

## Intersectoriality? IntersectorialitieS!

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**Abstract** *This article addresses the issue of intersectoriality and shows the polysemic nature of the topic. It reveals that there is still a lack of theories to confirm its status as a research and evaluation category. The suggestion is that each of the possible directions for an intersectorial approach will be answering different questions thereby fostering the creation of a “database of questions” for the research presented in this article. This article provides the context for intersectorial debate; it makes approximations of the theme; it indicates which aspects are still uncharted; and, inspired by the plurality of the word “intersectorialitieS”, it highlights the need to build a research agenda that favors a theoretical framework for intersectorial action, not merely as an experiment in public management but as praxis for government action. Twenty-three research questions are presented that open up the possibility of outlining a research agenda on intersectoriality and expand the theoretical and evaluative framework yet to be developed.*

**Key words** *Intersectoriality, Research agenda, Public policies, Equity*

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## Introduction

This article points to some directions to approach intersectorality. It points to the fact that so far there is a lack of theory to consecrate this topic as a category in research and evaluation. It suggests that one of the possible directions to approach intersectorality would respond to different questions or issues, favoring the creation of a “question database” for research that will be presented in this article.

The article contextualizes the intersectoral debate; with approximations to the topic, indicating that there are open issues, and inspired in the plurality of the word “intersectoralities”, signaling the need to build a research agenda to include theoretical contributions, so that intersectoral action will not be an experiment in public action and truly build a government praxis.

Magalhães and Bodstein<sup>1</sup> contribute to this debate upon saying that “the interface and dialogue between research, evaluation and follow-up of decision making processes constitute the main axes for greater social and institutional learning in this field”.

More than a mere academic debate, there are cries about the important insufficiencies in isolated intersectoral action with potential to face the root of the major problems affecting the health of populations, such as the unequal distribution of power, services and resources among coun-

tries, within countries and population groups, as well as the current forms of production and consumption, deleterious to health and life<sup>2-10</sup>.

These cries find their backing in a recent article in the *Lancet*, “The political origins of inequity in health: perspectives for change”, published by a coalition of groups and independent authors. They signal that “equity in health cannot be approached in isolated fashion within the health sector, through mere technical measures”, and that it is “necessary to adopt multiple forms of intersectoral governance”<sup>11</sup>.

### In which context can we understand the intersectoral debate?

The comic strip (Figure 1), by Chris Browne, makes us reflect that even with a multiplicity of interests, it is possible to obtain some sort of common result, in this case peace, but that war is potential in that never-ending clash between the diversity of chants.

And in this music festival, there is no way to do without a jury that will include, mediate and decide how the different voices will participate in the contest”. The opportunity then appears to discuss herein the role of the State that not always has played a constant and stable action faced with the flavor of ideological, political and economic waves of the times, allowing it to become a problem at times, and at others, a solution.

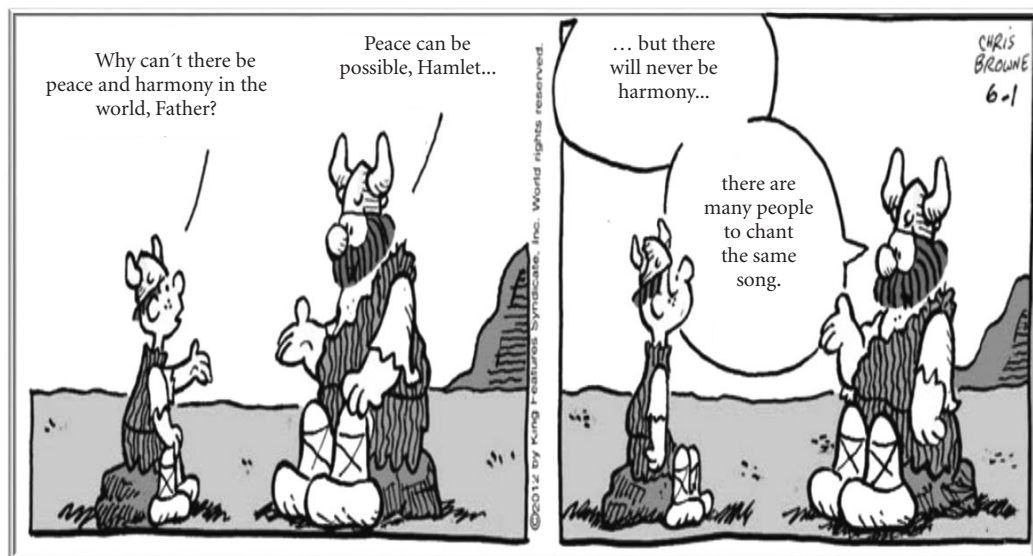


Figure 1. Peace or Harmony.

