

The thematic agenda of news broadcasts in Catalonia

Carmina Puig

- *This article aims to provide a view of the main events talked about by news broadcasts during a sample period. The news items have been grouped into broad themes in order to be able to determine, according to the news times allocated, which items are more present on the channels analysed. The thematic indicators of Society, Sports and Time, and the inserts from the Other group, have been chosen as barometers to evaluate whether news broadcasts tend towards the banal and tend to sensationalise news items. A description is then provided of the five news items concerning the same event that have attracted most news coverage, as well as how these evolved during the period analysed.*

Keywords

Pluralism, news broadcasts, Catalonia, thematic agenda, sensationalise

Which themes go to make up the news agenda on television?

News items in news broadcasts, except for the blocks of headlines, summary and, if they exist, sub-headlines, are covered by the thematic indicators established, which are:

- Art and culture
- Science and technology
- Social conflict
- International
- Politics
- Economy and business
- Education and teaching
- Sports
- Environment
- Media and telecommunications
- Health
- Society
- Weather
- Traffic
- Work
- Other¹

It should be noted that the total news time is very different on each channel because of the average duration of their news broadcasts and consequently of the news items including themes. While TV3 broadcasts 1.531 hours of themes and BTv, 1.076, TVE in Catalonia broadcasts 540, Localia, 88 and Citytv, 75.

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¹ In the *Other* theme, only the space "Review of the front pages of the dailies" is included, broadcast every day by *La nit al dia* on TV3 and occasionally by *Infodia* on BTv.

The following figures show the time distribution by theme and channel. The first five themes coincide on TV3, BTV and Citytv, although in a different order. News items related to *Art and culture*, *Politics*, *International*, *Sports* and *Society* are contained in all the news broadcasts on these three channels. TVE in Catalonia has the same schema except for the theme *Weather* which, as this is included within the news block, forms part of the five themes that appear most, relegating *Art and culture* to sixth position.

Localia follows quite a different schema: to the themes of *Art and culture*, *Politics* and *Society*, common to the rest, it adds *Economy and business* and *Health*, in detriment to *International* and *Sports*.

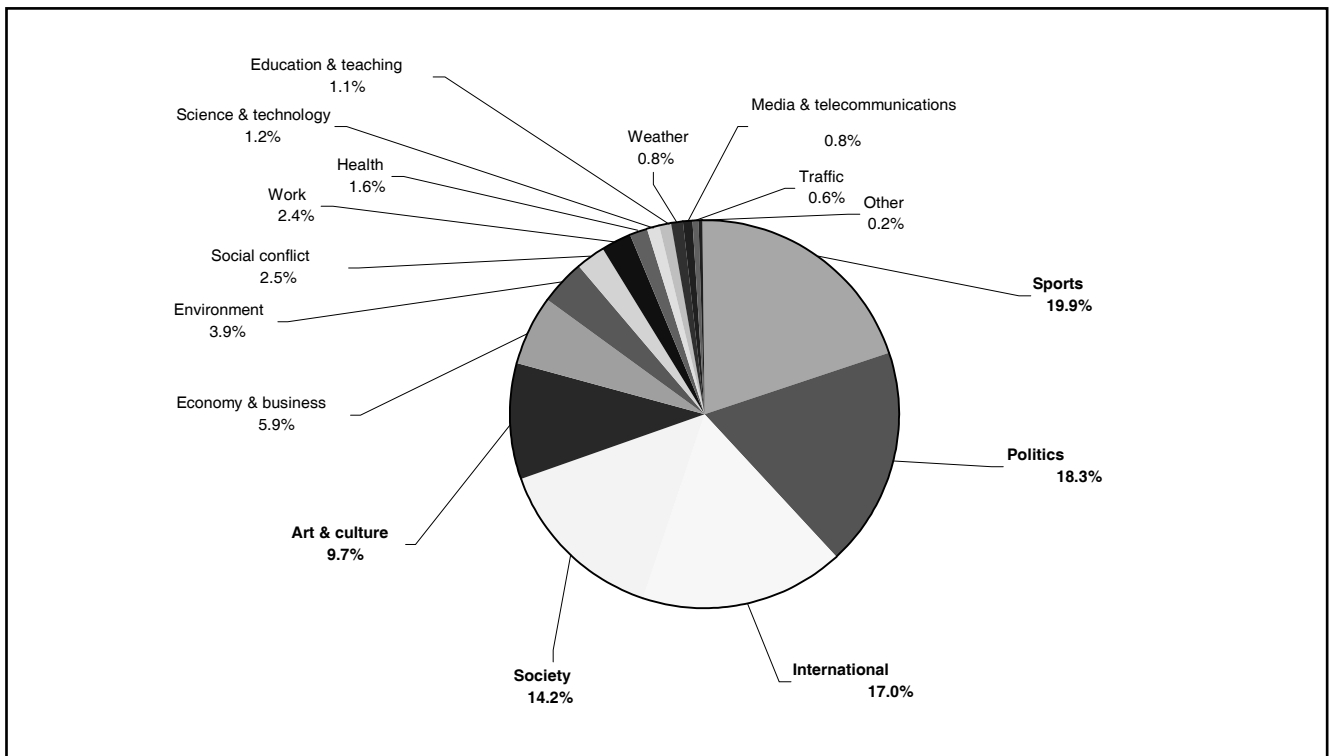
If, on the other hand, we look at which themes have been talked about least in the news broadcasts, we can see that, on all channels, there are few news items related to the *Media and telecommunications* and *Traffic*. These two indicators always appear in the last four themes of the five channels analysed. The remaining themes with little pre-

