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TSF radio live - the journalistic coverage of the Chiado fire in Lisbon (1988)

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Abstract. On 25 August 1988, a fire broke out in the Chiado area of Lisbon. It is considered one of the biggest fires in an urban area in Portugal, having destroyed a vast built historical heritage and caused several victims. The Portuguese news radio, TSF, was the first media outlet to report the news by starting a long special live emission putting into practice an innovative model of radio journalism for that time in Portugal which was based on the priority given to live informative reporting. The experience of this long live report was replicated in the following years by TSF in the coverage of other events. In this article, we analyse TSF's live coverage of the fire and reflect on the role of this experience in the journalistic model implemented by the radio in the following years.

Keywords: TSF, Radio, Chiado Fire, Live coverage, Portugal.

[es] La radio TSF en directo - la cobertura periodística del incendio del Chiado en Lisboa (1988)

Resumen. El día 25 de agosto de 1988, deflagró un incendio en la zona del Chiado, en Lisboa, que es considerado uno de los mayores registrados en zona urbana en Portugal habiendo destruido un vasto patrimonio histórico edificado y causado varias víctimas. La radio informativa portuguesa, TSF, fue el primer medio de comunicación social en dar la noticia iniciando una larga emisión especial en directo, colocando en práctica un modelo de periodismo radiofónico innovador para la época en Portugal que se basaba en la prioridad dada al relato informativo en directo. La experiencia de este largo reportaje en directo acabó por ser replicada en los años siguientes por la TSF en la cobertura de otros acontecimientos. En el presente artículo, analizamos la cobertura en directo del incendio realizada por la TSF y reflexionamos sobre el papel de esta experiencia en el modelo periodístico que la radio implementó en los años siguientes.

Palabras clave: TSF, Radio, Incendio del Chiado, Directo, Portugal.

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1. Introduction

The Portuguese radio TSF is the result of the liberalization of the Portuguese radio sector that occurred in the late 1980s. The project emerged from the initiative of a group of radio professionals who wanted to create a station focused on journalism and that would break with the information model on the radio that predominated in the country until then. The proposal was to create an informative radio station, in which live reporting would play a decisive role.

TSF was created in 1981 but only started broadcasting in 1988, even though the Portuguese Radio Law did not allow it. This means, therefore, that when it carried out the live report on the Chiado fire, which we will analyze, it was still a pirate radio. The movement of pirate radios in Portugal is between 1977 and 1988, and about 600 small stations were created in the country, although the exact number is difficult to ascertain since many broadcasted for a few days and, of course, were illegal (Bonixe, 2019; Reis, 2014). Most of the pirate radios that appeared in this period in Portugal were amateur projects, but TSF, along with other broadcasters such as CMR, Radiogeste or Rádio Cidade, integrates the group of more structured and professional projects. The liberalization of the radio sector in Portugal would only happen in 1989 after the law had been approved the previous year. TSF emerged in a context of effervescence in the radio sector in Portugal, and that can also be extended to the Portuguese media system. The last

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years of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s represented a dynamic period in the media in Portugal, with important projects appearing in the Portuguese press, such as the cases of *Público* (in 1990), or *Independente* (in 1988). It was also during this period that the monopoly of public television ended when the first broadcasting licenses were granted to two private Portuguese television stations, SIC (1992) and TVI (1993).

It was, therefore, still during the period when it broadcasted only to Lisbon as a pirate radio that TSF made one of the most important broadcasts in its history and that is still remembered today as a relevant milestone in the recent history of Portuguese radio journalism. The live news coverage of the Chiado fire in Lisbon - one of the most serious fires in urban areas in Portugal - presented TSF as a news radio station with a clear vocation for live and breaking news coverage.

This article aims to contribute to the knowledge of that informative moment in Portuguese radio through the analysis of excerpts of that news coverage, interviews with professionals who were part of the team of journalists who participated in the live coverage, and crossing with the available literature on radio information in Portugal and TSF radio's informative model.