Evans<sup>12</sup> carries out this analysis and characterizes three waves, the coming and going of an intervener model for the conception of a minimal state, quasi absent, to the recovery or redemption of a reconstructive role for the State:

- While a problem, the intervener state arose in part due to the failure of carrying out the tasks set forth by a prior agenda (1<sup>st</sup> wave).

- The new agenda, neo-utilitarian, preaches minimalist theories for the State,... and, advocates a structural adjustment for the State (2<sup>nd</sup> wave).

- Doubts regarding if the structural adjustment would suffice to guarantee future growth,... The response did not lie in dismantling the State, but instead in its reconstruction (3<sup>rd</sup> wave).

This debate also had its repercussions in Brazil, and Bresser Pereira<sup>13</sup> (apud Franzece<sup>14</sup>), in the context of a state reform, claimed for the expansion of non-state forms of participation and social control as a key dimension for the 20<sup>th</sup> century, indicating perhaps that intersectorality would come as a response to these non-state forms of management. Abrucio and Gaetani<sup>15</sup> conversed about these proposals and noted that the reform focused more on planning and budgeting than on the articulation of different sectors, under the form of priority programs, but that the organization of the Brazilian federation forced us to seek articulated and cooperative work among the three government spheres.

However, beyond a merely technical conversation that supports intersectorality or not as a device to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and efficacy of public management, there is an issue that has to be faced and can be seen in the next comic strip (Figure 2). In the dialogue between characters Frank and Ernest created by Bob Thaves, they judge if the role adopted by the State or through a management device, in this case intersectorality, has the ability to increase the buy-in of those who are outside the game (or the music festival).

In other words, the simplicity and delicateness of a comic strip that questions us if this should not be the ethical-political objective for any State reform or management device, to increase opportunities for those that are out of the game, using the lens of equity<sup>16</sup>.

We do not have the intention nor the naiveté of presenting intersectorality as the “weapon” in this confrontation, but as a device to allow for meetings, listening and otherness, besides helping explain the diverging interests, tensions and to seek (or reaffirm the impossibility) of poten-

tial convergences<sup>17</sup>. One that can also avoid duplicity of actions and seek budgetary integrations for priority projects, articulate resources, ideas and talents<sup>18-22</sup>.

Furthermore, it is worthwhile mentioning that we are attentive to the warnings made by some authors that “totality, integrality, holism, interdisciplinarity are notions that pretend to represent the whole. As a result, and very frequently, theoretical schemes that use these tend to disqualify any approach or any snippet that dares to speak about only a piece or part of things.”<sup>23</sup>, or that “we cannot fall into the error that intersectorality is an antagonist or a substitute for sectorality”<sup>24</sup>.

### Theory, research and evaluation: in the quest for a real intersectoral praxis

*Theory without practice turns into ‘empty words’, as practice without theory turns into activism. Notwithstanding this, when we bring together practice and theory we have praxis, the action that creates and modifies reality.*

(Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator, 1921-1997)

Intersectorality is one of the most commented themes in public management. However, so far there is no theory developed upon which a framework of analysis can be based for research and evaluation<sup>25,26</sup>. The artificial character of fragmentation of arising from the Cartesian paradigm of the production of knowledge and ac-

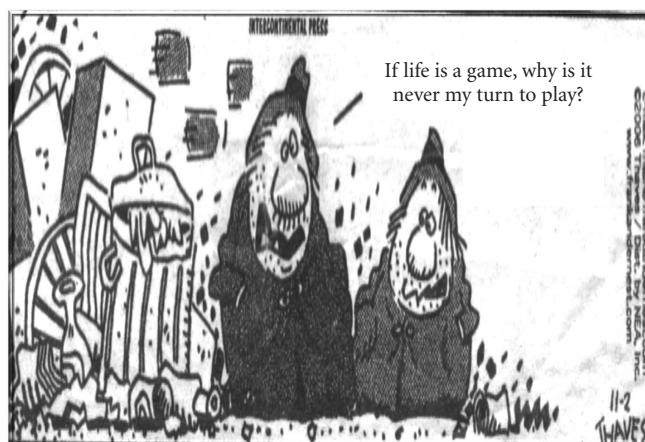


Figura 2. Playing the game

tion and the approximation to theories of a more complex and deeper and interconnected thought can prove to be the foundation for a less empirical intersectoral praxis, one that is more anchored on evaluation research<sup>27-30</sup>.