sence on all channels are *Education and Teaching*, *Science and Technology* and *Weather*. *Traffic* and *Weather*, however, are themes that are only used when the blocks of information on the roads and weather are included within the news broadcasts, explaining their low presence.

Localia, as occurs with its most frequently appearing themes, once again follows a slightly different schema and allocates very little time to *International*, a theme that is usually high priority on the other channels.

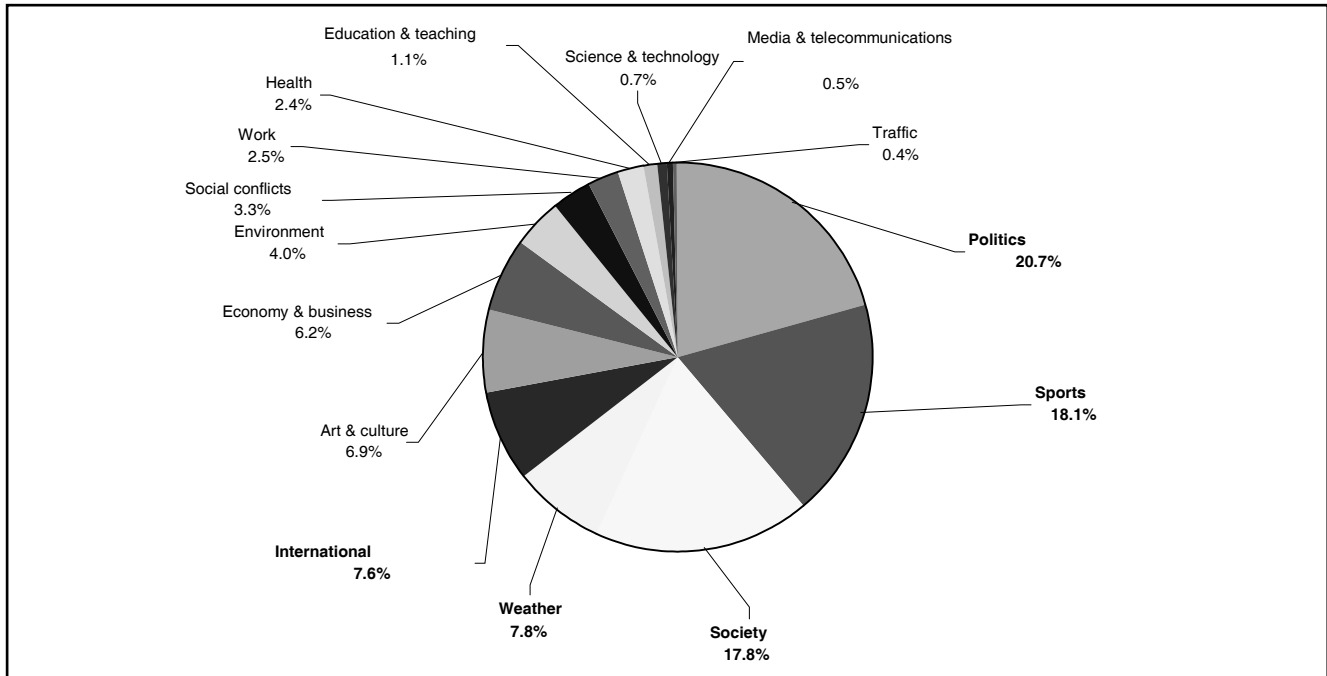
We may therefore conclude that all the channels except Localia follow a similar schema with regard to the importance given to themes. There are some themes that are always in a prime position on the television news agenda and there are other themes that are secondary. *Art and culture*, *Politics*, *International*, *Sports* and *Society* are the most important themes, while *Media and telecommunications*, *Education and Teaching* and *Science and Technology* are the themes with less presence.

