

# Interest groups and social movements on TV3 news

**MARÍA DOLORES MONTERO**

*Full-time lecturer at the Faculty of Communication  
of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

MariaDolores.Montero@uab.cat

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## **Abstract**

*Interest groups and social movements are important actors within the public sphere and public debate. Public television is committed to the values of pluralism and diversity of information, both essential for the proper functioning of democracy. This paper is aimed at contributing to the understanding of the production processes of news related to interest groups and social movements in TV3's Telenotícies. By means of a content analysis of 227 news items and in-depth interviews with both news professionals and the communication managers of some of the aforementioned groups, it was possible to conclude that the possibility for these actors' voices to be heard is quite unequal. Groups and smaller communities can hardly make their voice heard within the public sphere.*

## **Key words**

*Interest groups, social movements, news coverage, pluralism, public opinion.*

## **Resum**

*Els grups d'interès i els moviments socials són actors importants en l'esfera i en el debat públics. La televisió pública està compromesa amb els valors de pluralisme i de diversitat de la informació, fonamentals per al bon funcionament de la democràcia. Aquesta aportació intenta contribuir a comprendre els processos de producció de les notícies relacionades amb els grups d'interès i els moviments socials en els Telenotícies de TV3. Mitjançant una anàlisi del contingut de 227 peces informatives i entrevistes en profunditat als professionals de la informació i als responsables de comunicació d'alguns grups, es conclou que la capacitat d'aquests actors per fer-se sentir és molt desigual. Els grups i els col·lectius més petits difícilment poden articular la seva veu en l'esfera pública.*

## **Paraules clau**

*Grups d'interès, moviments socials, cobertura de les notícies, pluralisme, opinió pública.*

## **Introduction**

Plurality and diversity of information are among the essential elements for the proper functioning of democracy. Television plays a central role in the representation of the public sphere. The visibility or invisibility that it grants to some events, and the way and time when they are presented, can determine the content of public opinion. The role of television, and of the media in general, in a democracy consists of giving the necessary information and elements of interpretation of reality so that the public can actively participate in the democratic process (Curran 2005; Gardam, Levy 2008; Trappel, Maniglio 2009).

Interest groups try to influence public institutions and policies in favour of their particular objectives (Molins 1998; Jordana 2004). Social movements, by contrast, usually set themselves general objectives and try to involve society as a whole, be it in the short or long term (Ibarra and Letamendia 2004). In both cases, their public visibility is important for their activity to be recognised and for them to take part in public debate. The media generally provide the space where the ideas, proposals and interests of political and non-political actors meet,

so presence in the news constitutes an important objective for them all (Jerez 2008; Ibarra 2005).

The communicative strategies of interest groups and social movements appeal to citizens and try to publicise their objectives. They attempt to exert more pressure from the public sphere on the political powers to influence the decision-making process, be it in specific issues or at critical times of protest by social groups. However, the newsworthiness of their actions, especially that of groups and movements with fewer resources, is very far from that of the recognised political actors.

Interest groups and social movements relate to a wide range of organisations and social groups with very different abilities in terms of financial resources, organisation and strategies. There is a wide variety of possibilities among unions, organisations, associations, charities and citizens' groups. On the one hand, there are groups with a lot of organisational, financial and political resources, which are usually fully integrated into decision-making processes and consequently have highly defined political tactics. On the other, there are social groups and movements that are practically outside these processes.

Parallel to this, the communicative strategies of these groups

also reflect their financial and organisational capacity. The more resources they have, the more possibilities of drawing up communication strategies to influence the media and society through specialist communication offices.

Presidents, governments, political parties and interest groups of the economic and political elites are usually sources of information for their role when defining the news (Bennet and Entman 2001; Schudson 2002; Gans 2003, 2004; Cook 2005). Their communication and public relations resources help to create events that are inserted as newsworthy events into the media. Their communication techniques are increasingly more efficient and influence the television agenda. Those groups with few organisational and communication resources, such as small NGOs, associations, minority unions, etc., have fewer opportunities to enter the media public sphere.