2. The chiado fire

The Chiado fire broke out in the historic area of Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, on 25 August 1988. The fire caused two deaths and 70 injured, besides destroying many historical buildings in the Lisbon area, known as Baixa Pombalina (Fernandes & Fidalgo, 2020:154), because it was rebuilt by Marquês de Pombal after the 1755 earthquake. About two thousand people were left jobless and five families lost their homes and were rehoused. Due to its dimensions, the Chiado fire of 1988 is considered one of the most serious fires in urban areas in Portugal. The fire was fought by 1150 firemen, 275 vehicles, and 22 tankers that pumped more than 22 thousand liters of water. In addition to the firemen, other means of relief and support from Lisbon were mobilized, such as “the fire services of Lisbon airport, the intervention police, and Red Cross teams, which are starting to set up posts in various locations, with the city's hospitals all on standby”. (“Tinha tanto de bonito como de horror. O incêndio do Chiado visto por uma bombeira que o combateu”, *Observador*, 28-VIII-2018).

Even today, the precise time for the start of the fire does not gather consensus. The newspaper *Diário de Lisboa* mentioned that the alert was given at 3am, while TSF and *Diário de Notícias* talk about 5:20am. The start time of the fire was then somewhere between 1 a.m. and 4 a.m. (“O Chiado ardeu há 30 anos e ainda ninguém sabe porquê”, *TSF*, 25-VIII-2018).

Among the destroyed buildings, the Armazéns Grandella stands out, an important commercial space with 11 floors opened in the 19th century. In addition to this, many other historical and commercial buildings were also affected by the fire, such as *Perfumaria da Moda*, the *Grandes Armazéns do Chiado*, *Estabelecimento Eduardo Martins*, *Pastelaria Ferrari*, *Casa Batalha* and the *Valentim de Carvalho* archive (the entire estate was lost), accounting for 18 buildings destroyed by the flames.

The fire quickly took on national proportions, with the President of the Portuguese Republic at the time, Mário Soares, addressing the scene and calling it a “national disaster” (“O Chiado ardeu há 30 anos e ainda ninguém sabe porquê”, *TSF*, 25-VIII-2018).

After the fire, the aftermath operations lasted almost two months. “What remained, after the flames were put out, were buildings in ruins, streets turned into rivers that could not give flow to so much water, and many fire-fighters complaining about the lack of means” (“O Chiado ardeu há 30 anos e ainda ninguém sabe porquê”, *TSF*, 25-VIII-2018).

The causes of the fire are not known. In the first days after the accident, the possibility of arson was raised, which was never confirmed. But, the process would end up being inconclusive and closed years later.

Apart from the human and property consequences that it caused, the fire in the heart of Lisbon brought to the table a debate around the very action of civil protection. “The fire laid bare many of the deficiencies existing at the time, regarding emergency planning and fire prevention, in particular the lack of self-protection mechanisms” (Fernandes & Fidalgo, 2020:155).

The Chiado fire was an event that marked the history and the paradigm shift of the Fire Department and the culture on fire protection measures in buildings and generated from the first moment the media attention, both nationally and internationally (Fernandes & Fidalgo, 2020: 144). In the Portuguese case, TSF radio was the first media to report the news and it is that special live broadcast that we will analyze next.

3. The tsf news project

TSF was born in 1981 on the initiative of a group of radio professionals, unhappy with the existing radio model in Portugal. The group was made up of 17 elements: Adelino Gomes, Albertino Antunes, António Jorge Branco, António Rego, Armando Pires, David Borges, Duarte Soares, Emidio Rangel, Fernando Alves, Jaime Fernandes, Joaquim Furtado, Joao Canedo, José Videira, Mário Pereira e Teresa Moutinho. Some of whom already

had experience in radio, but who were unhappy with the way of doing radio in Portugal at the time (Bonixe, 2019). For that reason, they wanted to create a different radio station with a strong focus on information, football and breaking news.

Teresa Moutinho was one of the founding professionals of TSF radio and on the reasons that led to the creation of the radio station she says the following: “We want to be an alternative to the information that is currently being made in Portugal. We don’t have working conditions in radio, so we can only create those conditions with our means” (Gonçalves, 1999: 31).