Table 1. TV3. News time by thematic indicator during the period 2003-2005



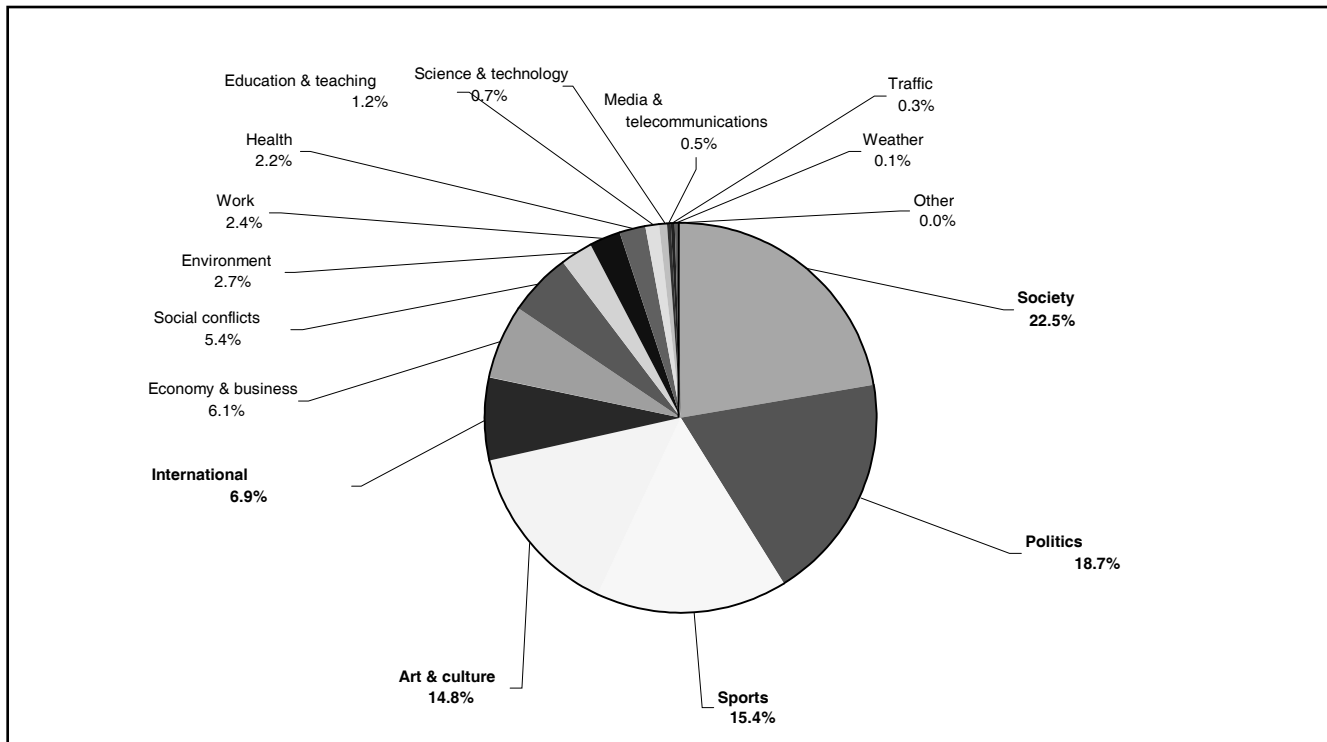
Source: in-house.

