

# Epistemic communities in the context of Brazilian redemocratization: the cases of health and social work

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## Abstract

The article discusses the importance of epistemic communities, a type of collective actor formed by specialists who share theoretical perspectives and political positions, in the process of formulating public policies. With this objective, the construction of the institutionality of health policies and social work in the period of the Brazilian redemocratization, which involved the elaboration of the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the organic laws that regulate these areas, was analyzed. The research was carried out based on bibliographic review on the subject and content analysis of legislative records. In both sectors, relevant participation of groups of specialists was found. However, different formative trajectories of each community were identified. While health experts already had an accumulation of prior articulation, the social work community was formed based on the institutional incentive of the constituent text.

**Keywords:** collective actors, public policies, political communities, defense coalitions, specialized knowledge.

**T**he debate about the importance of technical knowledge in defining the agenda and the formulation of public policies has become relevant as the complexity of these processes and the scope of actors involved in these processes increases. This discussion is often associated with the analysis of different types of collective actors that integrate these phenomena and whose action is supported by ideational and symbolic components. Such a conception runs counter to the perspectives associated with the rational choice theory, which restricts the explanation of the behavior of social actors to the instrumental calculation of costs and benefits.

One of the theoretical approaches whose purpose is to characterize the importance of specialists with technical knowledge for public policies is that of the epistemic communities. Elaborated by Haas (1992), this model of analysis aims to characterize a type of collective actor that is shaped by the sharing of specialized knowledge. According to the author, epistemic communities are “a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (Haas, 1992, p. 3). The cohesion of the community is based on a set of beliefs and principles based on technical knowledge shared by its members. Based on this conceptual core, the community formulates its conceptions regarding problems and solutions of public policies.

This article aims to identify how communities formed from the sharing of technical knowledge influenced the formulation of new parameters of public policies occurred in the period of redemocratization in Brazil. As such, two sectors of public policies that were restructured at that moment in the Brazilian history will be analyzed: health and social work. The choice of these two domains is due to the relevance that specialists had in the process and to the diversity with which these actors related to contextual and institutional variables, which caused the trajectory of each of these policies to assume a distinct character.

The analysis of each of these sectors will be carried out in two moments. First, we will observe how groups of experts articulated themselves in the period of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) and how the actions of these collective actors impacted on the conception of the Federal Constitution of 1988. Subsequently, we will go through the procedures for regulating the constitutional text concerning each of these areas.

Based on this research, we will reflect on the dynamics of formation and performance of collective actors in public policy processes, highlighting the importance that expertise can assume in these phenomena and the interaction with other factors that may affect the final outcome of this process. The research was conducted based on bibliographic review and content analysis of legislative records on these processes.

In addition to the introduction and the final considerations, the article is divided into four parts. First, the concept of epistemic communities and the importance of technical knowledge in the processes of public policies will be discussed. The second section will be devoted to the description of the political environment and the institutional context of the redemocratization, in which the sectors under analysis have been reformulated. Finally, we will address the reality of each of the areas in question, emphasizing the formulation of the constitutional text and the construction of organic laws in the health and social work areas.

## **The concept of epistemic community in its relational and symbolic dimensions**

The notion of epistemic communities integrates a set of concepts that aim to characterize collective actors whose objective is to influence the processes of public policies. Cohabiting this role, we find denominations such as epistemic communities, political communities, thematic networks and defense coalitions, among others (Haas, 1992; Rhodes, 2006; Hecló, 1978;

Sabatier, 1988). Three characteristics that are transversal to this range of nomenclatures allow us to group them into the same set: (1) the attempt to encompass the articulation of a spectrum of individuals in the sectorial production of public policies; (2) the emphasis on the relational dimension of the construction and participation of collective actors in the public policy sectors; (3) the centrality of ideas and other symbolic components in the agglutination and coordination of the action of individuals, thus forming a collective actor. The relevance of technical expertise and the performance of experts in the formulation of public policies is deeply related with the third aspect. In view of the interrelationship between the three axes, we can not disregard the importance of other aspects.

The sectorial production of public policies is a consequence of the complexification of state actions. With the expansion of state responsibilities, policy formulation processes began to take place in segregated spaces, with relative autonomy of the involved parties, in which individuals and groups with involvement in specific spheres of the society construct collaborative or conflictive relationships with the objective of influencing the direction of interventions. The phenomenon of decentralization of decisions was conceptualized in various ways by the literature on the subject, using terms such as subsystems, sub-governments and policy networks so as to characterize this new reality (Jordan, 1990, John, 1998).