However, the Portuguese law in 1981 did not foresee the existence of other radios, apart from RDP, the state broadcaster, and *Renascença*, a broadcaster belonging to the Catholic Church. For that reason, TSF, apart from some experimental broadcasts, only started broadcasting in 1988.

Until that date, the Portuguese radio sector went through a period of great effervescence when hundreds of pirate radios appeared all over the country (Reis, 2014; Bonixe, 2019), claiming that the radio sector could not continue to be under a duopoly: RDP, the state radio, and *Rádio Renascença*, the Portuguese Catholic broadcaster.

TSF is therefore a product of the process of liberalization of the radio sector in Portugal, which began in 1977 and lasted until the publication of the law in 1988. In that period, besides TSF, around 600 pirate radio stations were created in Portugal. The number of pirate broadcasters, besides being inaccurate (it should be noted that they broadcasted illegally and therefore without any official registration) hides the dimension of the different projects. The period of pirate radio stations in Portugal gave birth to very different broadcasters. Some with very reduced technical and human resources and others, like TSF, with a professional organizational structure and are owned by financially strong companies. The TSF project passed very early on through the creation of a journalistic radio station with a strong bet on journalism and live news coverage, as referred to by Francisco Sena Santos, a journalist from the station in the early years of TSF. “Suddenly a radio station appeared and started making news every half hour, waking up ministers at 6 or 7 am in the morning, going to restaurants to wait for politicians” (“A Escola da Rádio”, *Público*, I-III-1998:42).

TSF managed, therefore, since its foundation to stand out from most of the pirate radio projects that emerged in the country. It had a newsroom that mixed experienced professionals with young journalists had a strong presence in the Lisbon area and a very clear bet on information, which distinguished it from the competition.

TSF also played an important role in pressuring the then governments to approve the law liberalizing radio in Portugal. One of the most important protest actions was the one that took place on 17th November 1988 when TSF brought together in a single broadcast about two hundred Portuguese pirate radios contesting the measure of the Portuguese Government to force the closure of the radios until the result of the public tender for the attribution of frequencies was known. Although he did not participate in this broadcast, this was an idea that came from António Colaço, one of the main protagonists of the struggle for the liberalisation of local radio stations in Portugal (Reis, Ribeiro & Portela, 2014: 141). The closure of the radios would mean the loss of advertising revenue that the pirate radios, although illegal, were already earning.

Until it obtained the license to broadcast, TSF was creating its structure and in 1987 it promoted a training course for journalists and announcers from which the first radio professionals would emerge. This course lasted six months and it aimed to create a model for radio journalism that was different from the one that had been practiced in Portugal until then. The course was idealized by Emídio Rangel, one of the founders of TSF and its first director, together with Adelino Gomes, already at the time one of the leading Portuguese journalists and who summarized thus the model of radio journalism that was intended to be implemented at TSF of which the course would be a promoter:

“For us, the radio journalist is a guy who completely masters the radio language and has a vast and comprehensive culture. Naturalness over artificiality means that news programs should not be well-read but rather well told. News reports are not read but said, even when they are written. It also means a closeness to the listener, in that he listens in his shirtsleeves, and finally, it implies that oral language needs a different kind of punctuation. It was the cut with the dependence on newspapers” (Adelino Gomes, personal interview, 11th July 2008).

The style of radio TSF was in turn inspired by a French radio model that Edouard Guibert, a French radio journalist then connected to the Institut National de l’Audiovisuel had presented some time earlier in a training course in Portugal and it was this way of doing radio, very much based on improvisation, informality, and live reporting, that TSF wanted to implement with the 1987 course.

“People were trained for a model. The end was for us to create an information-oriented radio station. To make a live radio station. There was a period of training where everyone went and did live shows. Short live reports, long live reports. A generation of journalists was created that still exists today” (Francisco Sena Santos, personal interview, 4th July 2008).

It was a rupture with the radio journalism that was practiced in Portugal and a radio station focused on information and live broadcasting was born. The journalism model at TSF was characterized by the possibility of going on air at

any time to give current information and, if necessary, prolonging the live transmission for several minutes or even hours, interrupting the normal radio programming.