Table 2. TVE in Catalonia. News time by thematic indicator during the period 2003-2005



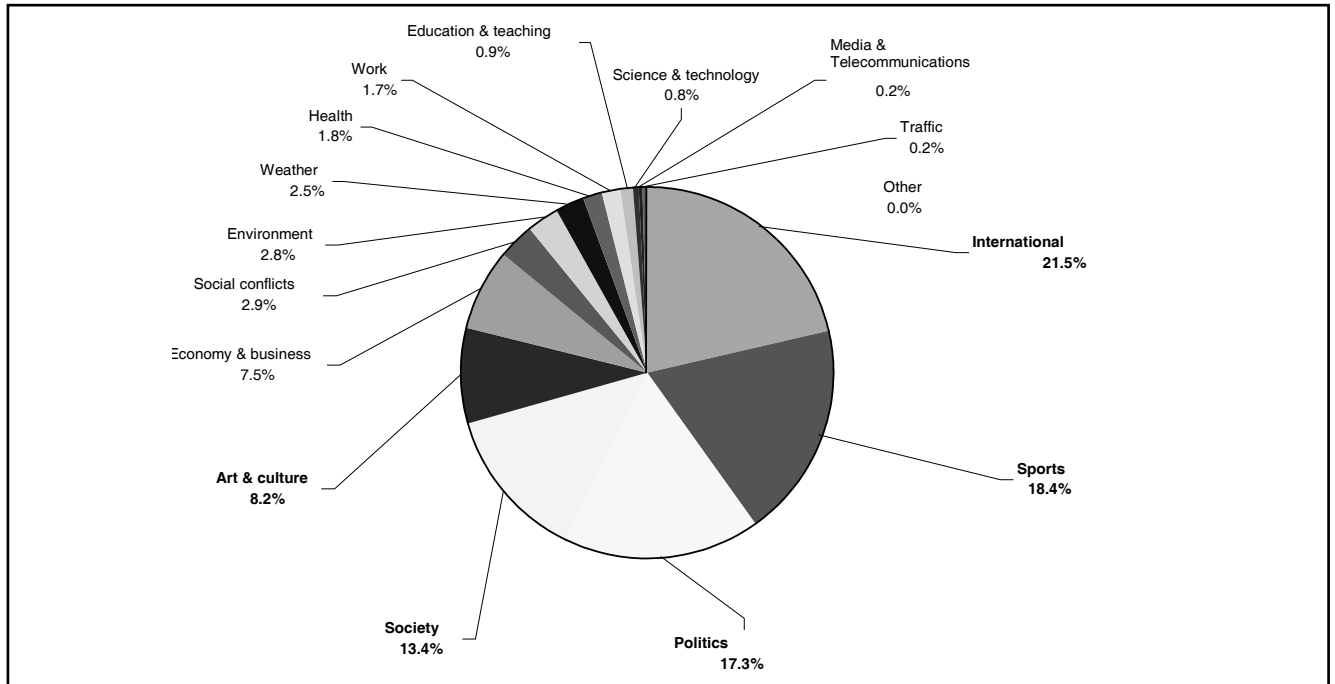
Source: in-house.

