05 (or, eventually, 0.04 or 0.03) logit means that if 14 (or, eventually, 18 or 23) news items concerning the Church property restitutions issue are presented in the media within the last seven days, the chance that the particular person will cite Church property restitutions as an important event will double ( $\text{logit } 0.7 = 0.05 * 14$  resp.  $0.72 = 0.04 * 18$ , resp.  $0.69 = 0.03 * 23$ ). These (or higher) are the values reached by the media exposition during the third, fourth and sixth polling waves (see Appendix 3). During the second and fifth wave of polling, the media exposition has a statistically significant effect which, however, is not significant factually since the media did not present, in these periods, enough news items that would be able to at least double the chance that the Church property restitutions will penetrate on respondents' personal agenda.

<Table 1 here approx. >

Now we are getting to the core of our analysis. The first hypothesis is tested through models 4 – 6. Through these models (using the „Restitutions only“ and the „Cathedral and restitutions“ variable), we test whether the effect of news items talking about the researched problem is strengthened by a reference made to the focusing event, in other words, whether the news item concerning the Church property restitutions issue has stronger effect in cases in which it refers also to the St. Vitus Cathedral trial.

Table 1 shows that both of these variables are statistically and factually significant for all three models. The “Cathedral and restitutions”, moreover, has (for all three models) statistically more significant effect than the “Restitutions only” variable<sup>5</sup>. It is possible to demonstrate statistically that the effect of the “Cathedral and restitutions” variable is (according to the model chosen) 2.4 times to 9.3 times stronger.<sup>6</sup> This difference of effect is significant factually as well: the impact media contact has on the recipients double if a minimum of 7 news items according to the Model for (or 5 items according to Models 5 and 6) contain both a reference to the restitutions issue and to the Cathedral trial. This frequency of news items was observed during the third and fourth wave of polling. The other waves recorded such a low frequency of news items talking about both the Church property restitutions and the Cathedral trial that it is not possible to talk about factually significant effect.

Models 7 – 9 were created by adding the “Cathedral only” variable to Models 4 – 6. Models 7 – 9 test the second hypothesis, in which we explore whether a news item talking only about the focusing event (and not mentioning the issue itself) has an effect. Models 7 – 9

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<sup>5</sup> Model 4:  $\chi^2=30.6$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ . Model 5:  $\chi^2=104.2$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ . Model 6:  $\chi^2=96.8$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ .

<sup>6</sup> Model 4:  $2.4 * \text{“Restitutions only”} < \text{“Cathedral and restitutions”}$  ( $\chi^2=4.47$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.034$ )

Model 5:  $9.3 * \text{“Restitutions only”} < \text{“Cathedral and restitutions”}$  ( $\chi^2=3.87$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.049$ )

Model 6:  $7.3 * \text{“Restitutions only”} < \text{“Cathedral and restitutions”}$  ( $\chi^2=3.96$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.047$ )

monitor, whether the “Cathedral only” variable is factually and statistically significant and whether, having been added to Models 4-6, these will significantly improve. If the significance of the “Cathedral only” variable is confirmed and Models 4 – 6 are demonstrably improved as a result of its effect, it will be the proof of the fact that even news items that talk only about the focusing event might also help to increase the chance that an issue is set on someone’s personal agenda.

The table 1 shows that the “Cathedral only” variable is not significant in any of the models, neither from the factual nor from the statistical point of view. Table 2 shows that if we added this variable, no Model (4 – 6) improved significantly, onto the contrary: the Wald  $\chi^2$  for Models 8 and 9 is even worse than for Models 5 and 6. These results lead us to definitely dismiss the hypothesis according to which news items talking only about the focusing event may help set the issue on the recipient’s personal agenda. News that concentrated on the Cathedral trial only have not demonstrably helped set the Church property restitutions issue on recipients’ personal agendas.

<Table 2 here approx. >

## **Conclusions and Discussion**

Results given in frame of the 4 – 6 Models reflect (support) entirely the No. 1 hypothesis: both the statistical and factual significance of the “Restitutions only” and “Cathedral and restitutions” variables as well as statistical and factual significance of the differences of their effects match. Our analysis hence proved that the ability of news items to set *issues* raises when these news items parallelly refer to a *focusing event*. Hypothesis No. 2 (assumption that the „Cathedral only“ variable has a significant effect), on the other hand, is refuted by Models 7 – 9; models 4 – 6 are not improved by this variable. This part of analysis

hence proved that news items talking about the focusing event only do not help set the given issue on recipients' personal agenda.

We can therefore conclude that referring to a focusing event impacts the public only if the relevant news item talks also about the relevant issue. When issue is not mentioned in the news item, referring to focusing event has no impact on the public. A news item talking about the issue only does have impact on the public and its effect multiplies in cases when it also refers to a focusing event.