“The course taught the journalist responsibility about what it is to be a journalist. The idea of the journalist as a medical intensivist. He is someone who is always on call 24 on 24 hours. It created a journalistic culture marked by rigor, ethics, and deontology. A lot of critical listening to the news of the time. The thoroughness of the critical listening went to the point of listening to all the news that were broadcast during the experimental period of the radio” (Francisco Sena Santos, personal interview, 18th, May 2021)

Radio journalists were trained to be on the street, gathering information and transmitting it to the radio, which adopted a very flexible broadcasting structure. The radio slogan “The news does not choose the time” was in itself the exponent of this philosophy that allowed that at any moment information could enter the broadcast said by a reporter who was outside, without regard to the limits imposed by the regular programming.

“The course prepared us very well in terms of ethics and the values of journalism. It prepared us to be resourceful, it prepared us for improvisation, for the adrenaline of radio. We were trained to write, to be live. TSF had a model that other radio stations did not have, which was news every half hour and that forced us to be very quick”. (Elisabete Caramelo, personal interview, 15th May 2021)

The priority was up-to-date information, even if this meant taking spaces from the radio programming, including the newscasts. This flexibility in radio programming allied to a model that instilled in journalists a logic of immediacy and quick response to current news ended up being determinant in the live coverage of Chiado fire, which we will analyze next.

4. Methodology

This study aims to characterize the news coverage made by the Portuguese radio station TSF to the Chiado fire, in 1988 in downtown Lisbon, to understand what role this moment of radio journalism represented for the informative model of the station, which asserted itself since its inception as a live news radio station.

Our research is based on a theoretical framework that addresses issues such as the liberalization of broadcasting in Portugal, live as a journalistic discourse privileged by radio and Portuguese radio journalism. In this study we sought to characterise the live broadcasting carried out, identifying the broadcasting model adopted, the informative management of the event and the distribution of reporters in the field. The research is based on a literature review on TSF’s live coverage of the Chiado fire and on a content analysis of the interviews conducted with three journalists who integrated the broadcasting team, Francisco Sena Santos (coordinator), Elisabete Caramelo and Nuno Roby, both reporters. We also heard a piece from TSF radio summarising the broadcast, which is available on the radio website.

5. Live coverage of the chiado fire

The live coverage of the Chiado fire on August 25th, 1988 was the first big test of TSF’s model of radio journalism. The radio sought, as we have seen, to create a structure that would allow the live monitoring of the events by enhancing the flexibility and improvisation of its reporters. These ideas had been an important part of the training course for professionals we have already referred to earlier and which is pointed out as a key to success, not only in the case under analysis but for the whole model of journalism at TSF in the following years.

Although it had started its regular broadcasts less than a year ago, live news coverage on TSF already represented a practice on that radio station in 1988, because, before this coverage of the Chiado fire, the station had already done live reports of other events, such as a general transport strike that paralyzed mobility in the Portuguese capital. But the Chiado fire was effectively the first big test for TSF structure because it was an unforeseen event.

This model ended up representing a facilitating ground for TSF to be able to broadcast the fire live for hours without having to be interrupted by musical programs or others. The radio time-signal was always broadcasted in the background and the anchor only gave short information about the weather. All the priority was given to the interventions of the reporters who were on the ground. “There were no commercials during the broadcast. And nobody got upset. The owners of the radio understood that it was a footbridge for the radio to move forward” (Francisco Sena Santos, personal interview, 18th May 2021).

The coverage of the fire started at 5:23 a.m. on the morning of August 25, almost by chance. The TSF journalist, Nuno Roby, lived near the burnt area and managed to spot a column of smoke in the Chiado area, which

led him to call the radio station giving the information, although without having the notion of the proportions that the fire would have. “I lived in a house in Lisbon overlooking the city center. It was hot, I couldn’t sleep. I heard a strange noise, went to the window and saw everything burning” (Nuno Roby, personal interview, 17th May 2021).