Table 3. BTV. News time by thematic indicator during the period 2003-2005



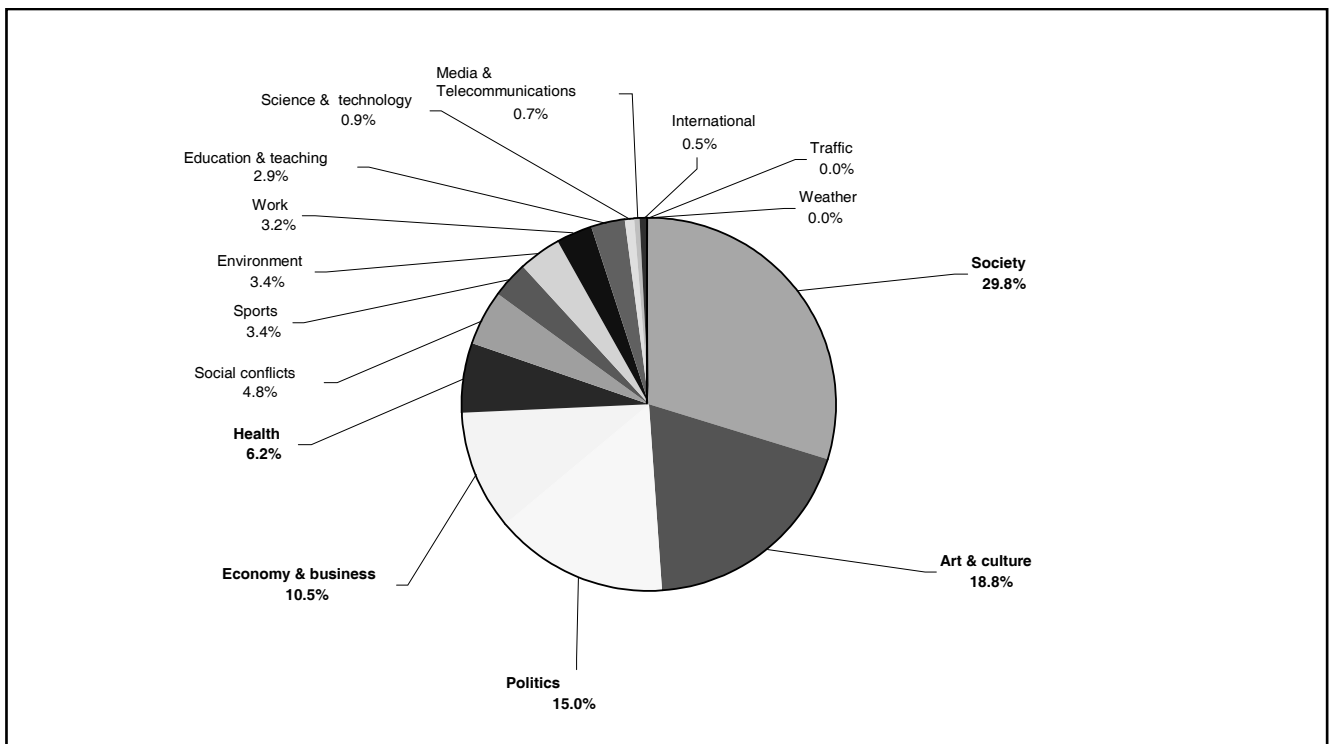
Source: in-house

Table 4. Citytv. News time by thematic indicator during the period 2003-2005



Source: in-house.

Table 5. Localia. News time by thematic indicator during the period 2003-2005



Source: in-house.

Table 6. All channels. Percentage appearance of the themes *Sports*, *Society* and *Weather* in the news broadcasts (2003-2005)

Channel	Sports (%)	Society (%)	Time (%)	Total (%)
TV3	19.9	14.2	0.8	34.9
TVE in Catalonia	18.1	17.8	7.8	43.7
BTV	15.4	22.5	0.1	38
Citytv	18.4	13.4	2.5	34.3
Localia	3.4	29.8	0.0	33.2

Source: in-house.

Do news broadcasts tend towards the banal and sensationalise the news?

With the data available, we can attempt to observe the sensational or banal nature of news broadcasts from two different perspectives: the dominant theme and the speaking time allocated. In this respect, a significant presence of news items grouped within the themes of *Society*, *Weather* and *Sports*, as well as inserts from the group of *Other*, would indicate a tendency to sensationalise in news broadcasts.

Presence of the themes *Society*, *Time* and *Sports*

A high volume of social, sports and weather news items, which would translate into the presence of the themes *Society*, *Weather* and *Sports*, would be a sign of a tendency towards the banal in news broadcasts. With regard to the theme *Weather*, we should note that, for the monthly reports on the observance of pluralism, only those news items are analysed that are contained within the news broadcasts, so that any block attached to the news but not forming part of it is not included (such is the case, on some channels, of the space entitled *El Temps*). So the theme of *Weather* has quite a low presence in the sample analysed except for those channels that usually include the weather forecast inside their news programme.

