

INVISIBLE AND VULNERABLE, YET RESILIENT: A PORTRAIT OF CENTENARY REGIONAL PRESS IN PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT

In a context of deep crisis in the media sector and growing news deserts across vast regions of Portugal, this study maps the centenary regional press as a resilient expression of proximity journalism. Using a mixed-methods approach — combining documentary analysis and a quantitative survey — 40 publications over 100 years old and still active nationwide were identified and analysed. The study examines their geographical distribution, periodicity, medium (print and/or digital) and editorial board composition in terms of gender. The results indicate a strong territorial anchoring of these publications and significant regional asymmetries, revealing concerning patterns, such as a fragile digital transition, limited gender diversity in leadership within a framework of vertical segregation, and persistent economic vulnerability. Despite these limitations, these newspapers continue to play a relevant role in preserving collective memory, fostering social cohesion and strengthening local democracy. Moreover, they offer essential insights into practices of resistance and adaptation that challenge the decline of proximity journalism. Finally, the study reflects on the public value of this press and the urgency of policies recognising it as informational heritage and a common good, essential to guaranteeing the right to information in peripheral and under-represented regions.

KEYWORDS

regional journalism, proximity journalism, centenary press, gender inequality, democracy

INVISÍVEL E VULNERÁVEL, MAS RESILIENTE: UM RETRATO DA IMPRENSA REGIONAL CENTENÁRIA EM PORTUGAL

RESUMO

Num contexto de profunda crise no setor mediático e de crescente desertificação informativa em vastas regiões de Portugal, este estudo propõe um mapeamento da imprensa regional centenária enquanto expressão resiliente do jornalismo de proximidade. Através de uma metodologia mista — combinando análise documental e levantamento quantitativo — foram identificadas e analisadas 40 publicações com mais de 100 anos de existência, ainda em atividade no território nacional. O estudo examina a sua distribuição geográfica, periodicidade, formato (papel e/ou digital) e composição das direções editoriais em termos de género. Os resultados apontam

para uma forte ancoragem territorial destas publicações e assimetrias regionais significativas e revelam padrões preocupantes, como a frágil transição digital, a reduzida diversidade de género nas chefias num quadro de segregação vertical e a persistente vulnerabilidade económica. Apesar dessas limitações, estes jornais continuam a desempenhar um papel relevante na preservação da memória coletiva, na coesão social e no fortalecimento da democracia local. Além disso, oferecem pistas importantes sobre práticas de resistência e adaptação que desafiam o declínio do jornalismo de proximidade. O estudo propõe, por fim, uma reflexão sobre o valor público desta imprensa e a urgência de políticas que a reconheçam como património informativo e bem comum, fundamental para garantir o direito à informação em regiões periféricas e sub-representadas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

jornalismo regional, jornalismo de proximidade, imprensa centenária, desigualdade de género, democracia

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of research on journalism in the current digital ecosystem — marked by profound transformations in professional practices, news values and business models (Boczkowski, 2010; Deuze, 2012; McChesney, 2013) — regional press remains largely neglected, despite its democratic importance, particularly in local political information environments (Nielsen, 2015).

In Portugal, where the dynamics of change also affect the processes, values, and economic structures of the sector (Garcia, 2020), we are witnessing the emergence of so-called “news deserts” (Abernathy, 2018), territories in which local journalistic coverage is non-existent, irregular, or excessively dependent on external sources. Despite this, the historical and social relevance of regional press has rarely been recognised and little studied, particularly regarding its role within the communities it serves. The few exceptions (e.g., Camponez, 2002; Correia, Carvalho, et al., 2011; Correia, Morais, Carvalho, & Sousa, 2011; Correia, Morais, & Sousa, 2011; Jerónimo, 2012, 2015; Jerónimo, Ramos, & Torre, 2022) highlight the urgency of reflecting on the production, circulation, reception and consumption patterns of regional press and their implications for the territories in which it operates.

From a normative perspective, regional journalism presupposes a close relationship with local communities, based on constructing an ongoing connection of proximity and identification with the surrounding social reality. It is journalism oriented towards the individual as an active member, rooted in a specific community whose dynamics, habits, concerns and ways of life are generally recognised, monitored and reflected in news production (Carona & Simões, 2025). In this context, the concept of “proximity journalism” (*jornalismo de proximidade* in Portuguese scholarship) refers to the affective, symbolic and cultural connection between the media outlet and its audience. This concept, explored, for example, by Camponez (2002), emphasises the central role of the media in promoting citizenship, encompassing both local and regional outlets, and reinforcing their function as instances of social and cultural mediation in the public sphere.

The concept of “regional journalism”, which we adopt here, takes geographic delimitation as a starting point (López García, 1995). However, the nature of the relationship between the media and communities, their key agents and institutions, need not be disregarded, nor their role in territorial cohesion. Moreover, it is an expression that conveys a specific media sector more clearly, whose activity appears to suffer more intensely from the crisis affecting the entire ecosystem (Anderson et al., 2015; Powers et al., 2015), with problematic implications for its audiences.