It is also rare for social movements to be in the television news, despite their being a form of collective expression of civil society in the social, political and cultural spheres (Wall 2003). For social movements, the "media issue", as it is called by P. Ibarra and E. Grau (2003), is important and affects the forms of protest on the street. From their point of view, anyone who does not appear in the media does not influence the political powers, to the point where some social movements try to offset their inability to channel collective protest in the street with press conferences and initiatives aimed at attracting media attention.

Communication researchers to date have tended very little towards studying the news coverage of interest groups and social movements. The results of the research conducted even highlight the fact that the news pays little attention to interest groups with scant resources (Thrall 2006) and to social movements (Gitlin 1980; Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1997; Neveu 2002; Rucht 2004). The main reasons are usually the difficulty in the news tackling new subjects and approaches beyond routine matters. Journalists normally resort to sources from the most established institutions (Sampedro 2000). With regard to this issue, we could mention the contributions by Rodas (2006) on the visibility of social actors in television news, and of Montero, Zeller and García Blanco (2008) on the newsworthiness of the alter-globalisation movement in the benchmark international press.

In general terms, there are three important aspects that should be taken into account when producing the news: the criteria of newsworthiness, information sources and objectivity. Newsworthiness refers to the up-to-date aspects, the newness, the significance, the importance of the events, the impact of the images, accessibility, etc. The information sources, meanwhile, have to be credible and reliable. Objectivity seeks to construct a story in which all sides or points of view are represented in a news item.

All these aspects form part of journalism as an activity. Despite this, the journalism profession is carried out within social contexts marked by different political conceptions, party systems and political cultures (Hallin and Mancini 2008). We

can speak, therefore, of diverse journalistic cultures that share some elements and that are different in others. So, for example, some of the shared elements that lead to the similarity of news would be the fact that the information has just been released, the uncertainty about what is important and what is not, and the limitation of external interferences (Cook 2006). The differentiating traits would arise from the type of medium (television, newspapers, etc.), whether it is public or private, if it is partisan or not, the type of audience, etc.

The aim of this article is to analyse the coverage of interest groups and social movements on the TV3 news, considering that public television is committed to the values of pluralism and diversity in the content of information and in the sources.<sup>1</sup> This means, first of all, analysing the content of the news on these actors. Secondly, describing the newsworthiness criteria applied in news coverage related to interest groups and social movements. And thirdly, analysing the interaction guidelines between these groups and movements and the media.

TV3 is a Televisió de Catalunya channel that has an extensive range of news programmes. TV3's news programmes, *Telenotícies migdia* (midday), *Telenotícies vespre* (evening) and *Telenotícies cap de setmana* (weekend), are the channel's daily news programmes and one of the benchmarks in Catalan society for finding out what is happening in Catalonia and the world.

## Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives defined above, we applied a methodology that combined content analysis of the news items with semi-structured in-depth interviews of professionals in the news services of Televisió de Catalunya and in institutional communication with the interest groups analysed.

In the first instance, the content of the news items on *Telenotícies*, in which the leading actors were interest groups and social movements, were analysed. Then, in the second instance, news and institutional communication professionals were interviewed. The aim of these interviews was to take an in-depth look at the definition of newsworthiness criteria from the point of view of the professionals involved, in different positions, in the news production process.

The study universe included news items from *Telenotícies migdia*, *Telenotícies vespre*, *Telenotícies migdia cap de setmana* and *Telenotícies vespre cap de setmana* featuring interest groups and social movements over six months, between September 2009 and February 2010. When defining interest groups and social movements, we took into account the definition made by Clive S. Thomas (2009):<sup>2</sup> "Any association of individuals or organisations, usually formally organised, that, on the basis of one or more shared concerns, attempts to influence public policy in its favour. All interest groups share a desire to affect government policy to benefit themselves or their cause."

Based on his proposed classification (five broad categories of

interest group: economic interests, cause groups, public interests, private and public institutional interests, and non-associational groups), when analysing the content, we considered the types of actors specified as follows (see Table 1):

### 1) News content analysis

On the basis of the study universe, the criterion for selecting the sample was to ensure the representativeness of the news items in different news contexts. In other words, the treatment given to interest groups and social movements in the coverage of specific actions and in the major news subjects was taken into consideration. For this reason the sample was selected at random: one week in each of the months that were in the study universe, between September 2009 and February 2010, chosen at random through repetition of equiprobable stochastic events for each month.

