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Health surveillance and geography: Theoretical and methodological potential

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CSP200521(3)Monken-Barcellos

Monken M., Barcellos C. Vigilância em saúde e território utilizado: possibilidades teóricas e metodológicas. [Health surveillance and geography: Theoretical and methodological potential]. Cadernos de Saúde Pública (Rio de Janeiro, Brasil) 2005 May–June; 21(3):898-906.

Objectives: To contribute to constructing recognition methodologies in the field by means of secondary data on objects and their forms, namely conditions of action and means of existence of human endeavor; to contribute to health surveillance through the incorporation of particular geographic characteristics; to relate concepts and categories of the territorialization process of health surveillance practices.

Methodology: Descriptive analytical. In this article, concepts of human geography according to authors Milton Santos (construction of territory) and Anthony Giddens (construction of society) are applied to health care practices.

Results: Recognition of the social dynamic and of customs and habits is important for determining health vulnerabilities, which originate in interactions between social groups in geographical spaces. They are defined as an indivisible set of systems of actions and objects. The integral use of territory as the unit of analysis for health status and health interventions assumes the identification of geographic objects, their use by the population and their importance for the flow of people and materials.

Conclusions: The search for new paradigms in the field of collective health should be accompanied by the development of methods that link individuals and communities, viewed as a whole, with particular characteristics, organization and territory. A systemic analysis of the local context on geographic scales enables health practices, health status, surveillance and health care services to be identified in their contexts. One proposal is to combine a study of “construction of territory” and the theory of structuring “construction of society” in order to understand the contexts by which populations utilize territory.