Regional journalism has always faced structural vulnerabilities, such as scarcity of financial resources, small newsroom sizes, limited newspaper circulation and news coverage often conditioned by ideological or doctrinal interests, especially in smaller-population outlets (Amaral, 2012; Camponez, 2002; Peruzzo, 2005; Rego, 1969; Torre et al., 2023). In particular, the activity of centenary regional newspapers has been marked by fragile sustainability, limited capacity for renewal and ongoing devaluation by local economic actors, who resist supporting them (Carona & Simões, 2025).

Nonetheless, regional press plays a crucial role as a locus of resistance against the advance of news deserts, which hinder the population’s access to contextualised and proximity-relevant information, exacerbate inequalities in the exercise of the right to information and weaken democratic scrutiny and civic participation (Nielsen, 2015).

Assuming that guaranteeing the right to information and combating news deserts requires the preservation of regional journalism, this article focuses on centenary regional press, which has been essentially rendered invisible in academic research, as is generally the case with regional journalism. The study aims to map the main attributes of centenary regional newspapers in circulation, while also providing an analysis of the resistance and adaptation strategies they have employed, to identify lessons that may guide professional journalism in the current crisis context.

Using a mixed-methods approach, combining documentary analysis and a quantitative survey, we characterise the centenary regional press active in 2022, considering periodicity, geographical distribution, medium and editorial composition. Simultaneously, we explore these attributes to gain insights into the conditions that underpin their longevity.

The results show that the centenary regional press represents a living heritage, whose preservation is of interest not only to journalism but to society as a whole. Rethinking its place in the present — and in the future — is an essential step to strengthen the right to information, pluralism and democracy at the local level.

2. REGIONAL JOURNALISM: FOUNDATIONS, SPECIFICITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM

Regional journalism occupies a singular position within the media field, simultaneously serving as a space for informational mediation and the construction of collective identity in specific territories. Its definition and characterisation have been the subject of various approaches. João Carlos Correia (1998), reflecting on the role of regional press in the public sphere, highlights several of its structuring characteristics: a strong presence

of readers in publications, the mark of controversy and debate in opinion spaces — often influenced by local elites — collaboration between the public and journalists, thematic repetition, and a marked resistance to the fusion of journalism and advertising. Along similar lines, Camponez (2002) emphasises that national press tends to generalise its audience over a broader territory, whereas regional journalism is anchored in a logic of territorial and community specificity.

Regional journalism can thus be understood as an informational practice oriented towards socially relevant issues at the local or regional level. It plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting public accountability and fostering territorial cohesion, particularly in politically and culturally sensitive regions (Singh et al., 2023). This is how the term will be understood in this article.

The delimitation of what is understood as “regional journalism” has nonetheless been the subject of conceptual debate. Jerónimo (2015) proposes an operative definition that includes all general information periodicals that regularly devote the majority of their content to cultural, social, economic, religious, political or sporting events about specific communities and territories with at least the size of a district. This definition also encompasses the criteria of medium (print and/or digital) and editorial independence from local political powers.

When approached from this perspective, regional journalism can transcend the administrative limits of municipalities and even districts, incorporating a broader dynamic of collective identification and operating with relatively more structured resources — whether in terms of the number of professionals involved, circulation size or presence on regional audiovisual platforms.

Distinct from a strictly geographic delimitation, the concept of “proximity journalism” instead refers primarily to the affective, symbolic and cultural connection between the media outlet and its audience. Considered “a distinctive value of regional press in relation to national press” (Correia, Morais, & Sousa, 2011, p. 25), proximity manifests in the ability to reflect the concerns, identities and social dynamics of surrounding communities, independently of spatial location.

In the contemporary digital context, this logic of proximity has acquired new layers of meaning, becoming a communicational value that operates simultaneously at local and global scales (Ramos, 2025). The bond between the audience and the media outlet depends not only on geography but also on perceived relevance, cultural engagement, and symbolic belonging, which can be activated by both local newspapers and digital platforms embedded in transnational networks. In this sense, proximity becomes a strategic editorial criterion for meaningful mediation within a fragmented, hypermediated information ecosystem. Readers’ consumption habits and lifestyles tend to favour emotional investment in technical objects (Martins & Garcia, 2016), often to the detriment of print, which nonetheless may support business viability.

Paradoxically, digitalisation has generated additional challenges for the sustainability of regional journalism, mainly due to adaptation difficulties. However, significant

progress has been recognised since 1998, when Setúbal na Rede, the first exclusively digital regional newspaper, emerged (Jerónimo, 2012).

Digitalisation has affected journalistic activity by fostering not only the proliferation of convergent newsrooms but also new alliances between journalism and advertising as a business sustainability strategy (Garcia, 2020). Nonetheless, the journalistic community appears to converge in the perception that a business model capable of responding to the profound changes affecting advertising revenues — historically central to press sustainability — remains to be consolidated (Anderson et al., 2015). Although in some contexts the digital environment proves to be a strategic ally, opening possibilities for audience diversification and content expansion, the Portuguese reality shows that digital transition has been strongly constrained (Jerónimo, 2012).

