

## Diversity, unity and public health

Hannah Arendt<sup>1</sup> reminds us that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the planet. By saying this, she underlines the plurality of the human condition which, although human, never determines the existence of a generic man. Applying this precept to contemplate collectivity, we perceive that there is no such thing as generic collectivity, but different collectives that comprise the whole. Public health, in its conception, focuses on the needs of the population but, as it is also closely linked to the defense of human rights, it needs to ensure that movements that express the diversity of individual and group situations have social, political and legal recognition.

This statement can seemingly lead us to an impasse, namely, how to define public health principles and policies for a plurality of segments or even for a set of individualities that inhabit the collective? We strive to adopt the line of thought of Mary Douglas<sup>2</sup>, to work towards an answer to this question. Just like Douglas<sup>2</sup>, who considers that there are commonalities in different cultures, we can also think of commonalities that unite the different segments of a collectivity. And affirm that all segments of the same society, even being different, aspire to health as a collective good. Complementing this thought and paraphrasing Arendt<sup>1</sup>, we consider that public health lives with the paradoxical plurality of the segments that comprise the collective.

It is based on the considerations that link the relevance to the whole with due respect for differences that we present this special issue. It brings into focus the diversity of themes that are being developed or that can be included in the agenda of the field of public health. Some of the texts that feature in this issue are theoretical essays that discuss the relationship between the theme and the field mentioned. Others advocate a perspective on health centered on social identities that are, at the same time, stable, provisional and the result of various socialization processes that, together, “build individuals, define institutions”<sup>3</sup> and also enhance the collective. Good reading!

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