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**Conceptualising Media Events  
within the Context of Cultural Diplomacy**



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# Conceptualising Media Events within the Context of Cultural Diplomacy

## 1 Introduction

Although cultural diplomacy has a long history worldwide, it was the mass media era which provided it with new tools, thus enabling the live broadcasting of cultural events. Cultural diplomats quickly learned the logic of mass communication and consequently how to use social media as well. Knowledge about media logic was incorporated into the body of cultural diplomacy during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the media age required new ideas regarding the ability to attract people to cultural performances and exhibitions. Governments started to organise series of events abroad, calling them Years or Seasons of Culture, Bilateral Years or Years of Friendship. While capturing the attention of audiences and media, they were supposed to contribute to the development of good and profitable relations between countries, while at the same time promoting national cultures and the countries themselves.

The objective of this paper<sup>1</sup> is to discuss the media event concept as a framework for the analysis of Years and seasons of culture. The first insight into the literature on international relations and media and communication revealed that any conceptualisation of these Years was missing. The direct reason to focus the research on the subject in the current study was the observation of the efforts of a number of EU states to celebrate cultural festivals with the Russian Federation between 2012 and 2016 in the time before, during and after the annexation of Crimea as well as the invasion of eastern Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2014. The fact that some of the cases chosen for the analysis took place during such a difficult time in international relations complicates the attempts to perceive Bilateral Years and Years of Culture as being aimed at attracting media attention and promotion of the country. The project that this paper is a part of has wider objectives, as it strives to find out the aims and expectations of governments who, while performing cultural events with the Russian Federation, were simultaneously imposing political and economic sanctions on them, as happened in 2014 and afterwards. All the same, for the purposes of this paper I shall put the conflict aside and concentrate on events and media events as a theoretical frame for further studies.

The cases included into the wider study are the Austrian Season of Culture in Russia 2013-2014, the German Year in Russia 2012-2013, the German-Russian Year of Language and Literature 2014, the British-Russian Year of Culture 2014, the British-Russian Year of Language and Literature 2016, the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year in 2013 and the Polish-Russian Year of Culture planned for 2015 but cancelled in 2014. The German Year in Russia and the Dutch-Russian year took place before the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine,

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nonetheless they were included into the study as verifiers for the purposes of the comparative approach. I call the events Years, even if it does not automatically indicate that they lasted for twelve months. They were very diverse in size, despite the fact that they all were framed by cultural diplomacy and similar in their objectives, structures and policies. The Dutch 2013 event consisted of 600 Dutch events in Russia and in the Netherlands; the German in 2012-2013 of 1000 events in the Russian Federation, and the Austrian in 2014 of only about sixty events in Russia.

Neither international studies nor media and communication and event management research discovered the Years to be a field of study. This paper is one of the attempts to fill this gap. The Dayan and Katz media events concept is one of the first choices which comes to mind in the search for the theoretical frames for the Years. It is therefore essential to check the extent to which the approach of both authors works in these cases and in the post-television era, additionally to search for these media events' features which potentially link the events from the television and post-television era. The objective of this current study is to search for elements in the vast studies on (media) events which would function to explain the specifics of Years of Friendship or Culture as events.

The main concept of media events - elaborated upon by Dayan and Katz in the beginning of the nineties of the 20th century - has been widely implemented but also thoroughly verified since the publication of their book. Both authors returned to their own theory in 2018; in the article published in "Media, Culture and Society", Dayan and Katz responded to the main controversies in the more than twenty year discussion about media events, understanding them in 2018 as "products of a combined 'demand': for ceremony on the part of establishments, broadcasters who are truly independent, and the populace" (p. 150). The inclusion of the three "stakeholders" into the discussion on media events seems to be applicable to the social media era as well. However, the question arises as to the extent to which the concept can prove to be functional in the case of events, which - contrary to Dayan and Katz's approach - seldom gather any big audiences in the front of their television sets. Will it manage to conceptualise cultural events, organised by governments during the so called Bilateral Years or Years of Culture as elements of foreign policy? Therefore, this article is supposed to verify the expectation that the Years as series of cultural events might be understood as media events and in line with Dayan and Katz's concept as "holidays of cultural diplomacy", and to verify the concept as such.