And while seeking this direction, we dare to suggest an exploratory script that will indicate a “what” – for the architectures; a “how” – the methodologies; a “with whom” (“for whom and” and “by whom”) – of the players; a “for what” – the intentions; and a “why” – of the paradigms<sup>31</sup>. This direction or path could result in a possible operational concept in which intersectorality would be defined as a form of management (what) developed by means of a systematic process of (how) articulation, planning and cooperation between the different (with whom) sectors of society and among diverse public policies to act on (for what) social determinants.

Despite this theoretical vacuum, the theme of necessary intersectoral action has been present in the collective health field in various technical-political movements. For example, in the Alma-Ata Declaration (1978), in the 8<sup>th</sup> CNS (Brazilian Health Conference) (1986), the Ottawa Charter (1986), in the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health - SDH (2011), in the World Conference on Health Promotion in Helsinki, Health in all Policies (2013) appearing in expressions such as:

*...besides the health sector, all of the sectors ...  
...health is the result of a series of policies ...  
...coordinated action of all sectors involved...  
...expanding the accountability of other sectors...  
...integrated government action...<sup>10,32,33</sup>.*

In the documents for the construction and foundation of the ideal of the Unified Health System – SUS - an intersectoral articulation is recommended to make the health-disease process ever more visible. This is composed of multiple aspects; the need to convene other sectors to consider evaluation and sanitary parameters regarding the enhancement of quality of life and of the population when they set forth their own specific policies.

There is therefore intersectoral activism that is still based on a praxis that has sufficient creative power to influence new governance architectures for public policies.

Let us explore the issues that are pending or still open. Shankardass *et al.*<sup>16</sup> carried out a review on the topic and although they identified 5342 articles for intersectoral action undertaken by governments in the last 60 years, they noticed that only 194 has the explicit purpose of fostering

equity in their arrangements, and that only 16% went deeper into mechanisms for the integration of objectives, administrative and funding processes. The other 84% set up some sort of information sharing, cooperation and coordination, but were unable to set forth processes for innovative management that would be better integrated, the *raison d'être* of intersectoral undertakings.

Shankardass *et al.*<sup>16</sup> and Solar *et al.*<sup>34</sup> see the need to pose questions that can understand or comprehend this “scarcity of integration” to overcome it, indicating a possible and more encompassing research agenda.

- Which players take the initiative in triggering intersectoral undertakings?
- Which political context favor the carrying out of these intersectoral undertakings?
- Which has been the role of the health sector?
- Which incentives have attracted players to intersectoral undertakings?
- Which reasons lead players to move away from this participation?
- Have intersectoral undertakings facilitated or impeded social participation?
- Are there competencies that need to be developed to trigger or unleash these intersectoral undertakings?
- What type of negotiation is undertaken among the different players involved: in terms of funding, loss of autonomy, decisions and responsibilities?

To sum up, these are the questions that deep down could guide us in that challenge of questioning if there truly does exist an intersectoral culture that needs to be modified or could take us in the direction of presenting analytic tools to develop the ability to look, listen and evaluate which undertaking is more appropriate for each situation.

And, as literature points to the fact that this information is scarce, descriptive and under isolated perspectives, either from the health sector or that of academy<sup>26</sup>, we suggest we follow “questions for research” with the aim of broadening analytic frontiers on the topic of intersectorality.

#### **Possible analytical paths: presenting a question database for research**

*...Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar. Al andar se hace el camino...*  
(Wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking)  
(Antonio Machado, Spanish poet, 1875-1939)

There is no frozen “intersectorality” bank. Each situation-problem or territory will demand a different response for articulation, acquiring its own DNA<sup>31</sup>.