On all channels, the total of these three themes accounts for more than 33% of the total news time in a news programme (the block of headlines, sub-headlines and summary do not apply to themes). This percentage reaches 43.7%

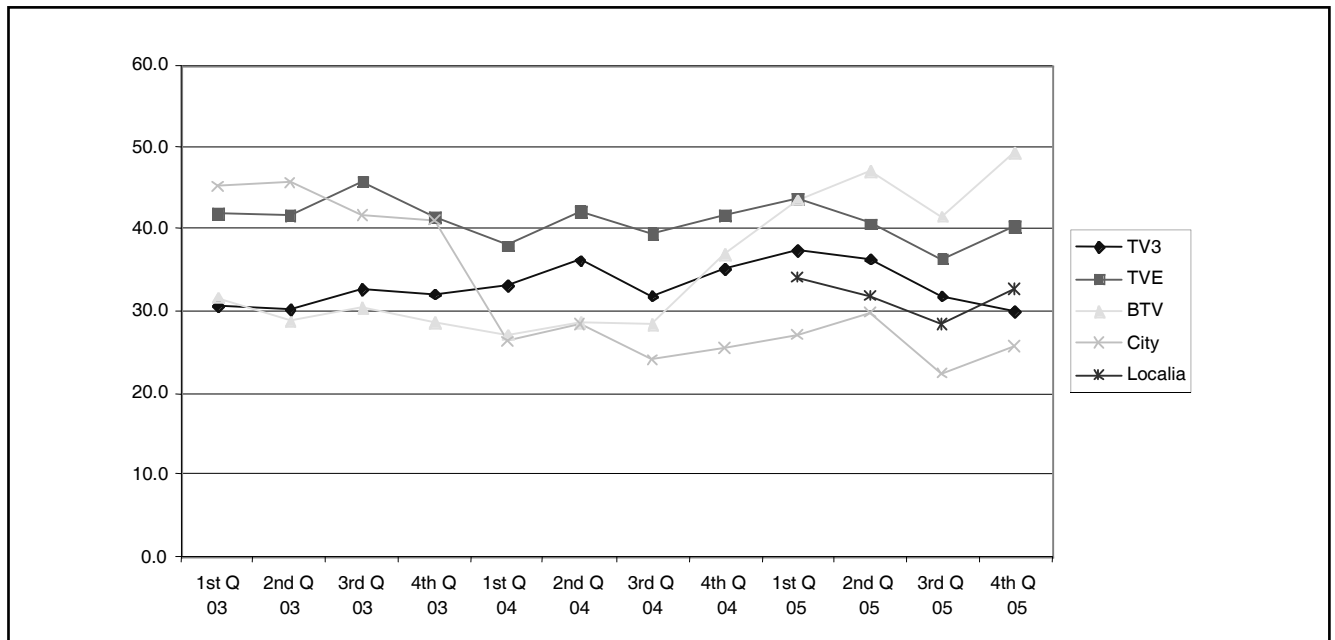
in the case of TVE in Catalonia, which usually includes weather information in its news programme. If we omit the theme of *Weather* due to the variation among channels, the total of *Sports* and *Society* is always higher than 30%: ranging from 31.8% on Citytv to 37.9% on BTV.

In the graph showing the three themes throughout the period analysed, it can be seen that, in spite of the high percentage of news items related to these themes, this percentage is maintained and does not vary significantly during the year or indeed over the years. In this respect, the theory that news broadcasts tend to be less dense in summer due to a lack of newsworthy events is not reflected on most broadcasters. The third quarter follows the general tone of the rest of the quarters, as the themes *Society*, *Sports* and *Weather* have a similar presence throughout the year. Density would therefore be determined by a more quantitative issue (duration of the news broadcasts) than a qualitative issue (content of the news broadcasts).

Unlike the rest of the broadcasters, BTV does vary in the fourth quarter of 2004. While the total of the themes *Society*, *Time* and *Sports* had been between 27% and 31% of news items with themes in the news programmes up to that quarter, as from this point the trend changes and an increase is initiated that culminates, in the fourth quarter of 2005, in a percentage of 49%. But this could be due to the fact that the evening news programme increased its duration and thereby the number of news items with the themes of *Sports* and *Society*.