## **2 What is an "event" and what kind of events are Bilateral Years or Years of Culture?**

Studies on events have been notably advancing. In line with Getz, they are focussed on "all planned events, and meanings attached to events and their experience (encompassing event management and event tourism)" (2012: 5). Events gained "global importance" as being "inherent in all societies and integral to civilisation itself"(Getz, 2012:8). In the current study, I will go through some representative approaches which are useful in order to explain the under-researched phenomenon of the Years. I understand the "usefulness" of the approaches to take the form of their possible implementation in studies on foreign policy and international relations, as one of my goals is to analyse cultural events as tools of foreign policy. I add to the media events analysis the idea of an event and festivals to be a series of events.

Early approaches to analyse events were framed by event management, as was explained by Getz in 2010 and Foley, McGillivray and McPherson in their “Event Policy: From Theory to Strategy” in 2012. All these authors placed the beginning of event studies in the nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In an article in “Event Management” (2010), Getz analysed the main concepts and backgrounds in the field of event studies, observing that 60% of articles identified as dealing with events were focussed on their economic objectives and outcomes, and 40% on culture. Both publications mentioned above present the collection of definitions and the way in which events were understood. Getz, who saw events (and festivals) as “themed public celebrations” (1993), was followed by McDonnell et al. in 1999. According to the latter, events were “specific rituals...or celebrations that are consciously planned and created to mark special occasions”. Goldblatt added to these definitions in 1997 the exceptionality of events (“unique moment in time”) and their objective to “satisfy specific needs” (Foley et al., 2012: 54). Furthermore, for Goldblatt (1997), “a special event recognises a unique moment in time with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs” (p. 33). These needs might be related to the identity of celebrating communities and their demands to rejoice or resist (Foley et al, 2012:1).

The other theoretical approaches result from the implementation of Rojek’s event power idea which is framed by the public relations perspective (2013). Rojek understands events as “the material embodiment of new forms of co-operative labour, social recognition and social networking that are now commonplace on the internet (2013:4).” His definition potentially links cultural events tightly within the specifics of online communication.

What is common in these definitions is the understanding of the events as being pre-planned (Dayan and Katz likewise saw media events in such a way) and organised for the celebration of a special occasion. The celebrations are constructed out of rituals in order that events turn to ceremonies, reflecting the culture of the community. The stress on rituals and ceremonies seems to be useful in the study on cultural events and their implementation in foreign policy. They are organised (and pre-planned) by the governments and serve as examples of public communication, deeply rooted in the political elites’ imagination of how the “political” should be performed in the public. Rituals play an essential role in performing events.

The authors specialising in event management mentioned above also introduced the first typologies of events. Their classifications are usually based on the size (number of visitors, attracted tourists), and on the audience of events (numbers of viewers, nowadays users). (Goldblatt 1997: 55, McDonnell et al. 1999). Some events are called Festivals or undergo the process of “festivalisation”. In this current study, festivals are seen as a series of ritual events. Government-organised cultural events undergo a “festivalization” which represents a wider phenomenon of the “symbolic transformation of public space to a particular form of cultural consumption” (Crespi - Vallbona, Richards, 2007:106). “Festivalisation” as a term won some notoriety (Getz, 2012: 28) and was seen as a sign of the commodification of culture and the move of control “from local to national and global”(Richards, 2007) in event studies. I will classify Years as cultural festivals, consisting of festivities, during which governments use culture as a scene for political performance. In the cases under research however, the commodification of the events has been of no primary significance.

The next group of studies in the field is focussed on the value of events, among them economic and social. Whereas economic value is focussed on revenues, Throsby (2001:29)

explains the social as “the sense of connection with others (...) an experience may create.” Much of research into the social value rests on the concept of social capital, as events are supposed to enhance the social capital of their stakeholders, while facilitating “social networks among individuals as well as groups of people” (Throsby, 2001). Furthermore, their value results from the ability to foster social change. This finding seems to be applicable in research on Years as bilateral events, but it is questionable if events can facilitate networks between countries and nations and result in social change in the partner country.