The focus on the different patterns of relationship established between state and societal actors in these processes is underlined by the understanding of the production of public policies in sectorial areas. Often the watertight separation between State and society is not adequate to capture the complex set of fluid relations that characterize the dynamics in these domains. In view of this reality, approaches have emerged with the purpose of constructing a conceptual framework capable of encompassing the relational dimension of the processes of public policies, evaluating in a more fluid and realistic way the interaction among the participants. The

conceptualization of the types of “actors operating in these arenas - in which the notion of epistemic communities is inserted - is one of the essential aspects for the construction of a relational perspective for the analysis of the functioning of these arenas.

Several theories that approach the sectorial reality point out that, due to their integration into specific sectors of public policies, the different types of collective actors that participate in these spheres tend to attract people with technical knowledge related to the scope of the sector, besides forming their own specialists with the accumulation of knowledge resulting from their performance. Nevertheless, the centrality of the expertise was highlighted with greater emphasis by the formulation of epistemic communities.

Despite the differences in focus, the various concepts that characterize collective actors that aim to influence sectoral policies emphasize the centrality of the symbolic dimension in its conformation and in the direction of its actions. The relevance of this aspect to the confrontations arising from the decision-making process contrasts with approaches that restrict the motivation of the actions of individuals and groups to instrumental rationality. Therefore, for these actors to establish themselves, it is fundamental to build a coherent symbolic system capable of attracting individuals who identify with the presented ideational framework. In addition to recruitment, the ideas enable internal group cohesion (Dudley, 2003).

In the case of epistemic communities, there is an effort to construct a conceptual tool that allows the analysis of the relevance of ideals originating from technical knowledge to political disputes. Haas adds the ideational components of an epistemic community into four distinct groups, as summarized by Faria:

- (a) a set of normative and principled beliefs, which provides a value-based rationale for the social action of community members;
- (b) certain beliefs about specific cause-and-effect relationships derived from their analyzes of practices that contribute to the solution of a

"central set of problems in their area and which serve as a basis for elucidating the multiple links between possible policies and actions and the desired results"; (c) notions of validity, that is, criteria defined internally and in an inter-subjective way for the evaluation and validation of knowledge in the field of its specialty; and (d) "a common policy enterprise, namely, a set of shared practices associated with a set of problems for which its professional competence is addressed, presumably based on the conviction that, as a consequence, the welfare human being will be promoted" (Faria, 2003, p. 27, our translation).

In the first type of idea highlighted it is already evident that it is not enough simply to possess knowledge relevant to a sector of public policies so that the specialists compose an epistemic community. First of all, it is necessary for these individuals to be guided by normative values they have in common. Thus, an epistemic community is not only moved by technical knowledge. Associated with this type of grouping, there is a judgment about what is right and wrong, what is desirable or not, and what are the legitimate procedures for achieving its objectives. Therefore, the performance of an epistemic community is the result of an amalgamation of expertise and political judgment.

### **The action of epistemic communities in the context of Brazilian redemocratization**

The overcoming of an authoritarian regime involves the reformulation of fundamental institutions with the aim of re-adjusting state functioning to democratic precepts. In the case of Brazil, the institutional reconstruction started with the end of the military government created a favorable context for those who defended changes in Brazilian public policies, but failed to fulfill their demands due to the scarce possibilities of participation in a dictatorial environment. The need to re-elaborate the institutional framework of support of the Brazilian State can be considered as a window of opportunity

- that is, a conjunctural context with high potential for political transformations - important for groups that had demands repressed, such as those who advocated changes in policies (Margarites, 2019).

It should be noted that the pressure for change was not restricted only to the content of policies, but also to the way decision-making processes took place. The same groups that defended changes in public policies demanded the construction of mechanisms that would allow the participation of the civil society in the formulation and management of these policies. This demand was reflected, even, in the design of the process of elaboration of the new Federal Constitution. The National Constituent Assembly (NCA) was structured with the objective of creating an open space, which would enable the translation of the population's wishes into constitutional text (Lima; Passos; Nicola, 2013).

Collective actors interested in influencing the constitutional design found in the subcommittees and thematic commissions, where the formulation of the constitutional text was initiated, a receptive environment for their participation. The presence of representatives from various groups was frequent, presenting their understandings and pressuring parliamentarians to adopt their demands. This dynamic had a practical effect. The institutional design of the first NCA regiment, which allowed the pulverization of the decision-making process, resulted in preliminary projects that incorporated demands from pressure groups, which resulted in texts that reflected the progressive positioning adopted by most of these groups (Gomes, 2006).