In the research work on the topic that we carried out to be able to draft this article, it was possible to identify six analytical paths, not necessary excluding among themselves, that point to different research questions permeated by diverse analytical categories.

The first analytic path suggested is “Integrated Public Policies and Intersectoral Strategies: why and what for?”

Burlandy’s<sup>35</sup> study on “The National Policy on Food and Nutritional Safety” inspired the suggestion of this first path. It highlights that it is possible to find political fundamentals – the political decision for integration and articulation – and technical ones – intersectoral strategies per se – as base categories for the analysis of an integrated policy, conditions pointed out by Cunnill Grau<sup>25</sup> as being *sine qua non* to elaborate a theory on intersectorality.

In this sense, in Chart 1 we suggest the first block of research questions connected to this initial path.

Some authors suggest that when proposing an intersectoral undertaking, the latter should explain an ethical-political purpose, so as not to become a mere utilitarian artifact for the search of efficiency in management<sup>16,34,36</sup>.

Shankardass et al.<sup>16</sup> considered the equity promotion and acting on social determinants of health as criteria for inclusion in its review of government experiences on intersectorality. They found a scant 194 studies with these characteristics, in 43 countries, among the 5343 identified with intersectoral proposals.

Nevertheless, not all principles or ideas translate into the complete fulfillment of desires and it would be naive to imagine that an intersectoral ar-

rangement would have sufficient power to invert the logic of political responses that oftentimes reflect the power structure of the society they are part of<sup>37-40</sup>.

For example, even in the SUS, that vigorously raises the flag of equity when analyzing the data referring to transplantations, they observe that of every 10 transplantations done, seven refer to white males, not necessarily reflecting the epidemiologic structure of health needs<sup>41</sup>. On the other hand, there should be an attempt to intervene in the distribution logic of resources in public management, as those with the greatest power resources will receive the greatest piece of the pie of available resources, whilst the weaker ones will compete for the leftovers, deepening inequities<sup>42</sup>.

From this perspective, and in that tension between finding solutions and facing problems that will be dealt with through intersectoral undertakings steadily anchored on the purpose of fostering equity, appears the second path set forth, “Intersectorality as a problem and a solution in the path towards the promotion of equity?”

Chart 2 includes the block of research questions aligned to the second path.

De Salazar<sup>43</sup> identified in a study on the equity approach in interventions for health promotion in the UNASUS countries, based on a review of literature in the period of 2007 to 2012, that the topics related to the components: reorientation of services, inequities in health, intersectorality and social determinants represented 82% of the production in that period. Brazil presented the largest volume of publications (24.5%), followed by Chile (12.3%) and Argentina (12%). Notwithstanding this, “the emphasis in the articles is still not on the conceptualization, and very little on the operationalizing of these concepts”<sup>43</sup>. Several recommendations from the abovementioned study ratify the need to investigate the issues pointed out in this second path.

**Chart 1.** Research questions relating to the first analytical path: “Integrated Public Policies and Intersectoral Strategies: why and for what?”

- P1:** Which integrated public policies are presently in force and were set forth by the federal government and act upon determinants?
- P2:** Which integrating mechanisms are used?
- P3:** Which opportunities are lost upon implementing undertakings with a greater degree of integration?
- P4:** Which activities are used with potential to set up a “tool kit” for intersectoral strategies?
- P5:** Is there a body of competencies that needs to be developed, so that both managers and workers can undertake more and better within intersectorality?

Our third path to be tread is based on a communication hypothesis, and borrows the biblical passage of the Tower of Babel when God launched divine punishment upon condemning mankind to have several languages, making communication among them more difficult: “Intersectorality: Babel among public policies?”

It is far from our intention to cause a dispute with God and revert His punishment. There are authors that preach “*imperfect communication*” precisely as a gap through which the possibilities of emergence of something novel can infiltrate themselves<sup>29,44</sup>.

This communication hypothesis could also be translated as an “intersectoral dilemma”<sup>39,45</sup> in which there is a consensus of discourse on the need for tensioned intersectoral management, nevertheless, through practical political and incessant dissention on the “how” to do this<sup>46</sup>.

This apparent paradox, many a times permeated by power conflicts and interests that make difficult “communication among men” led us to drafting another block of questions that appear in Chart 3, and could be used to give greater thrust to more research regarding this topic.