Years as cultural events, organised by governments and framed by their foreign policy, have a political dimension which is directly expressed in their political objectives and expected effects. Seeing as the research on events did not include the Years discussed in the current project, the authors of the basic studies in the field hardly mention their political value, as was the case in the volume on the “Value of events”. In the same way, the popular Triple-Bottom-Line approach to assess events does not include the political environment (Getz, 2010). The writings by Laybourn (2003) rarely include political risks in organising big events either. Eventually, Getz adds “value for politics” as one of “domains” or “areas of application” while analysing the value of events (Armbrecht et al.: 191), and includes the political motivations and ideology for staging events (2012:126). Attendance may also be “a political statement”. In the current study, any protest against the Years is also classified as a political statement. Getz admits that audiences may have “political motives to attend or stay away” from events (Getz, 2012: 127, table 4.3) - or to protest against them.

Years as series of cultural events with a political background provide one with evidence that, while serving the purposes of foreign policy, they may also lead to tensions. Such developments were observed by McClinchey and Wood (2017). The search for the political dimension and political value of events seems to be essential and necessary to verify event management as a frame for international cultural events analysis.

Studies into event management also touch upon the question of involvement as their value. Wood asks the question of how “public and participatory they really are” and follows the idea to understand involvement as a process rather than a passive inclusion. The engagement of the communities in festivals can vary from inception to attendance to, design and development (Wood, 2017: 18). The “consensual events” (Katz, Dayan 2018) can bring together not only separated groups in the society, but also two nations. At the same time, they allow both sides - as in the case of Years - to promote the interest of one of the partners and “exert power” over the “other group” (Katz, Dayan 2018: 149). The Dutch-Russian Year in 2013, as displayed by Ociepka (2018), clearly illustrated such a clash of values and in fact, a clash of interests. Katz and Liebes (2010) suggest the inclusion of disruptive events alone into event studies as they can generate not only debate but also dissent, protest and disagreement (Foley et al., 2012:6). Therefore, for the purpose of the current project, I will search for both the disruptive and the integrative power of events.

The issue that makes cultural events and at least some of the analysed Years different from events, as seen from the perspective of event management studies, is their missing commercial dimension. To a large extent, the body of research on event management has been focussed in recent years on their returns. Nevertheless, the cases analysed in the current study are in a degree of opposition to the main trends observed by Foley, McGillivray and McPherson, due to the fact that Bilateral Years and Years of culture are much less led by the logic of marketing and public relations and at the same time are not specifically aimed

towards the generation of revenue. What is more, the interviewed persons<sup>2</sup>, cultural agencies workers and politicians responsible for cultural diplomacy would attach more importance to open communication between nations than any commercial objectives and effects regarding the relevance of the Years. The economic value of the Years is measured in few cases only, such as in the Dutch one, as it included a relevant economic pillar.

Even though the Years can also be organised with the strong involvement of regions and communities which can expect tourism inflow and some economic benefits, their economic dimension was of secondary relevance despite the fact that the Russian Federation had been a strategic economic partner of the involved EU countries. Nevertheless, the commodification of culture as a process - as it is presumed - is also visible in cultural diplomacy and in the ways in which governments plan Bilateral Years or Years of culture as well as in their thinking about culture as a creative industry. Businesses participated in the Dutch and the German events (in 2012 and in 2013). The Dutch and Russian governments organised a Bilateral Year which was also based upon an economic pillar, while the German foreign cultural policy is a result of the convergence of cultural diplomacy and foreign image policy, rooted in economic and business diplomacy. Hence, it should not be overlooked that authors such as Crespi-Vallbona and Richards (2007), at the turn of the century, not only stressed the growing social and political but also economic relevance of events such as cultural festivals.

Consequently, the analysed cases form two groups of public diplomacy events: the Bilateral Years (as in the Dutch-Russian Year in 2013) which cover not only culture but are underpinned by socio-political and economic pillars; whereas the second group is generally focussed on culture, namely language and literature as in the 2015-2015 German and 2016 British cases and the Polish-Russian Years which had been planned for 2015. Accordingly, the content allows for the first categorisation of the Years as cultural, political and business events (Foley et al., p. 25). The second group are more likely than the first to be linked with a degree of expectation of economic return, although both may increase tourism flow. At the same time, the stakeholders in both groups - the domestic public and media - might be concerned about the cost. It remains to be said however that Bilateral Years have never reached such a level of financing as global or even regional - European - sporting events. There is no bid for the Years. In praxis, the decision to organise a Bilateral year is taken by the partner governments together, while it can also occur that one government can invite another one to participate with it. In the case of the current study, Bilateral Years seem to belong to the Russian Federation toolbox in foreign policy, although all the countries involved in the project, apart from the Netherlands, organised them before they decided to celebrate the Years between 2012 and 2016 with Russia. It should be noted that the origin of the idea to organise Years is unknown and requires some research into its history.