Within this context, the NCA's conservative forces articulated with the aim of changing the course that was being designed for the new Magna Carta, constituting the block that became known as *centrão* [big center]. The main movement of this new alliance was the modification of the NCA regiment so that the drafts forwarded by the thematic commissions could be amended at the initiative of the Plenary - a space in which the chances of

majority formation by the *centrão* group were greater. The approval of the new regimental regulation marked the beginning of a new phase in the National Constituent Assembly, in which some advances achieved by collective actors in the subcommittees and thematic commissions were reversed. The new design made it possible to centralize the decision-making power for the traditional political elites, thus softening the effects of receptivity to the demands of the sectoral articulations of the first stage of the NCA (Gomes, 2006).

The result of this battle of forces was a final constitutional text that at times incorporated the progressive demands imposed in the first stage of the Assembly and, on the other hand, reflected the conservative positions strengthened with the amendment of the regiment. Many controversial issues that would hardly generate consensus and which blocked the completion of the NCA's work were relegated to further normalization by infra-constitutional legislation.

The need for additional legislation to regulate the Constitution imposed on the groups engaged in the different sectors of public policy two challenges: to preserve eventual achievements indicated by the Constitution and to deepen transformations that were not initially accepted by the NCA. Thus, the process of contesting for the redefinition of public policies opened by redemocratization had not ended in the elaboration of a new Constitution. Therefore, when dealing with the work of epistemic communities in this context, the analysis can not be limited to the constituent procedures without considering the relevance of the formulation of these infra-constitutional devices.

The work of the epistemic communities in the areas of health and social work in the National Constituent Assembly will be dealt with in the following section, as well as the process of regulating the constitutional text through organic laws. The focus of the analysis will be on the symbolic components that have sustained these communities and the relationship

between these groups and the institutional contexts in which their actions have developed.

## **The protagonism of the epistemic community of sanitary reform in the federal constitution and the organic law of health**

The Movement for Sanitary Reform was one of the most well-structured collective actors to act in the reconstruction of the bases of Brazilian social policies during the period of redemocratization. One of its most striking features was the presence of specialists from the collective health area. In this sense, the university institutions that worked in this area were central to the formation of the group, considering their relevance as spaces of production of knowledge directed to the insertion of medicine and other branches of health study in the national context, emphasizing the importance of the function of these areas of knowledge.

The strengthening of this perspective refers to the mid-1970s, when the process of opening the military dictatorship began. Some associations of experts were important for shaping the group of advocates from a particular perspective of health policy. In this context we ought to highlight The Brazilian Center for Health Studies (CEBES) founded in 1976 and the Brazilian Association of Collective Health (ABRASCO) founded in 1979. These organizations were set up with a mission to change the perspective that scholars and health professionals had in relation to their practices, emphasizing their social dimension. This redirection implied in the engagement of the expertise that adopted this new look in themes of the public sphere, such as the resistance to the authoritarian regime and the militancy in the redefinition of the bases of the health policy with the democratic recovery (Cohn, 1989).

The conceptualization of the Movement for Sanitary Reform as an epistemic community was established considering the importance of the

academic origins for the development of the action of this group (Menicucci; Brasil, 2010, Costa, 2014). This fact, however, does not mean that the composition of this grouping is restricted to the participation of academics or specialists. Throughout the course of political action of this collective actor, other types of individuals were added that did not necessarily have technical knowledge about the area, but who, for some reason, were involved with health issues. Nevertheless, in spite of the amplification of the types of actors in their composition, we can define this grouping as an epistemic community because of the centrality of the expertise and the protagonism of individuals and organizations from the scientific environment, maintaining the connection between the roots of the group and the academic field.

The starting point for understanding the performance of an epistemic community is the understanding of its shared conceptual basis. In the case of the reformist health movement, Paim (1997) highlights two axes from which this theoretical framework was constructed: preventive medicine and community medicine.

Predictive medicine is based on the pre-pathogenic behavior, that is, before the individual becomes ill. In the pathogenic phase, this perspective highlights the benefits of early diagnosis, thus preventing the worsening of the disease. Community medicine, on the other hand, has a peculiar conception of how health services should be organized and offered to the population. In this point, the importance of principles such as regionalization, the division of services based on their degree of complexity, the construction of multidisciplinary teams and the participation of the community in the planning and implementation of health actions are emphasized (Paim, 1997).