The predominance of small-scale business structures, characterised by precarious investment capacity and low profitability, limits technological innovation and hinders the adoption of sustainable strategies. Thus, regional press retains, as a distinctive feature, the difficulty in overcoming a structural framework of economic fragility, reflected in its incipient digital presence and dependence on traditional funding models poorly suited to the contemporary logic of media ecosystems (Negreira-Rey et al., 2022).

At the same time, digitalisation has intensified trends of “deskilling” (Quintanilha, 2021) and gender disparities (Silveirinha & Simões, 2016; Simões, 2021), while simultaneously increasing the loss of centrality and devaluation of traditional media as “information sources within their territory” (Negreira-Rey et al., 2022, p. 153).

3. REGIONAL JOURNALISM AND THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Regional journalism plays a crucial normative role in preserving democratic values by bringing information closer to local communities and serving as a mediator between citizens and institutions. By enabling citizens to engage with local institutions and hold them accountable for their decisions, regional journalism constitutes a cornerstone of democracy (Pickard, 2020).

Equally recognised is the capacity of regional journalism to promote public deliberation, strengthen community cohesion and sustain participatory citizenship (Correia, Morais, Carvalheiro, & Sousa, 2011). The study *Agenda do Cidadão* (Citizen Agenda; Correia, Carvalheiro, et al., 2011), conducted with nine Portuguese regional newspapers, showed that journalists and editors acknowledge the need to construct a more pluralistic agenda, centred on citizens as sources and protagonists of news. These practices align with the logic of deliberative journalism, which differs from the canonical model by prioritising public debate and encouraging citizen participation in collective decision-making processes. In this framework, community mobilisation to participate in public forums has been considered beneficial, not only for reinforcing the social role of newspapers but also for fostering a journalistic ethic oriented towards public service and proximity journalism.

In a context marked by information fragmentation, the crisis of business models and the rise of populist discourses, the everyday reality of regional press is far from homogeneous or idealised. Media coverage continues to reveal hierarchical patterns that privilege institutional politics, particularly municipal power, highlighting the strong influence of local elites on news agenda-setting (Carvalho et al., 2014; Correia, Morais, & Sousa, 2011). This scenario raises concerns about editorial independence, especially in situations of financial dependence and political entanglement.

Constraints inherited by regional press persist, stemming from strong economic dependence on municipalities, the State, and, in some cases, the Church (Leite, 2010; Subtil, 2009), highlighting the continued presence of editorial structures with doctrinal or religious orientations.

The COVID-19 pandemic, on the one hand, reinforced the importance of regional media in more peripheral communities; on the other hand, it exposed structural vulnerabilities in the sector. The decline in print newspaper sales, intensified by unfounded fears of contagion during the pandemic, exacerbated the already existing sustainability crisis. This vulnerable context necessitated rethinking traditional financing models, opening space for alternative experiences based on community and associative support. Such initiatives, as argued by Greenslade and Barnett (2014), help reinforce the conception of regional press not merely as a commercial product but as a public good, endowed with intrinsic democratic and social value.

The need to provide financial support for regional journalism is strongly justified by its role in strengthening democracy. The small size of newsrooms in certain regions results in scarce and deficient coverage of local issues (O'Neill & Smith, 2018), thereby weakening participation in political processes. Conversely, when communities support regional journalism, they ensure informed decision-making (Ayoob, 2024). Particularly in contexts where regional newsrooms are insufficient, the overexposure of far-right figures, such as André Ventura, has a significant impact and contributes to polarising political debate (Pinhal, 2025).

Regional journalism is also expected to commit to promoting gender equality, both in news content and within the news production process itself. Significant asymmetries, however, continue to undermine this goal. The *Global Media Monitoring Project* (Simões et al., 2021), for example, continues to reveal the under-representation of women in Portuguese news media, which limits the diversity of perspectives and reinforces hegemonic narratives that tend to render invisible the experiences and contributions of women. Studies focusing on the Portuguese context (Lobo et al., 2017; Silveirinha & Simões, 2016; Silveirinha et al., 2023; Simões et al., 2021) confirm the existence of structural barriers to accessing decision-making positions and point to the need for deeper investigation into the composition of regional press newsrooms — a dimension frequently neglected in research agendas.

4. RESILIENCE OF CENTENARY NEWSPAPERS IN THE CONTEXT OF “NEWS DESERTS”

The centenary press constitutes a heritage of undeniable historical, cultural, and democratic value, contrasting with the scarcity of studies explicitly dedicated to its reality. In Portugal, except for work conducted from a historical perspective (Costa, 2020; Freitas, 2021; Pinho, 2021; Soares, 2017; Vaquinhas, 2005), little is known about how this press adapts, resisting the structural crisis of journalism and challenging traditional logics of public communication dynamics (Lene, 2020).