The content analysis unit was the news item. *News item* is taken to be the product that tells of an event in a unique context and is developed around actors and actions that share a same logic throughout the story.

Based on these criteria, the total number of news programmes that were part of the sample was 83. In total, the resulting number of items was 227, which were distributed by month and *Telenotícies* as follows (see Table 2):

Each of the items that form part of the content analysis sam-

ple was treated on the basis of a card with variables relating to the “formal aspects of the information”, the “principal and secondary actors”, the “type of action” and the “information topics”. The treatment of the data obtained from analysing the content of the 227 sample items was carried out using Excel, with dynamic tables.

### 2) Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with professionals from Televisió de Catalunya and the Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals

A total of nine journalists and professionals from TV3 and the Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals (CCMA) were interviewed, all of whom had extensive experience in journalism.

The research technique used was the semi-structured, in-depth interview. Based on a prepared script, the interviewee was asked open questions so that the professional criteria and work routines of journalism emerged during the conversation. The interview script tackled the following aspects: information sources, opinion of interest groups and social movements as information sources, an assessment of these sources in relation to other political actors, the values of the information, newsworthiness criteria and plurality of content, formats, the image the journalist has of the audience, and the opposite, the journalist's opinion regarding his or her image of what the audience feels about the profession and news in general.

**Table 1. Types of actors**

Economic and business groups	Foment del Treball Nacional, Confederació Espanyola d'Organitzacions Empresarials, Chamber of Commerce, Gremi d'Empresaris de Cine, etc.
Economic working groups	Comissions Obreres, Unió General de Treballadors, Confederació General del Treball, etc.
Economic groups of farmers and breeders	Unió de Pagesos, etc.
Professional groups	Professional associations
Groups defending the general public interest	Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, Intermón Oxfam, Caritas, Amnesty International, Save The Children, etc.
Public or private institutional groups	Universities, media, etc.
Think tanks	Fundació Catalunya i Territori, Fundació Rafael Campalans, Fundació Trias Fargas
Cause groups	Catholic church, etc.
Political associations and citizens' platforms	Amical de Mauthausen and other camps of all Nazi victims in Spain, Associació Defensa Drets Animal, Associació Plataforma per la Llengua, parents and teachers associations, residents' associations, FEDELATINA, etc.
Social groups and activists	Activists in defence of alter-globalisation, groups of immigrants, workers, students, residents, etc.

Source: Author.

**Table 2. Distribution of news items in the sample for analysis**

Broadcast / News items	2009				2010		Total
	September	October	November	December	January	February	
<i>TN migdia</i>	18	11	26	26	9	9	<b>99</b>
<i>TN vespre</i>	12	14	14	16	9	14	<b>79</b>
<i>TN migdia cap de setmana</i>	1	3	5	7	4	4	<b>24</b>
<i>TN vespre cap de setmana</i>	4	7	5	5	1	3	<b>25</b>
<b>Total/months</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>227</b>

Source: Author.

### 3) Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with institutional communication professionals from the interest groups

The selection of the interest groups in order to interview some of the members was made following criteria of representativeness based on the results of the content analysis. Despite this, we did not get the same response from all the groups.

The communication managers of the larger groups agreed to being interviewed, whereas some members of the smaller groups declined to be interviewed, as is the case of activists of the recent student mobilisations and the alter-globalisation movement. The main difficulty in interviewing members of the smaller groups and social movement activists was that these groups did not have defined spokespersons or stable organisational structures, and the activists did not regard themselves as representative of the group or of the movement as a whole. Consequently, for this reason, the results of this study do not include the viewpoint of any member of organisations that form part of these movements.

Members of the following organisations were interviewed: Foment del Treball Nacional, Comissions Obreres (CCOO), Unió General de Treballadors (UGT), Confederació General del Treball (CGT), Unió de Pagesos, Médecins Sans Frontières, Intermón Oxfam, Amnesty International, Federació Catalana d'ONG per al Desenvolupament, Federació d'Entitats Llatinoamericanes de Catalunya (Fedelatina).