The political action of the epistemic community of the sanitary reform was guided by the overcoming of curative medicine offered through private services and by the defense of preventive medicine made possible

through a public health system of universal access. In the opening period, access to public health was still subject to social security contribution criteria and its management tied to the bureaucratic apparatus of social security. In this context, health coverage for people whose job placement was informal or who did not have the means to finance their medical care occurred precariously. This scenario affected a considerable part of the Brazilian population, constituting itself as a relevant social problem.

The confrontation of this situation on the part of the reformists took was shaped from the organization of spaces of debate and the articulation of proposals of solutions. One of the main meetings for this purpose was the VIII National Health Conference in 1986. The federal government convened this event with the objective of discussing the bases for restructuring the country's health system (Menicucci, Brasil, 2010). This initiative can be situated in a set of spaces opened by the first military post-dictatorship management so that state, societal and market actors could rethink the structures of Brazilian social policies, providing subsidies for the construction of a new active legislative framework that had as fundamental piece the formulation of a new Magna Carta. The existence of a similar initiative in the areas of social security and welfare will be verified subsequently.

The accumulation built by the reformist community from the beginning of the reopening process allowed the VIII National Health Conference to be used by the group as a space to consolidate its proposal as a reference for the debate regarding the future of health policy in Brazil. With the articulation of health reform advocates previously consolidated, the deliberations of the conference reflected the perspective defended by the community, emphasizing the need to build a public and universal health system under state responsibility. The previous construction resulting from the militant trajectory of the reformist grouping was also a relevant resource for its work in the National Constituent Assembly. The specialized knowledge and representativeness acquired during the trajectory of the group made it

possible for the forces linked to the sanitary reform to take center stage in the Subcommittee on Health, Safety and Environment and in the Social Order Commission, antagonizing the supporters of private provisions (Rodrigues Neto, 1997).

The final result of the constitutional text related to health accompanied the ambiguities and confrontations of the different moments of the constituent process. In general, the definitions reflected the basic conceptions of the project advocated by the reformers. Health assurance as a universal right of State responsibility echoed the demands of the health reform community. However, the conservative reaction managed to guarantee the coexistence between the public system and the private initiative, submitted to the state regulation and inspection. The search for a hybrid model was a consequence of the need to equate divergences of interests and political conceptions within the scope of the NCA. Thus, a new understanding regarding health policy was consolidated, but with the permanence of vestiges of the privatist historic in this sector.

The consolidation and deepening of the principles of sanitary reform present in the Federal Constitution depended on the legislative piece that would regulate the implementation of the constitutional text. With the end of the NCA, the efforts of the reformist epistemic community were concentrated in the Nucleus of Studies in Public Health (NESP) of the University of Brasilia. This group was chosen by the Ministry of Social Security and Social Work to prepare the preliminary draft of the organic law of health to be submitted to the Congress. Once again, the academic field and the specialized knowledge had great relevance. Rodrigues Neto (1997) states that more than 100 technicians linked to the sanitary reform movement participated in the debates led by NESP.

The proceedings of the project in the Congress resembled what happened in the National Constituent Assembly: the main confrontation of forces was between the reformist group and the health business category.

Conflict resolution also took a similar form. It was decided to try to equate the interests of those who defended the Unified Health System and those who advocated for market interests. When it was not possible to reach a common denominator, it was sought to remove the topic of organic law. Despite clashes of interests, the prevailing spirit of the law was in line with the principles of the sanitary reform community. Demands such as the definition of health as a universal right, the State's duty to ensure this right, the formation of a free single system in a decentralized network involving the Union, states and municipalities, the subordination of private services to state regulation, and the understanding of health in addition to medical care, encompassing other aspects of social life were contemplated in the final drafting of the organic law (Rodrigues Neto, 1997).

### **The new constitution as a starting point for the epistemic community training of social work**

The conformation trajectory of the social work epistemic community does not resemble what happened in the health sector. Formed by professionals and specialists from the academic and professional field of social work, this group began to articulate from the need to elaborate an organic law after the promulgation of the Federal Constitution. Previously, changes to this policy were in the wake of social security debates.