As a consequence, what can be searched for while analysing cultural events and their policy-making process? Hall and Rusher suggested that some solutions can be within tourism studies (2009). Both authors discussed “the political nature of the event policy-making process”, which in the case of cultural events, programmed by ministries of foreign affairs and the other government agencies, is evident. The decision about Years is taken at the central -

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<sup>2</sup> The methodology of the project also included semi-structured interviews with officials responsible for cultural diplomacy as well as Years as events and relations with Russia in Austria, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Poland.

national - level by governments, who are consequently the natural sources of power in event policy. Bilateral Years, as shown in the current study, may reflect the belief that events can provide for the development of democracy, while supporting and establishing new channels for communication between two nations. However, an attempt to classify them as oriented to the democratic set of values, clashes with the logic of the military authoritarianism of the Russian Federation in the researched period.

Years as events must be seen first and foremost in their political frame. While sharing culture through festivals, Years were at the same time supposed to share political values and leverage political relations or facilitate economic links by cultural events. Therefore, they were not only “underpinned by political ideologies” (Dimmock and Tiyce, 2000) but pre-planned as political events. Not less important was their inclusion into broader efforts to reshape countries’ images.

### **3 Media events concept as a frame. Media event policy**

One of the approaches to analyse Years as well for an attempt to develop their conceptualisation is to confront them with the main features of media events. Bilateral Years and Seasons of Culture are organised by the governments who are their programmers, give them clear contours, while at the same time unintentional developments influence their final effects to a large extent. It is thus not only the list of the core events which construct the Years but also their surroundings and backgrounds, as in the Dutch case, when the official ceremonies and performances in 2013 were joined by the public which protested against Putin’s politics during them and had in fact a disintegrating power. In the British-Russian case in 2014, British politicians withdrew from any participation in the celebrations due to the war in the eastern Ukraine. In fact, in cases such as these, this was the background that attracted the attention of media and not the events themselves. However, all of the government documents on Years and Seasons convince one that the attracting media attention is one of the relevant Years and Seasons’ goals.

Research into the above-mentioned cases revealed that it can hardly be expected that they would play a role of ceremonies, changing the daily routine of media and their viewers as in the classic media events version. If analysed in line with Dayan and Katz, Years fit according to the “coronation” event, providing relations between two states with more visibility than usual, and at the same time, renewing the bond between the states, but not necessarily between the viewers, as Dayan and Katz would expect. As media events, Years are long-term and should be seen as series of events in the field - mainly - of culture. As they usually have a ritual character, their openings and closings are celebrated and joined by the heads of the states. Their temporal dimension therefore differs significantly from what was included into the Dayan and Katz concept. The same must be said about their spatial dimension (Foley et al), as the performances take place simultaneously at the local (community, city), regional (German federal land or the Dutch region, Russian provinces) and national levels. Both time and space preserve their significance in these cases, as Years are often organised in order to mark anniversaries that are supposed to integrate participating countries, as for example the 400 years of diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and Russian Federation in 2013. The places - cities or regions - contribute to the main narratives. Amsterdam and St. Petersburg in the Dutch- Russian case can serve as an illustration, as both cities are linked by the history of the incognito trip of Peter the Great, the

Russian tsar, to the Netherlands in 1679. Unlike the events described in event management and tourism studies, Years - while serving as tools of foreign policy - are highly institutionalised. As a result, it is the diplomatic protocol which at least to some extent decides on the ritual character of the Years, as it regulates the heads of the state's participation. The ritual character of media events, in line with Dayan and Katz, builds their integrative power in society and internationally.