We identified that if there is “imperfect communication” among policies/players, this perhaps exists, also in the interface between the responses formulated by governments, and the needs felt/perceived by citizens are their lives unfold in the day-to-day<sup>47-50</sup>.

To further explore this hypothesis, we set forth a fourth analytical path: “Intersectorality: the Babel among public policies and daily life!”, the following block of questions exhibited in Chart 4.

In this path or direction, several studies have attempted to point to the applicability of Intersectorality and its translation in the day-to-day of public policies<sup>51,52</sup> and based on the SUS in Brazil<sup>53-56</sup>, being that the majority of these conclude that this has been implemented predominantly and in a timely way, fragmented and without mechanisms to sustain it<sup>43,57</sup>. Furthermore, when looking at it from the viewpoint of networking<sup>58</sup>, and its potential in promoting social participation, it points to a necessary debate: is social/community empowerment a process or a result of intersectorality?<sup>59</sup>

The fifth analytical path opens the perspective of intersectorality, not as a management arrangement, but as a device for qualified listening and for the exercise of respect towards the differences and diversities, in the search for possible common interests, albeit temporary ones<sup>20</sup>.

Chart 5 brings two questions to explore this research path of “Intersectorality as a device for otherness and negotiation!”

A possibility to address this agenda was signaled out by Rocha and Akerman<sup>60</sup>, when indicating “entry doors” or “windows of opportunities” to act more effectively and, consequently,

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**Chart 2.** Questions that relate to the second analytical path: “Intersectorality as a problem or a solution on the path for equity promotion?”

- P6:** Which objectives and goals do the different players rally around?
- P7:** Is there a systematic practice to identify-make visible-“unhide” differences between population groups and/or different territories?
- P8:** Which concepts of health/disease/care and vision of society permeate intersectoral undertakings?
- P9:** Which are the opportunities and weaknesses that intersectoral undertakings come upon to act on structural SDH?

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**Chart 3.** Research questions relating to the third analytical path: “Intersectorality: Babel among public policies?”

- P10:** Who takes the initiative to trigger intersectoral undertakings?
- P11:** In which political context does this initiation take place?
- P12:** Which is the role of the health sector?
- P13:** Which incentives attract players to an intersectoral undertaking?
- P14:** Which are the elements that sustain intersectoral undertakings and their regulation mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation?

respond to the queries above. In this context, a starting point could be analyzing the “intersectoral undertakings” according to management and production levels of care at macro, meso and micro levels.

The sixth analytical path coincides with a movement that the WHO carried out at the 8<sup>th</sup> World Conference for Health Promotion, held in Helsinki, in June 2013, in which it advocated for an integral approach for the entire government to evaluate the impact of different public policies for the population’s health: “Health in all Policies?”<sup>33,61</sup>.

This WHO proposition also inaugurated a new research current that perhaps can be based on the three questions that are part of Chart 6.

These 23 questions open up the possibility of delineating a research agenda on the topic of intersectorality, and broaden its theoretical and evaluation foundation, which will still have to be developed. However, there are hints for a theoretical and evaluation formulation that can already be observed: (1) some growth in cooperation

and coordination movements among sectors; (2) the upsurge of some intersectoral undertakings with the ability to foster equity; (3) undertakings which deliberately set up mechanisms to face the discrepancy between discourse and practice; (4) international movements for the expansion of health accountability<sup>16,26,34,62,63</sup>.

### Intersectoralities!

There have been several starting points and one point of arrival! Questioning and exclamations appearing on the path of our reflections, dialogues and discoveries or breakthroughs

Through this process, we took six paths that are not parallel straight lines and that only meet in the infinite, but that are interwoven the entire time. They are almost the subtitles for the point of arrival: polysemy of the word intersectorality and multiplicity of research questions or issues = Intersectoralities.

Much like waves, intersectoralities reveal themselves and alternate according to the flavors

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**Chart 4.** Research questions relating to the fourth analytical path: “Intersectorality: Babel between public policies and daily life!”

**P15:** Do intersectoral undertakings facilitate or impede social participation?

**P16:** In their quest to fulfill their needs, which nets are woven by citizens? Which are the itineraries tread?

**P17:** Which discrepancies exist between the setting forth of policies, the opinion of specialists and the needs perceived by the “population”?