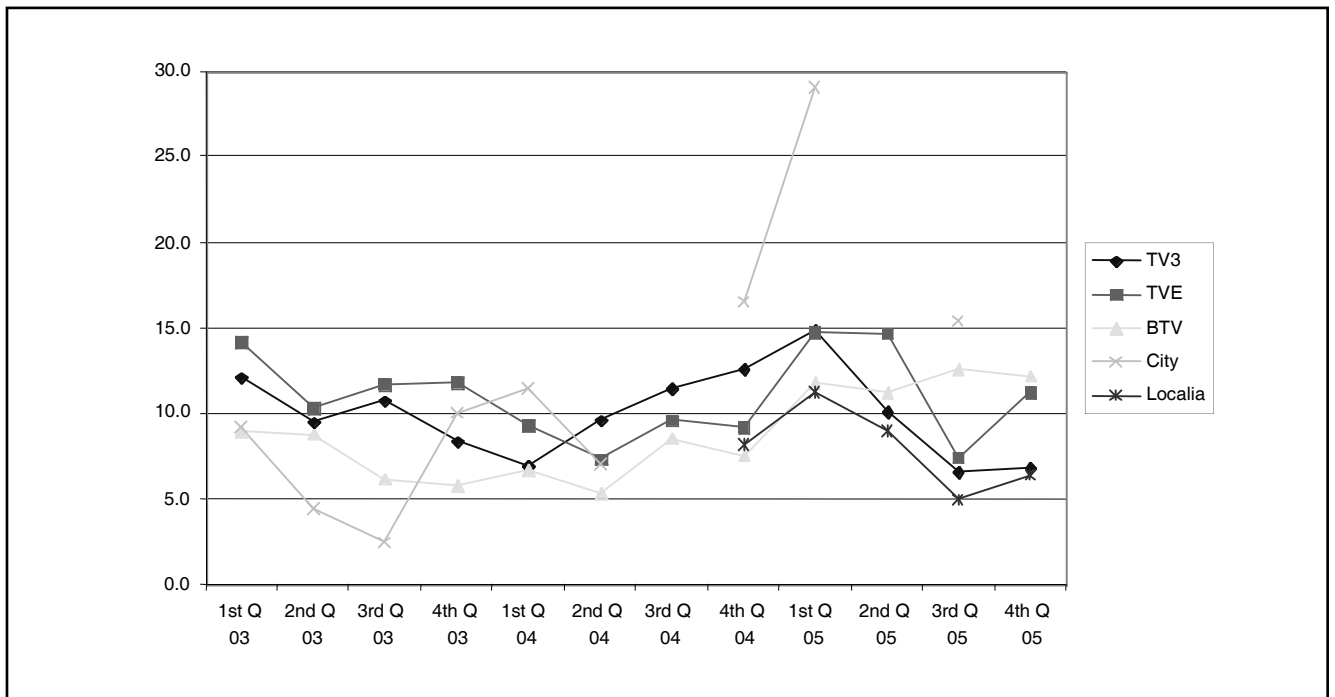
On the other hand, the graph shows a large variation between the fourth quarter in 2003 and the first quarter in 2004 on Citytv: the total of the three themes going from

Table 7. Quarterly trends in the themes *Society, Time and Sports*



Source: in-house.

Table 8. Quarterly trends in the *Other* group



Source: in-house.

41.2% to 26.3%. Alternatively, the news broadcasts on BTV, which had previously lasted between 15 and 20 minutes, now went to 5-7 minutes and we might suppose that the more banal news items were ignored in order to focus on truly newsworthy events.

Presence of inserts corresponding to the *Other* group

A large presence of inserts corresponding to the *Other* group might also be indicative of the banal nature of news broadcasts. This group includes occasional agents affected by the news in some way but that cannot be included in any

of the political or non-political groups established. A high presence of this group would indicate that the broadcaster tends to favour the opinion of people on the street above that of specialists in specific areas, thereby prioritising eyewitness information and taking a "proximity-based journalism" approach.

The graph shows that the *Other* group of non-political agents is stable over the three years and across the different quarters of the year. In this respect, the percentage of speaking time for agents classified in the *Other* group is always under 15% of speaking time for all agents.

Table 9. Main events, with regard to news time, in the news broadcasts of TV3 during the period 2003-2005

News item	Duration	% of total news time
Iraq conflict	97:28:47	5.9
Catalan statute	28:02:37	1.7
Immigration	24:12:36	1.5
Israel-Palestine conflict	20:35:52	1.2
Madrid bombing	17:56:28	1.1
Total news time	1.652:32:30	100

Source: in-house.