The classic media event concept was also developed by other authors who - to some degree at least - adjusted the Dayan and Katz approach to the reality of the third and the fourth eras of political communication (Blumler and Kavanagh, 2009, Blumler 2016). However, Years never reached such "dramatic effects" which would allow to call them Roche's (2000) mega events. Years cannot provide for global attention - unlike sporting events such as the Olympic games. The media did not pay for any exclusive rights for the coverage of Years. Years as events do not change economies, and instead of transforming collective identities, are meant to present them to foreign audiences. Some answers as to who these audiences are, and if the target groups are seen as the passive public, users of social media or stakeholders, are to be found in government strategies and reports on cultural events. In the cases under research, the events connected the classic mass media audiences, live audiences (also protesters) and attracted social media users. They potentially included fairly wide target groups, even though they were not broadcasted live by mass media but only covered by news media, thanks to their ritual form and the presence of the heads of the state. The media noticed the cultural events when they were linked with scandals or framed - and disturbed by tensions in bilateral relations - by conflict or war. Media coverage was planned by the governments, who viewed cultural events with Russia as being performances. The role of journalists during the Years did not continue to convey respectful and pro-government coverage (Katz, Dayan 2018).

The further implementable approaches come from studies into media events by Couldry, Hepp and Krotz (2010). The authors place an emphasis upon their integrating power, as displayed by Dayan and Katz. This approach will preserve its relevance - as expected - in the current study too. In Couldry, Hepp and Krotz interpretation media events are "certain situated, thickened, centring performances of mediated communication that are focussed on a specific thematic core, cross different media products and reach a wide and diverse multiplicity of audiences and participants" (2010: 12). The study at this stage is based on the latter understanding, although not all of the Years' performances are "mediated communication". In addition, the comparative research on selected cases should contribute to the verification of this definition.

Events work as spectacles<sup>3</sup> which are attended, watched and followed by diverse numbers of people and are provided with the power to legitimise and delegitimise meanings (Eide et al. p. 13). In line with Eide, Years as bilateral events confront two narratives - one rooted in the EU country and the second in the Russian Federation's political culture. Therefore, at the current stage of research, the study rests upon following presumptions:

- Taken into account the researched period, television is not the starting point for the analysis, neither did it play any relevant role in the coverage of the Years, partly due to changes in media landscapes and to some extent in event policy;

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of an event as a spectacle was developed in 1967 by G. Debord, in his "Society of Spectacle". The book can be seen as an early contribution of sociology to event studies.

- Years cannot be classified as any “holidays of mass communication” (Katz, Dayan 2018) however; I derive the term from Dayan and Katz and therefore designate Years as “holidays of cultural diplomacy” due to the fact that they are performed as series of cultural events, with heads of the states taking part in opening and closing ceremonies, thus providing them with more visibility and rituality;
- Classical media events are pre-planned and staged in advance - the same must be said about Years of Culture or Bilateral Years;
- Years neither changed the daily routine of their television viewers nor disrupted the television programmes. Some events of the Years may have been broadcasted live and via television, however they did not reach mass audiences such as the Olympic games as classical media events;
- Media events are ceremonies, they play the ritual role and have reconciling and integrating effects - this characteristics can also be implemented in the case of the Years, especially in the cases studied in the current study (Dayan and Katz, 1992);
- Through media events, communities and nations celebrate and reproduce the social system; in the current study two nations would celebrate and reproduce bilateral relations;
- At the same time, where it is the case that it is live broadcast and mass audience that make the media events, the Years are not media events. It provokes the question of whether events in the current study attracted the attention of social media users; additionally, what is the definition of a social media event?

An event becomes a media event according to Dayan and Katz if the people “consider it (to) be a remarkable event” (Couldry et al.: 100). What does that mean on social media?