Francisco Sena Santos, one of the founders of TSF radio, was the morning radio journalist on duty and it was he who coordinated the entire live operation of the fire. At 5.30 a.m, he gave a small information. At 6 am, still without the real dimension of what was going to happen, information was again given in the newscast.

It was only at 7 a.m. and after verifying that the smoke coming from that area of Lisbon was not dissipating, and on the contrary, it was gaining dimension, that TSF news team was mobilized. During this period, the radio newsroom had received several phone calls from local residents alerting them to the existence of gas canisters in the area.

The mobilization of the radio journalists is another curious fact of the voluntarism of the TSF reporters, as none were contacted directly by the editors for the report: “It was an event that we were not expecting and then it was a corporate feeling that existed in all that youth. You didn’t have to phone someone and say ‘come, we need your help’. No, after 10 minutes they were there” (Nuno Roby, personal interview, 17th May, 2021).

In fact, it was because they heard on the radio that Chiado was on fire that they went there on their own initiative.

“TSF had a mix of young and more experienced journalists. One of the cultures installed in the training course was that the journalist was a journalist 24 hours a day. And there was the habit of listening to the radio in the morning. It was this habit that made it possible to have this exemplary coverage. There were journalists who worked together and lived together. And it was enough for one house to know for everybody to know. People started to appear in places close to the fire. There was no way of contacting them, so they were called by radio. They realized that they might be needed and they showed up. The journalists were placed in various places, but in strategic places where there were telephone booths”. (Francisco Sena Santos, personal interview, 18th May 2021).

The coverage involved ten reporters distributed throughout the Chiado area. This distribution took two factors into account. Firstly, it was necessary to understand which parts of the city were in greater danger of being destroyed. Secondly, in an era without mobile phones, it was fundamental to place the reporters near the phone boxes so that they could do the live interventions whenever it was justified.

Coverage of the fire was always done live and providing information about the scene on the ground, with frequent descriptions by journalists present in the area.

“There was a concern to know if there were people, victims, the origins of the fire, what was being done to prevent the fire from spreading. I remember seeing facades collapsing and Carmo street all in flames” (Elisabete Caramelo, personal interview, 15th May 2021).

At the same time, the reporters tried to listen to the residents and shopkeepers of that whole area, and in many cases it was the people themselves who contacted the radio, witnessing what was happening there.

The non-stop journalistic coverage only finished close to midnight. TSF broadcast on that day was filled with interventions of reporters on the spot and with the presence of heritage and urbanism experts in the studio who helped to understand the historical, heritage, and cultural importance of that area for Lisbon and even for the country.

In TSF, the decision to make a special live coverage is related to factors such as the importance of the event and its potential to generate informative moments, therefore “the special live coverages end when the event on which they fall reaches a moment that can be considered informatively conclusive” (Proença, 2006, p. 246).

In the case of TSF coverage, the broadcast lasted much longer than the event itself, since the fire was extinguished in the late morning of 25 August and the broadcast lasted until late evening. The radio continued to follow the issue for several hours in a model of discussing the event itself and above all anticipating the consequences of the disaster. This model was achieved through the presence of heritage, culture, and architecture experts in the studio who helped to contextualize the event and thus prolonged the broadcast for twelve hours when the event that originated it (the fire) had a duration of about 5 hours. This practice fits in logic that radio tends to follow of finding “stories” that fill the informational device on the radio and (Golding & Elliot, 1978) based, as we have seen, on high informational productivity.

This feedback results from journalistic observation and reporting of events and their repeated presence on air. It means that other news facts emerge from the main fact that originated them (Bourgade, 2006). The coverage of the Chiado fire is a good example of this. For a while, the focus of the reportage shifted to one of the access streets to the fire, since the Lisbon City Hall had put up flower planters that prevented fire engines from passing and thus reaching the fire. This aspect generated several criticisms to the mayor of Lisbon at the time and was enough to mobilize a reporter from TSF to the spot. The live broadcast started at 5.30 a.m. and only ended close to midnight, totalizing around 18 hours non-stop.