What is reasonably known are the structural factors affecting regional journalism in general and centenary press in particular. One such factor, the so-called “news deserts” — regions without regular local journalistic coverage — has been on the rise. In 2021, 61 municipalities in Portugal lacked newspapers or radio stations, with the regions of Trás-os-Montes and Alentejo being the most affected (Ramos, 2021). Except for the coast, the scarcity or absence of news media characterised the Portuguese territory at the time (Ramos, 2021).

By 2022, more than half of Portuguese municipalities (53.9%) were either in a state of news desert or at risk of becoming one (Jerónimo, Ramos, & Torre, 2022), particularly due to the difficulties these media face in sustaining their operational logic (Cardoso & Baldi, 2020). In April 2021, the *João Semana* newspaper, which had been published for 107 years in the municipality of Ovar, was suspended indefinitely due to financial complications.

The term “news desert”, coined in the United States, refers to communities with limited access to reliable and comprehensive news (Abernathy, 2018, 2020). Often marked by an ageing population and low population density, these territories are further deprived of one of the main mechanisms of democratic scrutiny and civic participation, compromising the right to information and active citizen engagement in local decision-making processes. The absence of regional journalism in these territories weakens social cohesion and favours the proliferation of misinformation, opening space for populist dynamics and disengagement from local political and social realities. Hence, mechanisms aimed at protecting regional and local informational heritage are foreseen, as in Portugal’s “Regional Journalism Statute” (Decreto-Lei n.º 106/88, 1988, art. 3).

The distribution crisis, aggravated by the reduction in points of sale — currently fewer than 7,000, compared with nearly 10,000 in the past (“Presidente da Associação de Imprensa: É Urgente Resolver Problema da Distribuição de Jornais e Revistas”, 2022) — also compromises access to the press, particularly in regions distant from urban centres, and encourages the reduction of paid circulation. Between 2008 and 2020, the sale of print newspapers in Portugal declined by over 64% (Cardoso et al., 2020). In 2022, three municipalities did not even have a single point of sale for newspapers (Vimioso, Alcoutim and Marvão), and approximately 66% of parishes were in this condition, affecting nearly 2 million inhabitants (“Presidente da Associação de Imprensa: É Urgente Resolver Problema da Distribuição de Jornais e Revistas”, 2022).

This declining trend has been accompanied by a consistent decrease in the average circulation figures recorded by the Portuguese Association for the Control of Circulation. According to Cardoso et al. (2020), this decline is primarily attributed to the reduction in

the number of copies actually sold or paid for, with most of the publications analysed by the authors showing successive decreases in circulation over the years, reflecting structural difficulties in market distribution.

Other aggravating factors stem from the cumulative impacts of inflation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the exponential increase in paper costs, affecting smaller newspapers most acutely (Rosa, 2022). The operational costs of a centenary newspaper illustrate the magnitude of the problem. *Notícias de Gouveia*, for example, incurs approximately €2,250 per month in printing expenses alone, excluding additional costs for distribution and editorial operations. This reality makes urgent not only a reassessment of existing business and financing models, but also the development of new strategies to preserve territorial connection (Quintanilha & Cardoso, 2019).

At a time when regional journalism, particularly of centenary tradition, is simultaneously a scarce resource and essential to democratic vitality, it is urgent to understand it in depth. Understanding its characteristics, such as territorial ties and operational dynamics, will provide insights into the conditions that have ensured its continuity.

5. METHODOLOGY

The research question guiding this study focused on identifying the characteristics that distinguish centenary regional newspapers still active in Portugal on 6 October 2022, and the extent to which they represent resilient expressions of regional journalism.

To address this question, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining a quantitative survey — through which we mapped active publications — with a documentary analysis that enabled the identification of salient characteristics for study. The analysis was framed interpretatively, oriented towards identifying structural and symbolic attributes that might support the longevity of these titles, such as their community integration, role in preserving local memory, technological adaptability, and editorial relevance within the territorial context in which they operate. This approach not only allowed for the description of the identified newspapers but also provided an understanding of the socio-cultural and organisational conditions that contributed to their persistence over time.

For the quantitative survey, the primary sources included archival documentation published and made available by the Portuguese Press Association (API; Associação Portuguesa de Imprensa, 2017) and data provided by the Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media (ERC; Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social, 2010, 2020, 2021), which is accessible via their official website. These repositories enabled the identification and validation of titles over 100 years old, as well as the collection of essential information regarding their legal and operational existence.

In parallel, documentary analysis was adopted as the central method for qualitative data exploration. As defined by Bowen (2009), this technique systematically revisits written, visual, or electronic documents to extract meaning, identify recurring patterns, and construct interpretive categories. Sources may include journalistic content, institutional

discourses, historical narratives, and archives. In this study, particular importance was attached to the archives of the centenary regional newspapers themselves, their technical records, and, again, documentation from the API and ERC. The latter was especially relevant for assessing the presence or absence of women in leadership positions within the analysed newspapers.