#### **4 Media events and social media. Celebrating together online?**

All the cases in the current study took place in a period when social media redefined the understanding of the process of communication. It is obvious, when going back to the classic concept of Dayan and Katz, that their stress on television and its audiences does not thoroughly respond to modes of communication in 2013 and the following years. Therefore, the question must be asked as to the extent to which social media contribute to changes in media events and furthermore, to the relation between social media and media events. This problem was realised by C. Zanger (2014), who stressed some synergies which make the understanding of these relations easier. First of all, the author ascribes the role of their co-creators and co-producers to the stakeholders of media events and social media users. Secondly, social media widen the space for events including in geographical terms, and prolong their duration, as well as change their spatial and time dimensions. Both contribute to the inclusion of many more potential users than the old audiences of mass media. Zanger suggested a typology of media events, based upon the level of social media involvement as real, hybrid and virtual events. In the first case, real events are built on the direct contacts of their participants, excluding the involvement of social media. Hybrid media events work as live stream on social media, but they can also be integrated with the event as in the preparatory or follow up phase. The last type of hybrid media events provide them with more access due to their coverage on social media. Virtual events take place on social media

only and as such will be not included in further analysis. It should therefore be discussed whether the Zanger (2014) taxonomy is functional in the case of Bilateral Years.

Some explanation can be found in the Dutch report, published after the Dutch-Russian Year was finished (Cultuur as Kans, 2016). The Dutch government targeted the Year at the “broad group of receivers” and at “broad audiences”, owing to media coverage. As a consequence, the messages were sent directly to audiences taking part in events (classified as direct communication, aimed at smaller groups) in real time and at the same time, to media users (mass audiences, Cultuur as Kans, 2016: 70). However, the report does not allow one to estimate whether, in the Dutch case, the social media presence was pre-programmed and analysed separately from mass media. As the current study covers the Years from 2012 to 2016, it gives insight into how foreign ministries implemented digital (cultural) diplomacy. The very fact, that for example, the German Foreign Ministry around 2013 was reluctant to use social media (Auer and Srugies, 2013: 33), adds more variables to the study. Nevertheless, until 2016 all the countries under research seemed to confirm that media online and social media were effective, empowering and inclusive in interaction with the traditional, mass media (Pfetsch and Silke, 2013:36, Cultuur as Kans), and that the same findings shaped their understanding how cultural events should work.

As the method of the current study also embraces media analysis, it included quantitative and qualitative Twitter study. At the time when this paper was finished, it did not allow to define any threshold which should be reached on social media to call an event a “social media event” and specifically on Twitter - a “Twitter event”. In the Dutch (#NLR2013), German, and Austrian cases, the organisations of cultural diplomacy or government agencies responsible for the Years or “seasons” would use Twitter to announce the start of the festivities, playing the role of heralds, tweeting 140 characters messages in the global network. The same was done for separate events during the year. In several cases, the tweets had the form of an invitation to celebrate together the events, which reminded one of the logic of classical media events. However, although culture as such seemed to win more and more interest among Facebook and Twitter users, the Years in the Dutch, German, and Austrian cases seldom attracted the attention of people who were not involved in any forms of cultural exchanges or cultural life (Cultuur as Kans: 148, and Ociepka, 2019). The analysis of culture as a theme on Facebook and Twitter in 2013, done for the Dutch Foreign Ministry, hardly noticed any higher interest, something which might have been expected as the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year attracted attention not only owing to many exhibitions and performances but also scandals and diplomatic incidents between the Netherlands and Russian Federation. As a result, cultural events on social media attracted first and foremost members of expert networks.

### **5 Media events and scandals**

In line with the general understanding about the Years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands targeted the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year in 2013 (NLR 2013) at the media, in the expectation that the events would attract their attention and consequently that of their audience, as well as at wider groups of stakeholders.

As was said above, events can not only have integrating but also disintegrating effects, and generate as much protest as support. As regards protest, the counter-colonisation of the space where the Year’s events take place can also lead to scandalisation. Protests in

Amsterdam, which occurred several times during the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year, starting with the visits of President Putin in the city, serve as illustrations. As was discussed by Ociepka (2019), the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year in 2013 was dominated by diplomatic incidents in the Netherlands and the Russian Federation which greatly affected bilateral relations between the states. The Dutch media eventually renamed the year of friendship as a “calamity year” and, in fact, “constructed the event” (Rivenburgh, 2010: 188) itself. The reasons for such a development might have been found in the list of values that the Dutch government wanted to share with the Russian partner during the events. F. Timmermans, who served as the Dutch Foreign Minister at the time when the Dutch-Russian festivities were launched, defined these values as human rights, LGBT rights and freedom of speech (Brief, 2013). The first two of these clashed with Russian governmental values exactly at the beginning of the festivities when Dutch people protested against the new (2013) Russian law against “homosexual propaganda”. Eventually, diplomatic incidents provided the reason why cultural events of the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year were discovered by the Dutch journalists. They were not however able to cover all the scandals, as the Russian Federation had refused their visas to entering the Russian Federation. The government mentioned the latter fact as one of the incidents during the NLR 2013 (Vaststelling, 2014). It was also the Dutch media and journalists who called for a cultural boycott of the Russian Federation (Heijne, 2013). Symbolically, they pledged to bring the “year of calamity” to an end as well as to boycott the coming winter Olympic games in Sochi.