6. Live reporting as an editorial value

TSF presented itself in the Portuguese context as a broadcaster that sought to follow an all-news model, according to which priority was given to journalistic information 24 hours a day. This model fits into a classical theoretical framework about the radio medium that is subscribed by several authors (Golding&Elliot, 1979; Faus Belau, 1981; Crisell, 1994; Hendy, 2000, Bourgade, 2006) and that places radio as a breaking-news media. as this helps to enhance its media device, based on time and sound, characteristics that give it immediacy and speed. Radio has created a system of information available that is based on the constant updating of news. This system is particularly evident in the morning and late afternoon periods when the radio audience is characterised by drive-time and there is a greater demand from listeners for journalistic content. Radio produces information that daily provides a framework of reality that “must have occurred in the twenty-four hours between bulletins to merit inclusion” (Golding & Elliot, 1979, p.121).

It is in this sense that radio-news, the model that TSF wanted to follow in Portugal, bases its production, routines and daily practices to provide information at short notice and, if possible, live, as is the case of the coverage of the Chiado fires analysed here.

It is important to mention that TSF was not, of course, the first radio station in Portugal to cover news events live. Other transmissions were made previously, such as the cases of the coverage of the Lisbon floods by Rádio Clube Português (Henriques, 2019) or the 1st of May in 1974 by Emissora Nacional, are just two examples. However, TSF was in the Portuguese case the radio station that, due to its information-oriented characteristics, followed as part of its editorial structure, a line directed towards direct information. The coverage of the Chiado fire was the first big step in that direction.

Rui Gonçalves (1999) studied the way TSF radio journalists face the practice of their profession in that station. The author mentions that TSF radio journalists feel “with little reluctance” that live news coverage is the “flagship of the station”. Gonçalves underlines that despite the fact that the live reporting subtracts journalistic mediation, TSF journalists internalized this news treatment as something inculcated in their professional culture and in particular in the professional culture of radio journalists. This way of seeing the profession had practical expression in the coverage that the radio made of the Chiado fire in 1988 and led the station by its operational nature to see this type of broadcasts as “one of the instruments originally set up to distinguish itself from its competitors” (Proença, 2006:246).

TSF was in 1988, as we have seen, a pirate radio and, although its organizational structure already resembled a legal and professional broadcaster, the truth is that the law that had been approved in that same year provided for a public contest to obtain a broadcasting license from which, naturally, TSF, would not know if it would come out the winner. For this reason, the broadcasting of the coverage of the Chiado fire, while representing a risk for a radio station that had just appeared on the market, was simultaneously proof of life and affirmation in the Portuguese radio space.

TSF, therefore, wanted to practice an information model that was different from what the competition was doing, namely in relation to live reporting and special coverage on public events. TSF boosted radio as a breaking news media and assumes itself as the first to transmit public events of public interest. This model was little used in Portugal at the time, since the competition (RDP and Rádio Renascença) focused on information only during news time, with little space to overlap with regular programming.

The live coverage of the Chiado fire was therefore for TSF the putting into practice what Paddy Scannel notes: “Radio and television are live media. Like the telephone, the talk they produce exists in real time: the moment of speaking and the moment of hearing are the same” (1991:1). In the same sense, David Hendy recalls that live radio enhances its own communicational device while differentiating it from other media: “the relative technical simplicity of producing radio means that it is significantly easier and cheaper to produce live radio than to produce live television” (Hendy, 2000:88).

On the other hand, live broadcasting generates an illusion in the listeners in relation to what is being reported, enhancing emotion and increasing the danger of “drifting into deception, ineffectiveness or, more banally, the absolute waste of time” (Minc, 1994:122). For Adelino Gomes, while admitting that live radio does not allow us to be “fully informed”, considers that live reporting is the “vocation of radio” when he says that “(...) radio puts the listener to see and participate in the event while giving him the feeling of knowing, without intermediaries, the great figures of politics (or sport, culture, etc.)” (Gomes, s/d: 82).

According to the journalists interviewed in this study, proximity and emotion could not have been left out of this journalistic coverage, especially because they were seeing the destruction of a heritage value to the city and to the country.