The knowledge accumulated through the transmission of ideas, whether oral or written, constitutes a fundamental basis for interpreting institutional and cultural dynamics (Savioli et al., 1986). Archive analysis, in particular, allows researchers to “construct and interpret historical patterns using rich, contextualised sources” (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002, p. 815). This diachronic and contextualised reading facilitates the identification of structuring elements, although its limitations — such as scarce data, incomplete documentation, and potential selection bias — require a reflective approach throughout the process. As Bowen (2009) emphasises, documentary analysis demands a critical perspective attentive to gaps and weaknesses in the sources. In the same vein, Cellard (1997/2008) highlights the importance of accepting documents as they are, even if incomplete, partial, or imprecise, noting that in many cases it is essential to draw on even the most fragile sources, as these are often the only ones to shed light on a particular situation.

The main limitations of this study stem precisely from the scarcity of systematised data on the publications analysed, the absence of accessible digitised archives, and inconsistencies in institutional records. The sector’s volatile nature, characterised by closures, suspensions, and occasional reactivations, also posed challenges to the rigorous definition of the *corpus*, necessitating constant updates and cross-validations of the collected information.

In developing the analytical framework, four categories were defined to address the issues outlined above: the democratic value of proximity, news desertification, digital transition, and diversity of representations in news production. The variables considered were geographical distribution, publication periodicity, type of medium (print or digital), and the composition of editorial boards through a gender lens. In the following sections, after presenting the general map of centenary publications, we discuss each category in detail.

6. RESULTS

6.1. MAPPING CENTENARY REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS

On 6 October 2022, 40 regional newspapers, with a combined history of over 100 years, were active in Portugal. This longevity alone indicates the resilience of these journalistic entities in the face of a constantly evolving media ecosystem. The titles identified include, among others, *Açoriano Oriental*, *O Setubalense*, *A Aurora do Lima*, *Diário dos Açores*, *Maria da Fonte*, *Correio do Ribatejo*, *Notícias da Covilhã*, *Diário do Minho*, *Correio dos Açores*, *O Ilhavense* and *Correio de Azeméis*.

Table 1 presents the primary data relating to these centenary publications, considering the four analytical dimensions of the study: geographical distribution, type of medium (print and/or digital), publication periodicity, and editorial board composition by gender. These indicators provide a current and systematic portrait of the sector, contributing to a better understanding of the specific challenges these publications face in the context of the digital transition, the promotion of diversity, and the growing phenomenon of news deserts.

NEWSPAPER	FOUNDATION DATE	LOCALITY	DISTRICT	PERIODICITY	MEDIUM	GENDER COMPOSITION OF EDITORIAL BOARD
<i>Açoriano Oriental</i>	18/04/1835	Ponta Delgada — Azores	Azores	Daily	Print/online	Male board
<i>O Setubalense</i>	01/07/1855	Setúbal	Setúbal	Daily (weekdays)	Print/online	Male board
<i>A Aurora do Lima</i>	15/12/1855	Viana do Castelo	Viana do Castelo	Weekly	Print/online	Male board
<i>Diário dos Açores</i>	05/02/1870	Ponta Delgada — Azores	Azores	Daily	Print/online	Male board
<i>O Mensageiro do Coração de Jesus</i>	April 1874	Braga	Braga	Monthly	Print/online	Male board
<i>Diário de Notícias da Madeira</i>	11/10/1876	Madeira	Madeira	Daily	Print/online	Male board
<i>O Penafidense</i>	01/01/1878	Penafiel	Porto	Fortnightly	Paper	Male board
<i>Soberania do Povo</i>	01/01/1879	Águeda	Aveiro	Weekly	Print/online	Male board
<i>A Voz do Operário</i>	11/10/1879	Lisbon	Lisbon	Monthly	Print/online	Male board
<i>Jornal de Santo Thyrsó</i>	11/05/1882	Santo Tirso	Porto	Fortnightly	Paper	Male board
<i>O Jornal de Estarreja</i>	12/04/1883	Estarreja	Aveiro	Fortnightly	Paper	Female board
<i>Jornal de Abrantes</i>	16/03/1884	Abrantes	Santarém	Monthly	Print/online	Female board
<i>O Comércio de Guimarães</i>	15/05/1884	Guimarães	Braga	Weekly	Print/online	Male board
<i>Maria da Fonte</i>	03/01/1886	Braga	Braga	Fortnightly	Paper	Male board
<i>Correio do Ribatejo</i>	09/04/1891	Santarém	Santarém	Weekly	Print/online	Male board
<i>Correio da Feira</i>	11/04/1897	Santa Maria da Feira	Aveiro	Fortnightly	Print/online	Male board
<i>A Comarca de Arganil</i>	01/01/1901	Arganil	Coimbra	Weekly	Print/online	Male board
<i>O Concelho de Estarreja</i>	10/10/1901	Estarreja	Aveiro	Monthly	Paper	Male board
<i>Boletim Salesiano</i>	01/02/1902	Lisbon	Lisbon	Bimonthly	Print/online	Male board
<i>A Guarda</i>	15/05/1904	Guarda	Guarda	Weekly	Paper	Male board
<i>Folha de Tondela</i>	18/02/1906	Tondela	Viseu	Weekly	Paper	Male board