The semi-structured, in-depth interview was also used in this case with the aim that, during the course of the conversation, the professional criteria on the creation and organisation of events, the newsworthiness and the assessment of the image of their institution on *Telenotícies* and the general assessment of the *Telenotícies* news programme as a whole would emerge. The interview script was based on the following aspects: the opinion about interest groups and social movements as information sources, the assessment of these sources in relation to other political actors, newsworthiness criteria from the point of view of the interest groups, the assessment of *Telenotícies*, the assessment of the portrayal of their organisation in the news and aspects for future improvement.

### News about interest groups and social movements

The results of the content analysis found that, on *TN migdia*, the time devoted to news items on interest groups and social movements varied between 7% and 11% of the length of *TN migdia*, excluding the time spent on sports. This percentage rose considerably in November (18.84%) and December (23.26%). In these two months, the news about the recession, the editorial of twelve Catalan newspapers in favour of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy and the referendums on independence among the leading actors, of which there were unions, social groups, citizens' platforms, etc., focused almost all the attention. On *TN vespre*, the time varied between 8% and 9.5% in relation to the total broadcast time of this *Telenotícies* (excluding the time spent on sports). Also in this case, November (15.11%), December (17.58%) and February (15.53%) saw a significant increase in information. By contrast, *TN migdia cap de setmana* and *TN vespre cap de setmana* did not have any regularity in their treatment and their figures were highly disparate, between 3.00% and 16.12% over the period.

The news items in which interest groups and social movements were presented as actors of the information, between 20% and 25% of the sample units, appeared highlighted in the opening summary on all the *Telenotícies*. This news referred to national, Spanish or international, government actors, the two main unions, social groups (of immigrants, alter-globalisation activists, political mobilisations and citizens' platforms), international NGOs (Amnesty International, Caritas), the Catholic Church and universities.

With regard to the format, the items were usually (with a higher percentage than 60%) news narrated from the studio by the newsreader, with voice-over and broadcast of videos from Spanish or international news agencies, and this was also the case on all the news programmes.

On *TN migdia* and *TN vespre*, the items were characterised by a greater presence of political actors, which means that the newsworthiness of the interest groups and social movements was directly related to the political institutions, be they governments or other departments of the Administration.

It was considered appropriate to distinguish between two types of actor in the news item; “principal” actors and “secondary” actors. On the one hand, the “principal” actors were the protagonists of the news, the ones who bore the initiative of the events. Some items were focused exclusively on the action of a single actor but, in other cases, the action carried out by the principal actor was addressed at, associated with or opposed to the action of other actors, whom we call “secondary actors”.

See Table 3, where the “principal actors” of the news items are specified, expressed in percentages.

Normally, this type of item, in which governments and Administration were the leading figures of the news, usually referred to events relating to business organisations and the main unions.

By contrast, the emphasis on *TN migdia* and *TN vespre cap de setmana* was especially on political associations, citizens’ platforms and groups defending the general public interest (NGOs). The absence of government and Administration actors was possibly due to the flow of news itself, which drops off at the weekend and, in its place, softer news items devoted to other social aspects are broadcast. In other words, news that emphasises human interest aspects, focusing the news on anecdotes and covering the more festive aspects of events.

With regard to secondary actors, government and Administration actors stood out on *TN migdia*, *TN vespre* and *TN migdia cap de setmana* (55%, 43.04% and 70.83% of the total items in each *Telenotícies*, respectively). By contrast, on *TN vespre cap de setmana*, the secondary actors were primarily social groups (32%) and political associations (28%).

The variable on the “relationship between principal and secondary actor” included the categories of “collaboration”, “dispute”, “none” and “others”. In the sample as a whole, over half the news items relating to interest groups and social move-

ments made reference to disputes. These disputes were presented, in one-third of the cases, in statements by the protagonists (obviously, in the case of leaders and groups with more resources) and, in another third, through an extensive repertoire of mobilisation strategies (demonstrations, rallies, hunger strikes, performances, etc.).