**P18:** Which players, processes, interests and negotiations permeate the setting up of agendas in policy cycles?

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**Chart 5.** Research questions relating to the fifth analytical path: “Intersectorality as a device for otherness and negotiation!”

**P19:** How to develop the ability to look, listen and analyze which undertaking would be more appropriate for each situation?

**P20:** Which type of negotiation is carried out among the different players involved in the intersectoral undertakings, regarding funding, loss of autonomy and shared decisions and accountability.

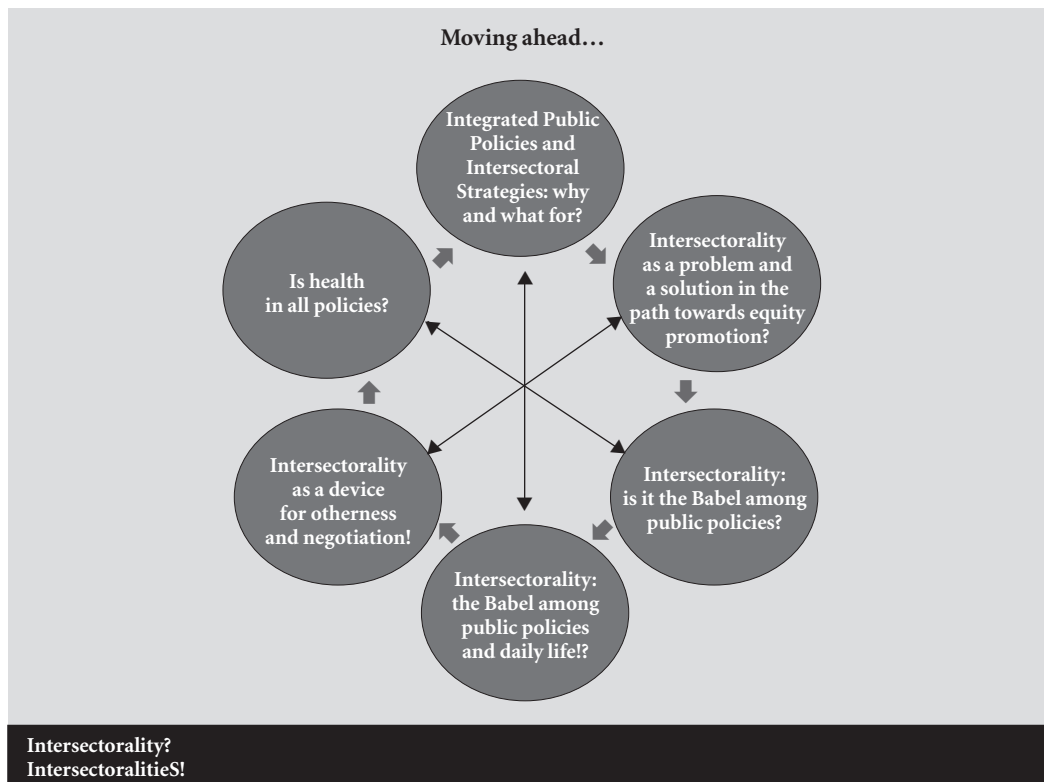
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**Chart 6.** Research questions relating to the sixth analytical path: “Health in all Policies?”

**P21:** Are there explicit instruments and indicators to measure the impact of different public policies in health equity?

**P22:** Are there agreements regarding the measures of impact used among the players of the policies involved?

**P23:** Are there modifications in the formulation and implementation of policies when the negative impacts on health equity are identified?



**Figure 3.** Interconnection between the six paths that represent plural synthesis: IntersectoralitieS!

of time, the prevailing situation and players: the 1<sup>st</sup> wave – Utilitarian, reinforces the minimal state and tutelage by the market “pass the hat” and shares responsibilities; the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave – Rationalizing, detects there is fragmentation in policies and in actions that compromise the effectiveness of the State and the search for efficiency; the 3<sup>rd</sup> wave, about to come – generous Interdependence in which intersectorality is not only the setting up of multisectoral arrangements, but a deliberate ethical-political decision that the State and its management and policies will serve the common interest.

Collaborators:

M Akerman, RF Sá, S Moyses, R Resente and D Rocha participated at all stages of the drafting of this article.



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