“I remember very well how impressive it was to see the Grandella and Chiado burning. Rua do Carmo all in flames. I remember being in Rua Garrett, very close to the Chiado department stores, and seeing the facade collapsing. It was a mixture of dust, flames, and people clutching their heads” (Elisabete Caramelo, personal interview, 15th May 2021).

This more emotional side that emerges from this type of journalistic coverage was also seen in other situations, as Francisco Sena Santos recognizes: “At a certain point a reporter says that the flames were several kilometers high” (Personal Interview, 18th, May 2021).

This positioning of TSF journalists in the face of the live radio generated a kind of paradigm on the radio that, in some moments following the coverage of the Chiado fire, will not have been managed in the best way:

“It led to some overconfidence and contributed to the idea that everything could be live. The idea that the TSF microphone had to be everywhere. There was an excess on the part of everyone who let themselves be carried away by success. Live broadcasting became the norm and there were many abuses of it. Everything was transmitted live. The filter was lost. The excellent work that was done led to some dazzlement” (Francisco Sena Santos, Personal interview, 18th May 2021).

For the journalist who conducted the live broadcast, these aspects may have been one of the reasons why, in the beginning, TSF’s journalistic coverage was not very well seen by the competition that looked at it as a “kind of marketing operation” of a radio station that was appearing and that the fire “had not been that serious” (Francisco Sena Santos, Personal interview, 18th May, 2021). Even so, TSF won its first Gazeta Award, which is the main prize awarded to journalism in Portugal. For journalist Francisco Sena Santos, the live coverage of such an important epochal event for Lisbon proved that “a private radio station can also do public service and that in this particular case it benefited from the competitors’ lack of attendance” (Francisco Sena Santos, Personal interview, 18th May 2021).

7. Final considerations

The Portuguese news radio, TSF, represents an innovative project in Portugal in the context of radio journalism. To a large extent, this innovation was due to the implementation of a journalism model based on breaking news and on enhancing the live reporting and special coverage of extraordinary events.

This TSF model was thought out and structured from the very beginning, as evidenced by the fact that a journalism training course was created even before the radio was authorized to broadcast in Portugal, given that liberalization would only come with the 1988 law. The course is, as we have seen, pointed out as the structuring element of a professional culture that sees radio as a privileged medium for the dissemination of breaking news, which requires a quick response from reporters. Live reporting as a journalistic narrative, despite implying several issues as we exposed, is absorbed as a flag by TSF journalists.

The coverage that the radio station made of the Chiado fire, on August 25, 1988, ended up being the practical expression of a way of seeing radio journalism that TSF cultivated in its professionals and that it tried to transmit in the training course we have already referred to.

There are, therefore, three moments that we consider relevant and that justify the importance that the coverage of the Chiado Fire represents for TSF and Portuguese radio journalism.

The first one, we place it in the period *before* the coverage, when TSF prepared the terrain, training its professionals for quick response journalism, of permanent follow-up of the events, endowing the reporters with the awareness of the importance of radio as a credible, rigorous and ethical informative medium.

The second moment, we consider the *moment of the coverage*, when TSF journalists put into practice a model that, although it had already been tested in the field with the coverage of live events, had never done so when facing an unforeseen event with the dimension that the Chiado fire reached.

Finally, the *after*. What TSF journalists took from the experience of live reporting the Chiado fire is that it is possible to enhance radio through live news coverage. This moment was a model followed in subsequent situations with the broadcasting of live specials of events such as the police demonstration known as Dry and Wet (1989), coverage of events in East Timor (1999), or the protests on the 25th of April Bridge in Lisbon (1994).

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8.1. Press articles

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8.2. Personal Interviews

Adelino Gomes, promoter of the TSF journalist trainer course in 1987 (Interviewed in 4th July 2008).

Elisabete Caramelo, TSF journalist in 1988, (interviewed in 15th May 2021)

Francisco Sena Santos, TSF founder and journalist in 1988, (interviewed in 4th July 2008 and 18th May 2021)

Nuno Roby, TSF journalist in 1988, (interviewed in 17th May 2021)