The geographical location was predominantly Barcelona and Catalonia (45.5%). Madrid and the rest of Spain accounted for 25.9%; Europe and the United States for 11.45%, while the remaining countries, some 13.20%, were on different continents. These results highlight that the location of the news is an important criterion in the selection of news, and that relevance depends on its place of origin.

In all the *Telenotícies*, the most notable “news topics” included the recession, labour disputes (as a further expression of the above) and those relating to national or international politics.

The topic of the recession held first place on all the *TN migdia* (20.20%), *TN vespre* (18.99%) and *TN migdia cap de setmana* (25%). Throughout the period of study, the news focused, in September, on the proposed budget for 2010 of the Spanish government. In November, on the reactions of the unions to the crisis, with the call for demonstrations in Barcelona and Madrid. Finally, in December, the regional summit on the economy was held in Madrid.

Over all the weeks of the sample, *TN migdia* and *TN vespre* featured labour disputes (lay-offs, management and union negotiations, demonstrations, rallies, etc.), which were the second news topic (13.13% and 11.39%, respectively). Despite this, we should point out that, unlike the treatment given to government actors and social agents, this news was usually very short and rather standardised, both in the narration and in the pictures.

The “politics in general” category includes highly diverse aspects relating to international politics, such as the UN

**Table 3. Principal actors of the news items according to Telenotícies (in %)**

<i>Telenotícies</i> / Principal actors	<i>TN migdia</i> (Weekday lunchtime)	<i>TN vespre</i> (Weekday evening)	<i>TN migdia cap de setmana</i> (Weekend lunchtime)	<i>TN vespre cap de setmana</i> (Weekend evening)
Governments/Administration	22.22	20.25	12.50	8.00
Economic and business groups	7.07	7.59	12.50	-
Working groups	9.09	13.92	8.33	4.00
Economic groups of farmers and breeders	2.02	2.53	12.50	4.00
Professional groups	2.02	3.80	-	-
Groups defending the general public interest	11.11	10.13	16.67	8.00
Public or private institutional groups	5.05	5.07	-	-
Think tanks	1.01	-	-	-
Cause groups	3.03	5.07	-	12.00
Political associations / citizens’ platforms	9.09	8.86	20.83	32.00
Social groups / activists	22.22	21.52	16.67	32.00
Others	6.06	1.27	-	-

Source: Author.

Assembly, Honduras after the coup d'état by Roberto Micheletti and developments in the hunger strike by activist Aminatu Haidar. All these topics had a significant presence in all the *Telenotícies*: *TN migdia* (12.12%), *TN vespre* (8.86%), *TN migdia cap de setmana* (16.67%) and *TN vespre cap de setmana* (20.00%).

Of note among the other topics was the editorial of 12 Catalan newspapers "The Dignity of Catalonia" (2.53% and 4.17% on *TN vespre* and *TN migdia cap de setmana*, respectively) and referendums on Catalan independence (5.05% and 4.17% on *TN migdia* and *TN migdia cap de setmana*, respectively).

The interrelation of the variables described above, "principal actors", "type of action" of the principal actor and "news topics", shows the predominant focus on interest groups. In other words, the relationship with the other actors, the action carried out and the news topic that appears most frequently in the news items.

Consequently, the presence of business organisations was diverse; they appeared as principal actors (7.07%, 7.59% and 12.50% on *TN migdia*, *TN vespre* and *TN migdia cap de setmana*, respectively) and their voices were plural. With regard to the main unions, CCOO and UGT (6.06%, 3.80% and 8.33% on *TN migdia*, *TN vespre* and *TN migdia cap de setmana*, respectively) appeared as part of the news referring to the social dialogue between the government and social agents. Minor and radical unions barely appeared in the news.

News items on NGOs were not very numerous (11.11%, 10.13% and 16.67% on *TN migdia*, *TN vespre* and *TN migdia cap de setmana*, respectively) but they were highly diverse. Their most important characteristic is that they are regarded as an actor to be taken into account when defining the situation. In the international sphere, in the case of Honduras (NGO defending human rights), or in the case of Haiti (NGO for cooperation in emergency situations and development aid), they were actors that were present in the progress of the events.