To what extent is it possible to generalize our findings? We are not trying to disguise that the relationship between the issue we have explored (Church property restitutions) and the relevant focusing event (St. Vitus cathedral property rights trial) is rather a loose one. We would hardly find another issue and a focusing event the ties of which would be looser. But we believe that this is only another strong argument supporting the assumption that referring to a focusing event intensifies the impact the news item talking about a particular issue: if we were able to prove this relationship exists in case of this particular issue and focusing event, it should also exist when it comes to focusing events that are linked to issues in a lot more tighter way.

When we look at No.2 hypothesis (on the impact of news items talking about the focusing event only, not mentioning the relevant issue), the situation is reverse: our hypothesis has been rejected. Generalization, however, is problematic in this case just because the relationship of the Church property restitutions and the St. Vitus cathedral trial is quite loose.

We just know that at least in the studied case such news items do not have the studied impact. We cannot, however, rule out for example, that news items talking about a concrete airplane crash will not help to set the air transportation safety issue on the public agenda: a

general validity of this hypothesis should be assessed by another research that would concentrate on focusing events that have a lot more tight relationship to the relevant issue.

It must be pointed out that the fact that our analysis proved a strong role of the focusing event might also be due to a co-occurrence of historical circumstances that occurred in the Czech Republic in spring 2008. Parliament sessions during which the Church property restitutions Bill was discussed overlapped with the period in which the Court gave its final decision in which it said the Cathedral belongs to the State. News concerning this clear conclusion of the case may have a stronger effect than news about the Parliament sessions (that were, in the end, postponed) and the result of which is very unclear. The differing effect of news items referring to the focusing event may, therefore, be due to the importance of this particular event (final court ruling) and not to the general feature (focusing event). Seen through this example, a similar phase of researched problems (dragging political negotiations with no clear results and conclusions) could weaken the effect of news items talking only about the issue. A future research project could concentrate on the comparison of a set of issues in various development phases and on relevant (more or less dramatical) focusing events.

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Table 1

*Estimated coefficients and (standard errors) of multi-level models concerning the occurrence of church property restitutions on personal agenda.*

	<b>Model 1</b> <b>(CL)</b>	<b>Model 2</b> <b>(GEE)</b>	<b>Model 3</b> <b>(GEE)</b>	<b>Model 4</b> <b>(CL)</b>	<b>Model 5</b> <b>(GEE)</b>	<b>Model 6</b> <b>(GEE)</b>	<b>Model 7</b> <b>(CL)</b>	<b>Model 8</b> <b>(GEE)</b>	<b>Model 9</b> <b>(GEE)</b>
News in preceding 7 days									
Media in total	0.05*** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.003)	0.04*** (0.003)						
Restitutions only				0.04*** (0.006)	0.01* (0.004)	0.01** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.007)	0.01 (0.005)	0.01* (0.005)
Cathedral and restitutions				0.15*** (0.017)	0.17*** (0.014)	0.18*** (0.015)	0.29* (0.117)	0.24* (0.096)	0.23* (0.097)
Cathedral only							-0.15 (0.118)	-0.07 (0.079)	-0.06 (0.097)
Previous mentioning of restitutions	-3.25*** (0.339)	-2.26*** (0.418)	-2.27*** (0.359)	-2.84*** (0.368)	-0.00 (0.274)	-0.82** (0.306)	-2.89*** (0.372)	-0.03 (0.275)	-0.82** (0.305)
Respondent's gender									
Man			0.22 (0.187)			0.21 (0.180)			0.21 (0.180)
Woman (reference category)									
Respondent's age									
18-30			-1.80*** (0.364)			-1.68*** (0.349)			-1.67*** (0.349)
31-51			-1.19*** (0.205)			-1.13*** (0.199)			-1.13*** (0.198)
52-71 (reference category)									
72-92			0.08 (0.314)			0.15 (0.299)			0.15 (0.299)
Respondent's education									
Basic			-1.14* (0.575)			-1.18* (0.565)			-1.17* (0.564)
Vocational school			-0.19 (0.201)			-0.17 (0.194)			-0.17 (0.194)
Secondary school (reference category)									
University			0.21 (0.241)			0.22 (0.231)			0.22 (0.231)
Respondent's religion									
Christian			0.47** (0.177)			0.46** (0.171)			0.46** (0.171)
Other (reference category)									
Constant		-3.42*** (0.182)	-3.23*** (0.248)		-3.48*** (0.192)	-3.27*** (0.251)		-3.51*** (0.198)	-3.30*** (0.256)
N <sub>macro</sub> (N <sub>micro</sub> )	170 (850)	369 (1845)	369 (1845)	170 (850)	369 (1845)	369 (1845)	170 (850)	369 (1845)	369 (1845)

Note: \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

Table 2

*Statistics of estimated multi-level models concerning the occurrence of church property restitutions on personal agenda.*