Governments achieve boomerang effects during such opportunities. All the interviewed persons who were involved in the organisation of the Dutch-Russian Year in 2013 on the Dutch side admitted that the Dutch-Russian relations at the end of 2013 were worse than at the beginning. Although the impact of the Year on this development was limited, the series of events worked as a scene where citizens were able to protest. The message of celebrating the co-operation was replaced with the citizen’s rejection of the guests’ values or agenda in a form of demonstrations and negative media coverage. In the current project, Critical Discourse Analysis should bring the answer to the question of whether and how the domestic stakeholders in the EU countries of the Years signalled their oppositional - to the governmental - messages regarding co-operation with the Russian Federation during a conflict. However, the first question that arises is whether the Years in all but the Dutch cases were, in the context of conducting cultural diplomacy, relevant enough for domestic stakeholders to express their opinions in the public sphere - including social media.

## **6 Event initiators: who defines the narratives and frames?**

As organisers of Years, governments attempted to define the main messages, while in line with the media events’ coverage these messages were changed in public debates. It was very visible in the Dutch case, as the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year turned to more a political event than was planned by the Dutch as well as Russian organisers. In the cases under the study, governments were strategic actors who gave the events their meaning; though the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 changed them. It was very visible in the British-Russian and the German-Russian cases in 2014. Not only media but also parliamentary commissions responsible for foreign relations or directly for cultural diplomacy (Germany) discussed the objectives of the Years at the time of international conflict. Therefore, the frames changed and the “holidays of cultural diplomacy” won even more attention in the public debate owing to the conflict.

The objectives of the governments were not fully achieved as their messages were redefined by media and the other actors of public debate, such as parliamentary commissions. The Polish-Russian Year of Culture, planned for 2015, was cancelled by the Polish government in July 2014 after the downing of the Malaysian plane. The cancellation itself turned to a relevant issue of public debate in the country. The Polish-Russian Year gained more media visibility, owing to its cancellation, than any other cultural events of this kind which were frequently organised by Polish governments.

The fact that the “holidays of cultural diplomacy”, studied in the current project, happened amid a period of diplomatic incidents (the Dutch-Russian case) or the war in eastern Ukraine (the British, German and Polish cases), had the effect that the media became more active and won more autonomy in covering the events. As a consequence, the cases under research open a new field of studies on (media) events, while confronted with tensions or conflict in international relations in their backgrounds.

### **7 Media events in the realm of international relations**

Governmental documents which are analysed in the current project provide one with a degree of explanation as to how cultural diplomacy can contribute to positive developments in bilateral relations. The Dutch government directly expected that, owing to cultural events, the stakeholders would be involved in “close interaction”, something which is a must for “successful international co-operation”. However, the same government stress that “culture doesn’t always connect people”, in the contrary, it can also escalate conflict (ICPF NL: 17). Authors of studies on event management also observed that the short-term positive integration effect of events can vanish very quickly if not followed by supportive action (Foley et. al, p. 92). Be that as it may, these latter findings stem from research into events organised by or for communities, cities or smaller regions. Event studies hardly touch the cases of bilateral cultural events and their significance for bilateral relations. Olympic games and big sporting events - despite their multilateral character - might serve as exceptions, as they attract research into event studies and tourism as well as international relations together with media and communication (Espy, 1979, Hill, 1996, Grix, 2016). The latter focusses on the reputational effect of mega events. In international relations, in recent years more and more researches discover the field and use the concept of sport diplomacy to frame it with (Kobierecki and Strożek, 2017; Murray, 2018). However, it cannot be said the same about international studies on sanctions, whose authors analyse the co-operation of the EU states, mainly however on the economic level. They did not tend to realise that the EU members, while agreeing on sanctions, implemented at the same time cultural diplomacy to keep the “channels open”. Economic and political sanctions and cultural festivals seem to take place at the same time, but in parallel realities. In line with the presumptions of the current study, such a position resulted in a cacophony of voices in European policy.

