The Saga of Social Sciences in the Area of Collective Health

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Loyola M. A saga das Ciências Sociais na Área de Saúde Coletiva: elementos para reflexão. [The Saga of Social Sciences in the Area of Collective Health.]


Objectives: To describe the situation of social sciences in the field of collective health as well as to expose the involvement of two agencies in promoting scientific research in Brazil.

Methodology: Descriptive analytical.

Results: The author notes that in Brazil the social sciences favor the formation of the collective health field between 1970 and 1980. However, several social sciences regulate the formation and collective scientific productivity in health according to the logic of the market and positivist quantification, as shown in the performance of two agencies: the Coordination of Improvement of Personal at High Levels and the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development. In this sense, the author explains the aspects that characterize the positivist productivity in these agencies: a) bureaucratization, b) the increase of work that is unelaborated and quickly consumable, c) weighting of the computer system. Furthermore, the author identifies four practices that encourage the reproduction and circulation of such knowledge: 1) implementation and impact indicators index, 2) the rapid and synthetic dissemination of texts in English, 3) the transference of decision about the content of journals to editors, 4) the application of exclusionary criteria for evaluating the work of the institutions involved.

Within this context, the author compares the production of three types of collective health journals with greater impact on Scielo, a major electronic consulting system of scientific literature. Cadernos de Saúde Pública and Revista de Saúde Pública, are predominately epidemiology journals while Science & Saúde Coletiva focuses on the advancement of social sciences. The author points out three arguments that would be encouraging to epidemiology studies: 1) the high production of articles, 2) more flexible rules such as the Qualis system and the ones that belong to post-graduate courses, and 3) obtaining rapid results. In contrast, the author describes two elements that limit the diffusion of more focused work in the social sciences: a) the Qualis A international classification and the postgraduate courses exclude university publishers due to their alleged low circulation and commercial value, and b) publishing regulations restrict the length of articles in these kinds of magazines. Finally, the author presents three features that ensure the predominance of epidemiology in the field of collective health: 1) the prevalence of clinicians in the processes of implementation and evaluation of courses and 2) the predominance of epidemiologists in agencies evaluation and its committees. Therefore, the author suggests giving autonomy to the field of collective health and dissociating it from medicine.

Conclusions: For the author, the agencies concede resource to promote collective health research according to the logic of cost-benefit analysis. The author concludes that this factor interferes with the production and circulation of social science knowledge in this field.