<i>Cardeal Saraiva</i>	15/02/1910	Ponte de Lima	Viana do Castelo	Weekly	Print/online	Male board
<i>Jornal de Albergaria</i>	13/05/1911	Albergaria-a-Velha	Aveiro	Fortnightly	Print/online	Male board
<i>Notícias da Covilhã</i>	12/01/1913	Covilhã	Castelo Branco	Weekly	Paper	Male board
<i>A Ordem</i>	03/05/1913	Porto	Porto	Fortnightly	Paper	Male board
<i>João Semana</i>	01/01/1914	Ovar	Aveiro	Fortnightly	Paper	Male board
<i>Notícias de Gouveia</i>	12/02/1914	Gouveia	Guarda	Three times per month	Print/online	Female board
<i>Folha do Domingo</i>	19/07/1914	Faro	Faro	Fortnightly	Paper	Male board
<i>A Crença</i>	19/12/1915	Vila Franca do Campo — Azores	Azores	Weekly	Paper	Male board
<i>O Amigo do Povo</i>	05/11/1916	Coimbra	Coimbra	Weekly	Paper	Male board
<i>O Despertar</i>	02/03/1917	Coimbra	Coimbra	Weekly	Print/online	Female board
<i>O Dever</i>	02/06/1917	Pico — Azores	Azores	Weekly	Paper	Male board
<i>O Almonda</i>	24/11/1918	Torres Novas	Santarém	Fortnightly	Print/online	Female board
<i>Diário do Minho</i>	15/04/1919	Braga	Braga	Daily	Print/online	Male board
<i>O Figueirense</i>	19/06/1919	Figueira da Foz	Coimbra	Monthly	Print/online	Male board
<i>Correio dos Açores</i>	01/05/1920	São Miguel Island	Azores	Daily	Print/online	Male board
<i>Jornal da Beira</i>	09/01/1921	Viseu	Viseu	Weekly	Paper	Male board
<i>O Ihavense</i>	20/11/1921	Ílhavo	Aveiro	Fortnightly	Print/online	Female board
<i>Correio de Coimbra</i>	18/03/1922	Coimbra	Coimbra	Weekly	Paper	Male board
<i>Correio de Azeméis</i>	05/10/1922	Oliveira de Azeméis	Aveiro	Weekly	Print/online	Male board

Table 1. Centenary regional newspapers

6.2. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

The research identified and characterised 40 centenary regional publications active in Portugal as of 6 October 2022 (see Table 1). The analysis of their geographical distribution reveals a clear concentration in the North and Centre of the country, confirming patterns previously highlighted in the literature. The district of Aveiro stands out with the highest number of centenary publications (eight), followed by the Azores and Coimbra, with five titles each, and Braga, with four. In contrast, districts such as Beja, Bragança and Portalegre show no identified centenary newspapers.

This regional concentration reflects historical trends in informational density, already noted in earlier studies, such as the 2010 ERC report (Entidade Reguladora para a

Comunicação Social, 2010), which identified the coast and the North of the country as areas with the highest density of regional publications. According to those data, in 2010 the district of Porto had the most significant number of local and regional press titles (11.7% of the national total, with 85 publications), followed by Aveiro (67 titles; 9.2%) and the districts of Braga and Leiria (56 titles each; 7.7%). Conversely, the districts of Beja, Bragança, and the Autonomous Region of Madeira registered the lowest proportions, with only nine to 11 publications each, accounting for less than 1.5% of the national total.

These results suggest that the presence of centenary newspapers is strongly associated with areas of higher population density, stronger editorial traditions, and, in many cases, more consolidated logistical and technical infrastructures, which may have contributed to their long-term survival.

6.3. PERIODICITY

In terms of periodicity, there is a predominance of weekly publications among the identified centenary regional newspapers. Of the 40 titles active until October 2022, 16 are published weekly, confirming this format as one of the most stable in the regional press. These are followed by 11 titles with fortnightly publication and six with a daily edition, indicating a less expressive but still significant presence of this more intensive model. There are also five monthly publications, one bimonthly, and one with a particular configuration of three issues per month, published on the 10th, 20th and 30th.

This diversity of formats reflects not only editorial strategies tailored to the operational capacity of each title but also different approaches to engaging with target audiences and aligning with the routines of journalistic production in local contexts. Publication frequency thus constitutes a relevant indicator for understanding both the level of informational intensity and the degree of editorial engagement of each newspaper with its community.