The lack of prior mobilization to the constitutional process by actors interested in influencing the assistance policy contrasts with the high degree of articulation of the sanitary reform community and the high degree of development of the set of structuring ideas and proposals defined by this group. The explanation for this phenomenon is found in two distinct processes that, afterwards, eventually became intertwined. These are the historical trajectory of the social work policy in Brazil, especially its relationship with social security, and the theoretical redirection that altered

the dominant conception in the academic field of social service on the relationship between a professional of this branch and the actions of the State.

In Brazil, social work policies oscillated between the idea of philanthropy promoted by state aid and the discretionary complementarity of social security actions. Associated with Christian morality, charities received public grants with little or no government regulation. State organizations that offered welfare services also operated under the same logic. A reflection of this was the practice of First “Ladism”, which consisted in the allocation of the area of social work to the accomplishment of the mercies of the wife of the chief executive. Even state-run social welfare entities with some level of professionalism, such as the Brazilian Legion of Assistance, founded in Getulio Vargas’ first government and extinguished in 1995, did not overcome the logic of philanthropy in their actions (Sposati; Falcão, 1989).

In addition to the philanthropic paradigm, another striking feature of social work was its ambiguous relationship with social security policies. LBA, for example, was financed with social security contributions, even if its actions were directed toward the excluded publics of social insurance. The intertwining of social security and welfare increased during the military dictatorship both from the administrative point of view as in the offer of benefits.

Following the technocratic logic that prevailed in the military government, the LBA was transformed into a foundation in 1969 and included in the National System of Social Security and Assistance (SINPAS) in 1977, with the objective of broadening its activities and rationalizing its administration. Also in the authoritarian period, the overlapping of the two policies was accentuated by the expansion of some benefits to non-taxpayers. This is the case of the Monthly Life Annuity, a benefit funded and managed by the pension structure, although it is not intended for its policyholders (Baptista, 1998).

As in the case of health, the end of the military regime and redemocratization provided a window of opportunity for the restructuring of social security policies. Following the pattern of other social policies, spaces of discussion involving governmental, societal and market actors were built to precede the elaboration of the new Constitution. In the case of the social security policy, the Working Group for Pension Funds Restructuring (WG/PFR) was created by the Ministry of Social Security and Social Work. Formed by representatives of government, workers, retirees and employers, the objective of the group was to draft a bill that would reshape the functioning of social security (Margarites, 2019).

In the course of the WG's work, government representatives, mostly from the academic field and specialists in social security issues, took the lead in decisions. Therefore, in this space too, expertise was a fundamental resource. Under the leadership of these technicians, the agenda discussed by the group was not only restricted to the issue of private pensions, but also covered other initiatives that were linked to this sector, among which was social work.

In the area of social work, two main pillars supported the debate. First, the WG defended the need to establish a set of minimum social rights that were offered without the obligation of the social security contribution. In this sense, the strengthening of social work would be essential for the care of the uninsured public in situations of vulnerability. The second line of discussion dealt with how to finance this non-contributory plan. The social security specialists had, among their main objectives, the adjustment of expenses with contribution funds. The idea was to finance with pension funds only what was intended for its policyholders. For this to happen, it would be necessary for social work initiatives to be financed as resources of the fiscal budget of the Union and not with the resources of social security contributions, as had been done until that time. The goal was to end the ambiguity between the two areas (Margarites, 2019).

The deliberations of the WG were pioneers in recognizing the urgency of making social work a right for all those who needed it without any compensation. This area was considered one of the pillars of the non-contributory plan of services and social benefits to be provided by the State. Associated with this measure was the decoupling of the financing of the non-contributory plan from the social security budget, which would imply the unequivocal separation of welfare and welfare benefits and services, breaking the ambiguous character of the two areas.

The report of the Working Group on Social Security Restructuring was the starting point for the debate on social security and welfare policies in the National Constituent Assembly. The presence of members of the WG as representatives who participated in the public hearings in the subcommittee and thematic committee debated the theme and as members of the technical staff of the rapporteur's advisory of the Committee of the Social Order was essential for the deliberations of the WG to influence the construction of the constitutional text. In the case of social work, the understanding that the provision of such a policy should be considered a citizen's right and a duty of the State, which was included in the report produced by the WG, was incorporated into the constitutional text, which represented a significant transformation in the path of welfare policies, disrupting the tradition of philanthropy (Margarites, 2019).

Despite the consolidation of a change of perspective in the way the Brazilian State faced social work, debates on this issue occupied a peripheral space in the constituent process. In the arenas more permeable to the action of external collective actors, there was no significant participation in order to influence the way the new Constitution would treat the area, leaving the debate completely tied to the social security. Therefore, the text related to social work in the 1988 Constitution is a collateral consequence of the social security discussion and not the fruit of an autonomous debate.