Table 10. Main events, with regard to news time, in the news broadcasts of TVE in Catalonia during the period 2003-2005

News item	Duration	% of total news time
Iraq conflict	21:16:19	3.6
Catalan statute	10:06:14	1.7
11th March bombing	8:53:23	1.5
Storms and cold or heat waves	7:37:23	1.3
Forum 2004	7:10:34	1.2
Immigration	6:46:13	1.2
Collapsed building in Carmel district	6:31:32	1.1
Traffic accidents and measures to avoid them	5:49:23	1.0
Total news time	584:55:01	100

Source: in-house.

However, Citytv is a case apart, with a highly variable trend for the *Other* group, in which the speaking time for political and non-political groups accounts for between 0% and 29% of the total.

We may state that, if banal and spectacular aspects can be measured via the high presence of social, sporting and weather news, as well as by a large number of inserts of agents corresponding to the *Other* group, then the news broadcasts for the period 2003-2005 allocated one third of their news time to these items and 5% to 15% of the speaking time to this group. BTV is the only channel with a growing percentage trend in these themes and this group of agents, especially as from the fourth quarter of 2004.

Events with more presence in the news broadcasts

With regard to how each of the events occurring over the three years was treated, news items were used that are the result of a series of items arising over time and concerning the same event.

The following tables show those events that exceeded 1% of total news time on each channel during the period analysed. It should be noted that Localia is the channel that differs most, given that the analysis of its news broadcasts started in November 2004 and, therefore, the main events discussed here are not the same as for channels with news programmes from January 2003.

As can be seen, the Iraq conflict, understood as all facts related to the war in this country, the post-war period, anti-war acts, the anniversary of the start of the war, suicide attempts and elections, occupy first place on all channels except Localia. The Catalan statute, which covers the proposal of a new Statute, the political summits held to discuss this and the debate concerning its preparation, was a highly significant theme on all channels except for BTV, where it is not among the top themes. On the other hand, on this channel the Forum 2004, which includes prior news items, subsequent news items and events while the Forum of Cultures was being held in Barcelona, was very important. The Collapsed building in the Carmel district of Barcelona, which includes all the events related to this collapse due to

the building work for the Barcelona underground system and news items related to the examining committee for this event is among the top themes on Localia, BTV and TVE in Catalonia. For its part, Immigration, which covers all news items related to this theme as well as reforms in immigration legislation, exceeds 1% of the total news time on all channels except Citytv. The Israel-Palestine conflict is a leading theme basically on TV3 and Citytv. Finally, the Madrid bombing, which covers both the terrorist attacks as well as the events taking place around these (police operation against the perpetrators of the Madrid bombing, examining committee, trial and anniversary of the event), has a high news time on all channels except for Localia.

At a particular level, TVE in Catalonia includes storms and cold or heat waves and traffic accidents and measures to avoid them among its events with most news time. For its part, Citytv covered ETA terrorism (attacks, demonstrations, announcements of ceasefires, anti-terrorist actions, trials of ETA members, special security plans and announcements from the terrorist group) as a sizeable block of news items. Localia also included the Financing of the autonomous community, the 2005 drought and Domestic violence.

Out of the news items most represented in the period 2003-2005, the Madrid bombing and the Collapsed building in the Carmel district are of particular note, *two exceptional events* according to Grossi's concept. These news items do not occur at the beginning of the analysis (January 2003) but later on, although they achieve as much importance as the others. In this respect, the Madrid bombing appears around the attacks of March 2004 and, in under two years, media attention dedicated to it is so significant it becomes one of the events with most news time. The same thing happens with the Collapsed building in the Carmel district which, since the event occurred on 27 January 2005, its news coverage, especially on TVE in Catalonia and BTV, is at a similar level to the rest of the news items with most news time.

To recapitulate, seven broad news items can be established that have been talked about on news broadcasts during the period 2003-2005: the Iraq conflict, the Catalan statute, Immigration, Forum 2004, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Collapsed building in the Carmel district and the Madrid bombings (the last two being exceptional events).