6.4. NATURE OF THE MEDIUM

Regarding the medium, most centenary publications currently in operation employ a hybrid model. Of the 40 identified, 24 are available in both print and digital formats, while 16 continue to exist exclusively in print. However, the research revealed that some of the latter also maintain a digital presence — through social media or websites — although this is not officially registered with the ERC. This mismatch between editorial practice and institutional records may indicate shortcomings in formal updating mechanisms or even an informal adaptation to the digital environment.

Overall, the analysis reveals that more than half of centenary publications have some form of online presence, whether through websites, social media, or both. However, the robustness of this presence is highly uneven: many of these newspapers operate with rudimentary digital infrastructures, poorly updated spaces, and irregularly published news content. This scenario suggests an incomplete digital transition, marked by technical

limitations and scarce human and financial resources, which undermines the full potential of today's digital ecosystem.

6.5. GENDER COMPOSITION OF EDITORIAL BOARDS

The analysis of the gender composition of editorial boards in centenary regional publications reveals a marked gender imbalance. Of the 40 publications identified as active in 2022, only six¹ have women as the top decision-makers responsible for editorial direction. In other words, the number of women in leadership roles (six out of 40) represents less than one-sixth of the total number of directors, illustrating the pronounced gender inequality in the leadership of regional media. This under-representation becomes even more evident when considering that, although some women occupy mid-level positions — such as deputy directors or coordinators of specific editorial sections — there are only 10² such cases, corresponding to one-quarter of the publications analysed.

This picture confirms the persistence of so-called “glass ceilings” within the structures of centenary regional press, reflecting a pattern of symbolic and institutional exclusion that continues despite advances in workplace gender parity in recent decades. The fact that men lead the overwhelming majority of centenary regional newspapers suggests the persistence of gender barriers to accessing leadership roles, the causes of which would require further investigation. Nevertheless, existing studies on the regional press already confirm women's more pessimistic views regarding working conditions and career progression in journalism (Jerónimo, Ballesteros et al., 2022).

7. DISCUSSION

The history of centenary regional newspapers is closely tied to the evolution of Portuguese society, particularly the transformations that the media ecosystem has undergone in recent decades. Of the 40 centenary regional publications, 11³ are members of the Christian-Inspired Press Association, which joined forces with API in seeking recognition of centenary Portuguese newspapers as intangible cultural heritage of humanity, submitting a candidacy to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2017 (*Media: Parlamento Europeu Acolhe Exposição Sobre Títulos Centenários da Imprensa Portuguesa*, 2017). This initiative culminated in an exhibition at the Portuguese Parliament, which opened on 5 October 2017 (Assembleia da República, 2018), and reflects the perception of the historical, symbolic, and community value of these publications as living testimonies of national and regional history.

The findings of this research confirm the relevance and distinctiveness of centenary regional press within the Portuguese media ecosystem. Despite the constraints that

¹ *O Jornal de Estarreja, Jornal de Abrantes, Notícias de Gouveia, O Despertar, O Almonda and Ilhavense.*

² *Açoriano Oriental, Diário de Notícias da Madeira, Soberania do Povo, O Comércio de Guimarães, O Correio do Ribatejo, Folha de Tondela, A Ordem, Jornal de Albergaria, O Setubalense and Diário do Minho.*

³ *A Aurora do Lima, Mensageiro do Coração de Jesus, Boletim Salesiano, A Guarda, Notícias da Covilhã, A Ordem, João Semana, Folha de Domingo, O Amigo do Povo, O Dever and O Almonda* (data obtained on 25 November 2022).

threaten their continuity and visibility — particularly in the context of digital transformation and news desertification — their persistence calls for recognition as active agents in adapting to new ways of informing, engaging, and representing communities. Having endured crises and transformations, centenary regional newspapers can offer lessons in resilience, adaptation, and community rootedness that deserve to be understood, studied, and projected into the future.

The continued presence of 40 centenary publications — in print and, in part, digitally — particularly in regions with historically greater informational density (Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social, 2010), reveals remarkable resilience in the face of successive challenges over the past decades: from economic crises to media ownership concentration, the erosion of the local advertising-based business model, and the impact of the pandemic. However, this survival should not be romanticised. Most of these publications operate under conditions of structural fragility, with scarce human resources, limited technical infrastructures, and low capacity for digital innovation (Carona & Simões, 2025).

The difficult transition to digital was also evident. In an era of accelerated news cycles and platform-mediated consumption, the absence of a robust digital presence may lead to the disengagement of younger generations of readers and the erosion of these newspapers' social role. Digitalisation, however, cannot be seen as an end in itself: its effectiveness depends on sustainable financing models, ongoing staff training, and strategies that combine historical memory with narrative innovation.

Moreover, more than saving print, the real issue at stake is safeguarding the public value of regional journalism, at a time when peripheral territories are losing centrality in the news agenda and attention shifts towards the global — even as democratic values are equally threatened at the local level, particularly due to news desertification.