One of the possible approaches to events in international relations comes from the studies on public diplomacy and country branding (Dubinsky, 2014), as they embrace cultural diplomacy or foreign image policy. Furthermore, international relations theory has already integrated the concept of agenda setting (for example Nye in his “Future of Power”), which may explain why governments perform cultural events like the Years and seasons of culture. The next one is rooted in studies on the history of cultural relations and cultural diplomacy and called a “cultural turn” in research on the Cold War. The books such as “Music Art and

Diplomacy” attempt to fill the gap in the research on the Cold War, usually focused on its political and military dimensions and neglecting the relevance of “culture wars” (Mikkonen, Suutari, 2016). I find these studies of relevance as their authors discussed culture at the time of international conflict, even if in the pre - Years of friendship era. Also the studies on the history of art events are useful, as their authors see them as “potent mechanisms in the construction and representation of power relationships” (du Cross, Jolliffe, 2014), which allows for their inclusion into the body of research on power relationships in international relations.

To add to this, the analysis of Years and seasons carried out together with Russia in 2012-2016 allows one to observe an issue alliance, consisting of mass media in the involved EU countries. Media and journalists in the UK and Poland covered the incidents which took place during the Dutch-Russian Year. The same happened on social media. Such cases contribute to a better understanding how media works in international relations. The Russian Federation has been a relevant partner for all the EU countries in the current study and this resulted in more international media coverage as a consequence.

## 8 Conclusions

The editors of “The Value of Events” volume suggested in their introduction the need to understand an event as “a text that illuminates cultural values and social structures” (Getz et al. :15). From the point of view of international studies, events can serve as content about political objectives and the role of culture in foreign policy. In some cases, as in the Dutch one, the Years did not seem to belong to the countries’ patterns of rituals and ceremonies of foreign policy. Eventually, Years became issues of public discourse.

Even though the growing literature on events studies and event management realised the specifics of long-term occasions such as the yearly European Capital of Culture (Foley et al., 2012 :6 and next), the Years of culture as international, bilateral events have hardly been noticed. The same body of research is mainly focussed on cities and the relevance of events (also cultural) for their policy, brands, narratives and, first and foremost, the economy, though not on the use of cultural events by governments, who initiate them for the purposes of their foreign policy. Years of Friendship can be therefore studied as (bilateral) tools of foreign policy.

Two main frames dominate in events studies: cultural and economic. During the Years, culture was widely discussed by expert networks interested in cultural exchange and culture as such, whereas economy was left in the background while discovered by the media in their coverage. However, it is not the commercialisation of events which will be of relevance in the current study, as they were not supposed to gain any revenue. Consequently, a neo-liberal approach in this case is not entirely workable. Nonetheless, the Russian Federation was a EU countries’ strategic partner, and despite sanctions, economic relations with Russia must still be mentioned as an important factor regarding the organisation of cultural events and for the media, while covering them.

In the cases under research, the Years turned to issues in public debate in the EU countries due to their political background. The fact that scandals, diplomatic incidents and conflict in eastern Ukraine attracted the main media attention, provides on the one hand for a good illustration for what was described by Dayan and Katz as the disenchantment of media events (2018: 10), while on the other, it convinces one that the effects of bilateral events

depend on many variables which are hardly controlled by the governments. The risks for “holidays of cultural diplomacy” are high and their effects are often unpredictable. The same unpredictability makes media events out of Years and Seasons of Culture. Unfortunately, at this stage of research, the question of when and how cultural events turn to media events on social media cannot be answered. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that they constitute a genre in communication, which is how Dayan and Katz would see them.

Coming back to the definition by Couldry, Hepp and Krotz (2010: 12), Years are mediated events centered on bilateral relations and culture, organized by governments to improve bilateral relations and to promote the country. They preserve the effect of reaching “wide and diverse multiplicity of audiences and participants”, even if it was their negative perception which contributed to more media coverage and more participation, also in a form of contestation and protest.

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