

Health and environment in the development process

This issue of *Ciência e Saúde Coletiva* has two innovations. The first, quite visible to the reader, is a change in the editorial and graphic format, aimed at providing the journal with a standard similar to the best domestic and international vehicles for scientific communications. The second relates to the decision by the Editorial Board to turn it into an instrument for the discussion of relevant, current themes in the field of Collective Health. “**Health and environment in the development process**” is one of the current issues demanding debate, due to both its significance for the theoretical and methodological field and its crucial importance for intersectorial intervention practices in health and disease.

The entire debate on the theme of the **environment** is based on two premises: the first is the essential character of the relationship between human beings and nature, and the second, deriving from this relationship, is that the concept of environment as we understand it is constructed by human action and can thus be rethought, reconstructed, and modified in light of our present and future responsibility towards the existence, conditions, and quality of life, not only of humans but of the entire biosphere. Thus, awareness of the planetary responsibility promoted by the new environmental paradigm, the stages of which this thematic issue seeks to demarcate, attempts to overcome the anthropocentric ideology (i.e., human command of nature) present in all previous sociological and biomedical theories, integrating them dialectically into a new way of viewing the world in pursuit of sustainable development.

It is necessary to keep in mind that the concept of **sustainable development** is no longer the magic word that for nearly half a century (since World War II) inspired the plans of developed countries and the dreams of underdeveloped countries, under an evolutionist vision of progress, in a boundless, breakneck, predatory, and anarchic race to dominate nature and raw materials. Today, the word **development** appears to inspire more problems than solutions, in a world that has succeeded in globalizing continental famine, ethnic conflict, deficient quality of life, pollution, growing structural unemployment, violence, drugs, depletion of natural resources, extinction of species, and ecological disasters.

Before opening this issue, it is worthwhile to keep in mind the words of Boaventura Santos in his beautiful book *Pelas Mãos de Alice* (p. 43s): “*At this turn of the century, the only realistic utopia is the ecological and democratic utopia. This principle of reality consists of the growing contradiction between the ecosystem of planet Earth, which is finite, and capital accumulation, which tends towards the infinite. In addition, the ecological utopia is utopian because to achieve it implies global transformation, not only of modes of production, but also of scientific knowledge, frameworks of life, forms of sociability, and symbolic universes and presupposes particularly a new paradigmatic relationship with nature. It is a democratic utopia because the transformation to which it aspires presupposes the repoliticization of reality and the radical exercise of individual and collective citizenship, including therein the charter of the rights of nature. It is a chaotic utopia because it does not have a privileged historical subject. Its protagonists are all those who, in the different constellations of power constituting social practices, are aware that their life is conditioned more by the power that others exert over them than by the power they exert over others.*”