The absence of groups engaged in the assistance debate in the Constitution contrasts with what occurred during the period of regulation of the text. After the promulgation of the Magna Carta, the process of formulating the organic law was initiated. As with health, the University of Brasilia was called to coordinate the preparation of a draft. In the case of social work, the task was performed by the Nucleus of Studies and Research in Social Policy (NEPPoS). Contrary to what happened in the health sector, the debate about public policies of social work in the academic field of social service was poorly structured, and it was necessary for NEPPoS members to begin the elaboration of the project without a defined conceptual basis or a model of action to serve as inspiration (Boschetti, 2008). In order to fill these gaps, the group sought contact with other researchers to initiate this construction. This action was important because it was the first step towards the construction of a set of social relations that were later consolidated in an epistemic community.

The articulation for the creation of the epistemic community of the social work was accelerated by the result of the process of the project elaborated by NEPPoS. After being approved in the National Congress, the project was vetoed by the President of the Republic, Fernando Collor, alleging fiscal unfeasibility. The veto corroborated the government's attempt to ignore the vision of social work embodied in the Federal Constitution to strengthen the traditional philanthropic perspective. The new moment in the command of the federal executive represented the closing of the open window with the redemocratization for initiatives that aimed at the expansion of social rights (Margarites, 2019).

The reaction of Social Service professionals to Collor's veto was significant. The agreement formed in the academic sphere for the formulation of the first organic law was expanded with the entry of the Federal Council of Social Service, which took the lead in the process of drafting a new bill. The systematics adopted was that of events involving

academics and professionals from all over Brazil (BOSCHETTI, 2008). As a consequence, the initial arrangement of the epistemic community of social service was consolidated, which later took the lead in the process that culminated in the establishment of the Single Social Work System in 2011 (Margarites, 2019).

The gradual integration of actors from the academic field and from the professional representation of social work accompanied the relevant theoretical transformation that modified the way individuals of these spaces saw their relationship with the State. For a long time, the idea disseminated by a structuralist view of Marxism that state actions were instruments of reproduction of the bourgeois society preponderated. This theoretical understanding began to be relaxed in the late 1980s, with the strengthening of the Gramscian perspective that saw in the State one of the spaces for the counter-hegemonic struggle. This redirection changed the way professionals and researchers in the area related to public policies and social work, previously viewed with a bad eye because of its welfare character. Based on the understanding that the redistributive policies of the State can be a means of emancipating the working class, this group began to consider the idea of assistance as a right of citizens and a duty of the State as one of its priority guidelines (Iamamoto, 2004).

The possibility of success of the articulation of the epistemic community of social work in the task of advocating for the approval of an organic law that would confirm their understanding of social work was reinforced with the impeachment of Collor and the inauguration of Itamar Franco as President of the Republic. The shift in command from the executive power provided a more favorable institutional environment for achieving the intended objective, given the new administration's greater inclination to incorporate certain demands related to social policies (Margarites, 2019). After a negotiation process that involved different forces of the executive and legislative branches and the social service grouping, the Organic Law of Social Work was sanctioned in December of 1993.

## **Final considerations**

In the processes discussed in this paper, we verified the importance of epistemic communities in the institutional design of two sectors of Brazilian social policies in the period of redemocratization. In both cases, we identified the relevance of technical knowledge and expert groupings acting as protagonists in the formulation of public policies. More specifically, we mapped the existence of a relationship between the theoretical production, the dynamics in the academic field of these areas and the understanding of groups of experts in engaging in the arenas of public policies acting to build certain social problems and advocating the adoption of specific solutions conceived from their specialized knowledge. Consequently, changes in the academic field can impact the sectors of public policies, as well as changes in political spaces can stimulate transformations in the academic scope.

Additionally, we approached the contrast of the trajectories of the epistemic communities of health and social service in their relationship with the institutional context. While in the health area the movement was typically characterized by pluralistic currents, in which pressure groups drive the direction of a policy, in the case of social work, we observe a distinct development, in which the absence of initial mobilization was reversed from the necessity of regulation imposed by the constitutional text that strengthened the perspective of assistance as a right. This institutional incentive, coupled with the theoretical redirection within the academic field of Social Service, enabled the formation of an epistemic community that, from the process of elaboration of the organic law, consolidated itself as one of the most relevant actors in the area.

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