<b>Indication and description of model</b>	<b>Test statistics</b>				
	<b>Wald chi<sup>2</sup>/ LR chi<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>d.f.</b>	<b>N<sub>macro</sub></b>	<b>N<sub>micro</sub></b>	<b>p-value</b>
M1: Media in total, previous answer (conditional logit)	274.4	2	170	850	< 0.001
M2: Media in total, previous answer (GEE)	153.3	2	369	1845	< 0.001
M3: Media in total, previous answer, characteristics of respondent (GEE)	192.2	10	369	1845	< 0.001
M4: Restitutions only, Restitutions and cathedral, previous answer (conditional logit)	283.9	3	170	850	< 0.001
M5: Restitutions only, Restitutions and cathedral, previous answer (GEE)	182.8	3	369	1845	< 0.001
M6: Restitutions only, Restitutions and cathedral, previous answer, characteristics of respondent (GEE)	221.9	11	369	1845	< 0.001
M7: Restitutions only, Restitutions and cathedral, Cathedral only, previous answer (conditional logit)	285.5	4	170	850	< 0.001
M8: Restitutions only, Restitutions and cathedral, Cathedral only, previous answer (GEE)	181.4	4	369	1845	< 0.001
M9: Restitutions only, Restitutions and cathedral, Cathedral only, previous answer, characteristics of respondent (GEE)	221.1	12	369	1845	< 0.001
<b>Contrasts</b>					
<i>Extension with Restitutions only, and Restitutions and cathedral</i>					
M4 – M1	9.5	1	170	850	= 0.002
M5 – M2	29.5	1	369	1845	< 0.001
M6 – M3	29.7	1	369	1845	< 0.001
<i>Extension with Cathedral only</i>					
M7 – M4	1.6	1	170	850	= 0.206
M8 – M5	-1.4	1	369	1845	= 1.000
M9 – M6	-0.8	1	369	1845	= 1.000
<i>Extension with characteristics of respondent</i>					
M3 – M2	38.9	8	369	1845	< 0.001
M6 – M5	39.1	8	369	1845	< 0.001
M9 – M8	39.7	8	369	1845	< 0.001

*Note:* Respondent's characteristics are: gender, age (3 dummy variables), religion (Christian vs. other), and education (3 dummy variables).

Appendix 1

*Number of respondents who indicated the restitutions of church property or the dispute over the ownership of St. Vitus Cathedral as an important event in the present or previous wave according to individual waves of research (N=369).*

	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> wave (25.-28.4.)</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> wave (2.-5.5.)</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> wave (9.-12.5.)</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup> wave (16.-19.5.)</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> wave (23.-26.5.)</b>
<i>Mentioning of restitutions</i>					
Number	20	121	39	8	15
Percentage	5.4 %	32.8	10.6	2.2	4.1
<i>Previous mentioning of restitutions</i>					
Number	0	20	121	39	8
Percentage	0%	5.4	32.8	10.6	2.2

Appendix 2

*Respondents according to gender, age, education, and religion.*

	<b>Analyzed sample (N=369)</b>		<b>Original sample (N=658)</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	123	33.3 %	230	34.9 %
Women	246	66.7	425	64.6
Unascertained	0	0.0	3	0.5
<b>Age</b>				
18-30	55	14.9	114	17.3
31-51	136	36.9	246	37.4
52-71	155	42.0	249	37.8
72-92	23	6.2	46	7.0
Unascertained	0	0.0	3	0.5
<b>Education</b>				
Basic	19	5.2	44	6.7
Vocational	128	34.7	232	35.3
Secondary school	155	42.0	277	42.1
University	67	18.2	102	15.5
Unascertained	0	0.0	3	0.5
<b>Religion</b>				
Christian	144	39.0	401	38.6
Others	225	61.0	254	60.9
Unascertained	0	0.0	3	0.5

Appendix 3

*Number of media news which respondents were exposed to in seven previous days, according to reference to the restitutions, reference to the Cathedral trial, and the precise date of the questionnaire being filled out.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Cathedral only</b>	<b>Restitutions only</b>	<b>Cathedral and restitutions</b>	<b>Media in total</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> wave</b>				
25.4.2008	0	1	3	4
26.4.2008	0	3	3	6
27.4.2008	0	7	2	9
28.4.2008	0	8	2	10
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> wave</b>				
2.5.2008	11	38	9	58
3.5.2008	12	40	13	65
4.5.2008	12	40	14	66
5.5.2008	12	46	14	72
<b>4<sup>th</sup> wave</b>				
9.5.2008	2	69	8	79
10.5.2008	1	68	4	73
11.5.2008	1	69	4	74
12.5.2008	1	65	4	70
<b>5<sup>th</sup> wave</b>				
16.5.2008	0	15	1	16
17.5.2008	0	12	1	13
18.5.2008	0	7	0	7
19.5.2008	0	4	0	4
<b>6<sup>th</sup> wave</b>				
23.5.2008	0	22	0	22
24.5.2008	0	22	0	22
25.5.2008	0	24	0	24
26.5.2008	0	24	0	24