As principal actors, "associations and citizens' platforms" made their voice heard when the news topic referred to an institutional dispute. The news about these actors lasted approximately 9% in each of the *Telenotícies*, and 20.83% and 32% on *TN migdia cap de setmana* and *TN vespre cap de setmana*, respectively. Coverage focused basically on demonstrations and other forms of group mobilisation.

Finally, "social groups and activists" usually appeared in disputes, with images of demonstrations or rallies that, in many cases, contributed little per se to an understanding of the facts (22.22% and 21.52%, 16.67% and 32% on *TN migdia*, *TN vespre*, *TN migdia cap de setmana* and *TN vespre cap de setmana*, respectively).

### Journalist viewpoint on interest groups and social movements

According to the interviews conducted with nine news profes-

sionals, we can state that there is agreement with regard to the determining factors of news production relating to interest groups and social movements. The first is time pressure on everyday tasks in many aspects: including the topic, the format, the depth and length of the items. The second is the broadcast time limitation, which means that news items are hierarchised. The third is the possibility or not of having images or means to capture images.

In the day to day, the newsroom combines the philosophy and principles of action of the media (defined by the Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals together with the Catalan Government and the Control Commission of the Catalan Parliament), those of the company and the values of the journalist. The materialisation of all these principles regarding work practices is not free from tensions and journalists tend to resolve them in their day to day work.

Among the interviewees, there are different perceptions and sensitivities when it comes to other aspects such as newsworthiness, plurality and information sources. In general, newsworthiness criteria with regard to interest groups and social movements are the same as those applied to other facts or events: general interest, newness, relevance, etc., but there are some important nuances regarding pluralism, sources and representativeness. By way of example, we reproduce the opinions of three of the interviewees:

*Interviewee 2:* "[...] as it is a public TV channel, we have in some way a duty of plurality. This plurality we speak of (the word isn't imposed but, let's say, "self-imposed by law and by fundamental principles") is that they have to appear. Plurality can't only happen in strictly political terms. Our desire and obligation is to be plural and that not only should the different political parties appear but (also) a broad representation of society. Understanding this to mean civic bodies, NGOs, union and management bodies, not just unions... And we also bear this very much in mind when we outline a news story.

We have a tendency – we, I would say the public TV channels – of giving an organised structure to phenomena that appear in society. We are more into looking for people who represent social movements than the "gross expression" of that social movement. Let me explain: if there's a dispute, for example, in Salt [...], to do with immigration, the news is not asking questions in the street to find out what immigrants or the people in the street think. But we try to seek out different organisations that represent the various points of view.

Because representativeness gives it plurality. And it also better represents the collective expression of society..., not strictly the point of view of a person."

*Interviewee 3:* To begin with, we are... subject a little to the control of the Control Commission of the Catalan Parliament which, as you know, is made up of different parliamentary groups. And, at the same time, it's not that we're tied to the political parties, but we do have to show, as a bit of an intro-

duction, regarding the parliamentary spectrum, on the one hand, the Catalan Parliament and Congress on the other. [...] Some people criticise why we make everyone have an opinion on everything. [...] Because we believe that the ones with more or less representation are representatives of the people of Catalonia, in this case, and that it's necessary.

Sometimes this advantage, since six groups take up a lot of room on the news, it means that these actors you're talking about [interest groups and social movements] are left a bit in the background or are more marginalised. If they're not very clear topics about unions or labour relations or whatever. With the subject of NGOs or also topics that affect them more directly. But it's more complicated to decide who is representative of whom, or of what.

Despite this, I think we always try to look for different voices, we always do it with political parties. Representatives, but unions as well, it's fairly established.

What's more complicated here are the NGOs or, shall we say, diverse organisations. Also, even though, considering that politics is very much in disrepute, it also happens to some extent with the agencies. There's a feeling that NGOs also have their own interests, that they're not all that transparent, that they're a business and... you have to be very careful with projects."

*Interviewee 5:* "For us, the most important thing is when it's an NGO that has prestige, therefore what they tell you is not what the actors involved (political parties or governments or unions...) will tell you. By contrast, an NGO such as Amnesty International or Intermón Oxfam or the Red Cross can give you details that we can, in principle, see as reliable.