The reduction of proximity news coverage undermines the right to information of local populations. It widens the gap between centre and periphery, between what is visible in the mediated public sphere and what remains invisible. Despite their limitations, centenary regional newspapers play a normative role of social mediation, collective memory, and democratic reinforcement. The debate about their future, therefore, requires a political and strategic perspective. These publications must be recognised not only as economic actors or cultural products, but as democratic infrastructures that need support. Hybrid funding models, public policies to promote reading and institutional advertising, partnerships with universities or research centres, and collaborative networks among regional newspapers could open up new avenues for reinvention and sustainability.

The analysis also highlights a worrying pattern of under-representation of women in editorial leadership, consistently identified as a central element in perpetuating imbalanced representations within the media field (Djerf-Pierre, 2005; Lobo et al., 2017; North, 2009; Ross, 2014; Silveirinha, 2012; Silveirinha & Simões, 2016; Simões et al., 2021). Despite some occasional improvements, centenary regional journalism continues to reproduce the gender inequalities present in the sector, limiting pluralism and diversity of perspectives in the news-making process.

The historical role of women in Portuguese journalism remains mainly invisible and insufficiently problematised (Silveirinha, 2012). In the case of centenary newspapers, this

invisibility is even more pronounced: documentation that would allow the history of women in regional journalism to be traced is scarce, and the process of newsroom feminisation remains little explored (Carona & Simões, 2025). In this sense, the analysis of editorial boards' composition is not merely a statistical exercise, but a contribution to recognising regional press as a space of symbolic and political contestation, in which gender equality must be conceived as an essential dimension of democratic communication.

8. CONCLUSION

The analysis of centenary regional newspapers in Portugal reveals a sector that is simultaneously marginalised and resilient, continuing to play a fundamental role in preserving collective memory, territorial cohesion, and practising journalism committed to the communities it serves. The 40 publications identified, each with a history spanning over 100 years, represent a unique cultural and informational legacy, rooted in contexts frequently absent from the national media landscape.

The characteristics observed in these centenary regional newspapers — their concentration in territories with strong local identity, the maintenance of traditional formats alongside attempts at a digital presence, and their editorial persistence despite profound structural limitations — demonstrate a remarkable capacity for resilience in times of crisis. These newspapers have survived technological transformations, the erosion of the press's economic model, news deserts, and funding difficulties, maintaining themselves as vehicles of collective memory and platforms linking citizens to their territory. Their continuity, achieved with scarce resources and operating outside the primary media circuits, demonstrates strong community rootedness and quiet adaptability, even if this is not always evident through major innovations or sustainability indicators.

They demonstrate that proximity, community engagement, and the steadfast pursuit of a clear public mission can be as significant as technological innovation or organisational scale. They also show that the survival of the press relies on local support networks and journalism that upholds identity and memory while maintaining its critical function. In times of media fragmentation and public distrust, these historical titles reaffirm the importance of journalism as a service to democracy, suggesting that longevity itself can be a form of resistance.

However, the pronounced gender disparity in the editorial leadership of centenary regional newspapers shows that, despite their longevity and historical significance, these structures remain shaped by traditional exclusionary logics. However, the pronounced gender disparity in the editorial leadership of centenary regional newspapers shows that, despite their longevity and historical significance, these structures remain shaped by traditional exclusionary logics. With only six women in editorial management roles and 10 in senior administrative positions, it is clear that the so-called “glass ceilings” continue to limit women's access to decision-making positions, even in a sector where female presence in journalism overall is increasingly significant and qualified. This imbalance is particularly concerning in a press that presents itself as close to communities and committed to democratic values but still reproduces structural inequalities internally.

For journalism more broadly, this reality serves as both a warning and a point for reflection. The absence of female representation in leadership not only undermines internal fairness within organisations but also limits the diversity of perspectives in news production, impoverishing the public sphere. Centenary regional newspapers teach that surviving the erosion of time is not enough: commitments to equality, inclusion, and representation must also be renewed. The future of journalism will inevitably depend on more diverse teams, capable of reflecting the complexity of the societies they aim to inform.

By providing an updated mapping and socio-economic characterisation that enhances understanding of the centenary regional press ecosystem, this study demonstrates that centenary regional newspapers are more than printed memories of the past; they can serve as privileged objects of study for considering the future of journalism in proximity contexts. This research also situates itself within the broader debate on news deserts and the crisis of local information, highlighting the risks of informational exclusion in vast regions of the country.

Its main limitations stem from the scarcity of systematised data on these publications, the absence of digitised archives, and inconsistencies in official records. The rapid evolution of the sector, marked by closures and reactivations, also posed challenges for defining the analysis *corpus*.

Future research should, therefore, deepen understanding of these publications through detailed case studies, comparative analyses with other national and international realities, and investigations into readers' perceptions of their social and democratic value. In this process, rather than viewing these newspapers merely as remnants of a declining model, it is necessary to recognise them as active agents in reinventing ways of informing, engaging, and representing communities in times of profound change.

Machine Translation Post-Editing: Anabela Delgado

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Portuguese Press Association and the Media Regulatory Authority for their cooperation.

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Submitted: 24/03/2025 | Accepted: 19/09/2025



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