Therefore, they are NGOs that we think have information. They give you a flow of legitimacy. It's a criterion we apply often to international news. On the ground, who do you believe? Well, you believe the one with prestige, a track record, who gives you reliability for one reason or another. Therefore, we use quite a lot of information that comes from NGOs in this respect. With spontaneous social movements, the most typical ones (groups that are created for a specific issue, in one country or another), to be honest we analyse them very much case by case."

The role of public television, pluralism, the representativeness of actors, their reliability as information sources are all topics that are present in the everyday work of journalism. In the case of political actors, their parliamentary representation and social position might follow objectifiable guidelines, but the criteria are not as clear when they are transferred to other social spheres. What determines representativeness in this case? Professionals choose to approach the stronger organisations: business organisations, majority unions and prestigious international NGOs. Their "legitimacy" as information sources is determined by the "reliability" of their statements and this is

based, at the same time, on their organisational capacity, their position in society, international recognition, etc.

Finally, in most cases, the answer to these questions is provided by the practical solution to the problems and the nearest and most usual sources. Consequently, interest groups and social movements become part of topics in which news items are highly standardised: negotiation between government and social agents, natural disasters, labour disputes, reports or human interest "soft" news.

### Point of view of institutional communication professionals

From the other side, that of interest groups and social movements, the tendency is to professionalise relations with the media through press departments or offices. The aim is to make communications effective and get maximum support from public opinion for their aims. The financial resources of these groups are therefore crucial if they want to professionalise their communicative activities. For smaller groups, the difficulty of having spokespersons and of drafting press releases, communiqués, etc. can be a significant drawback.

The problems that interest groups have are varied and their attitudes towards the media have as many nuances as there are types of organisation. The strongest and largest organisations tend to recognise TV3's *Telenotícies* as a quality product in the Catalan communication system. The communication departments of most of these organisations are made up of professionals and they are, generally, satisfied with the communication flows established with *Telenotícies* professionals. The exception is the perception by some of these organisations of the excessive importance that is given to the provenance of the news in Catalonia.

The thoughts of the professionals in the communication departments and offices interviewed suggest some elements that should be taken into account: excessive emphasis on politics and on news items on statements to the detriment of an in-depth look at the real problems of most people, or the stereotyping of news linked to groups and actions, such as in the case of the unions. This is expressed by the following interviewees:

*Interviewee 11:* "Let's see, I think that, at the moment, it's one thing how it should be, what I think should attract journalists' attention, and another, a bit, is the line taken by news programmes. I think that politics sometimes has an excessive presence in news programmes. That's the impression we have, and there's a very large part of news programmes that become question and answer sessions: one answers, another answers [the response to the first]... and that covers too much news and goes away a little from the big social movements, really, of the people.

And then it's true to say that they cover a large part of the social movement. Meanwhile, we think that sometimes, on the TV3 news programmes, there's no balance really

between the movement of real people in the street with the time devoted to the news on the programme”.

*Interviewee 12:* “In social groups, we could say that we unions are lucky. Up to a certain point, but we are lucky. We’re lucky because our role is very evident. Our role is clear: we represent a part, we have political projection, we are a [...] representative institution, therefore, you don’t have to tell [the media] much because they’re aware of you.

And I say we’re lucky up to a point because it’s true to say that this very specific, highly determined role often prevents you from doing different things, or dealing with your own issues differently. Everything’s like in quotas [...]. You don’t get a share on screen, like the political parties, nowhere near. We have to fight for our share. We don’t have the news guaranteed just because we’re a main union and among the most powerful and organised organisations.

[...] But we have a lot more opportunities. Very often we have this opportunity, not because of the interest or relevance of what we do, but very often because we’re part of the chorus of [reactions] to a political event...”.

With business organisations, the opinion about the cover of topics related to its sphere of action is positive:

*Interviewee 10:* “We’re fairly satisfied with how they present us. Obviously you’d love the statements you make about something to be more extensive [...]. But normally, as relations with TV3 journalists are good, the news can be pretty balanced. We all know that very often the union can have more power than the management, it’s more social, it’s this trend of the more social news and the stigma of the entrepreneur as the root of all evil.”

From the point of view of NGOs, newsworthiness lies especially in events linked to disasters, be they natural, humanitarian or in situations where there is evident damage to human rights. When these situations arise, what prevails for television is that the NGOs have images, access to the countries affected or the sharing of knowledge of the political and social reality in those countries. Most of the communication managers in the large NGOs agree that TV3 gives a fairly descriptive and positive treatment of their role in the situations in which they are involved. This is the opinion, for example, of the following interviewee:

*Interviewee 17:* “We, basically, are reasonably satisfied... Generally, when we want to appear, because it’s a “meaty” subject, we appear. Also because we know that they’re these three topics, which are... easy, there’s not much to say, they sell.”

By contrast, with regard to the points of view of smaller groups, the answer is more guarded, and some are even at the opposite end of the scale, as is the case of the Confederació General del Treball, the Federació Catalana d’ONG per al

Desenvolupament, the Federació d’Entitats Llatinoamericanes de Catalunya (Fedelatina). They questioned, for example, the favourable news coverage for larger unions or the lack of visibility of international aid. By way of example, the following is the opinion of one of the minority trades unions:

*Interviewee 13:* “In the first place, I want to say that not all the events are shown, normally. We’re entirely convinced that there’s an active boycott and, in this respect, we believe that both the private media, but also the public media, systematically don’t cover the demonstrations we hold, even though very often we are the main union, and even though, in some labour disputes, we ‘call the tune’. The feeling in the union [...] is one of an active boycott.

From the point of view of the smaller organisations:

*Interviewee 18:* “We have a relationship, a marriage of convenience: very good for some things and very bad for others. There’s a mix-up of all the driftwood the media have made, of spectacularisation, of sensationalism, of gossip... These are all things that also affect us, a lot.”

## Conclusion

In a democracy, the functions of the media are: to provide information about the principal events that affect society, to watch over the exercise of power and to offer a space for discussion and the circulation of ideas. Generally, the media provide the chance for the different voices in society to be heard. Furthermore, if it is possible, pluralism is one of the basic objectives of the public media, for which they have to answer to society.

According to the results of the analysis of the news and the in-depth interviews with journalists and communication professionals, we can conclude that the coverage of interest groups focuses especially on the larger organisations that have more resources devoted to institutional communication. Journalists feel that the “reliability” of the source may lie in its capacity to represent the group or its knowledge of a specific situation, among other criteria.

Small groups and social movements, by contrast, have a lesser presence, and on most occasions they appear in situations of dispute or in collective actions supporting their aims or interests. Their proposals, therefore, are usually outside the relevant issues of the day.

The commitment of public television to pluralism and diversity demands the presence of a broad social representation in news programmes, but the criteria applied regarding the representativeness of bodies and social movements are difficult to establish. Journalists usually apply the prevalent criteria of general interest, the unexpected, the novel, but in practice these are difficult to objectify.

Possibly, optimising the communication processes between interest groups/social movements and news professionals could



result in news treatment that tends to provide the public with a wider interpretation. From the point of view of journalists, often highly focused on institutional aspects, resorting to a wider range of these groups would allow them to go into the social reality with greater depth and increase their knowledge of social problems.

From the standpoint of minority groups and movements, establishing a stable structure of spokespeople could contribute considerably to generating news, even though in this case too, of what type should be questioned. Communication departments and offices usually adapt to the routines of journalism and, at the same time, reinforce the production dynamics of newsrooms. They tend to act with the same logic as the political actors. The challenge lies, then, in offering new focuses to explain the social reality.

## Notes

- 1 This article summarises the results of the research entitled *La cobertura dels grups d'interès i dels moviments socials a les notícies de TV3* (August 2010). This research was possible thanks to the grant awarded in the Sixth Call for Grants for Research Projects into Audiovisual Communication (Decision 103/2009, of the Plenary of the Catalan Audiovisual Council). The work also had the collaboration of Ms. Marta Civil i Serra in the production and transcription of the in-depth interviews of information and communication professionals.
- 2 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online].  
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/290136/interest-group>> [Consulted: 24 May 2010]

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