



# Fitness Centers: Space of Social Influence

## Centros de Acondicionamiento Físico: Espacio de Influencia Social

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### Abstract

Physical Conditioning Centers (PCC), better known as gyms, are spaces that have been gaining relevance in society. The objective was to discriminate the relevant elements and aspects that happen within the PCC, which have a social impact and lead to the transformation of the individual; conducting a mixed quantitative-qualitative study, with a phenomenological, descriptive approach. The results obtained show that the PCC scenario has a great impact on the development and actions of its participants. It is concluded that we must continue with the consolidation of these spaces as centers of social development aimed at health and well-being, with the collaboration of interprofessional groups and the generation of in-depth study and analysis from different areas and entities.

### Keywords:

Gym; Physical Activity; Social Skills; Health

### Resumen

Los Centros de Acondicionamiento Físico (CAF) más conocidos como gimnasios son espacios que han ido tomando relevancia en la sociedad. El objetivo fue discriminar los elementos y aspectos relevantes que suceden dentro de los CAF, que tienen impacto social y conllevan la transformación del individuo; realizando un estudio de tipo mixto cuantitativo-cualitativo, con enfoque fenomenológico, descriptivo. Los resultados obtenidos muestran que el escenario de CAF, tiene gran impacto en el desarrollo y actuar de sus participantes. Se concluye que se debe continuar con la consolidación de estos espacios como centros de desarrollo social encaminados a la salud y bienestar, con la colaboración de grupos interprofesionales y la generación de estudio y análisis de profundización desde distintas áreas y entidades.

### Palabras clave:

Gimnasio; Actividad Física; Sociabilidad; Salud



## INTRODUCTION

Physical Conditioning Centers, better known as gyms, are spaces that have been gaining relevance in society, they have managed to position themselves and have recognition, often towards the physical motor component of individuals through physical activity, but really in these places the individual manages to explore new things, communicating, socializing, learning, through the body; Although the focus is health, it should not only stay on the physical part, rather it should allow the person to also achieve psychological and social health; Thus, these spaces become scenarios of influence where new experiences are generated and various objectives are established, often finding great rewards on an emotional level by finding differential activities.

In the movement expansion and corporality sector, we find a series of scenarios and spaces that, accompanied by a wide range of activities, actions and tools, offer the general public diverse alternatives for carrying out physical activity. (Rodríguez, 2014) states that these spaces are directed towards recreation and sociability, generally involving themselves in the organization of the urban sector, and that is why it is important to know what happens within these spaces.

What is the objective of its creation and consolidation, what population participates and benefits, activities carried out, tools used, work methodologies, among other characteristics; as well as inquiring about the meaning that these scenarios have for people and the relationship of this definition at a national and international level and its connection with other branches of the movement and corporality sector; observing the potential that these scenarios have to influence at an individual and collective level, generating interaction patterns between what is developed within the scenario and the daily subjects life.

In the search of the human being to find actions, tools with differential approaches that allow him to improve his health, it was found that the PCC offer a series of activities with diverse methodologies that can accompany this process; (Rocha et.al., 2016) in his study indicates that according to the current epidemiological reality, everything related to health and that contributes to improving it, at an individual and collective level, must have a high degree of attention and support for its development and to maximize its benefit.

It is essential to understand that individuals have become aware and are concerned about generating self-care and reducing negative habits such as sedentary lifestyle; this has always been present in society and is not something that has emerged in modern societies; the search for health and



prevention of diseases by human beings has always been present in their development and evolution; evidence has been found highlighting the benefits obtained from a systematic practice of physical activity, contributing to the physical, social and psychological development of the human being.

That is why it is essential that in settings such as fitness centers, comprehensive training processes are structured based on physical activity, taking up actions and foundations of the hygienist movement and directing it towards health care.

The work that is carried out and the activities that are promoted in fitness centers are based on physical activity and must generate a complex, clear and inclusive process. What does this mean? These centers must rethink their actions considering what is happening in relation to the needs, demand and characteristics of the sector and of individuals, suggesting immediate action.

Structuring strategic plans for the future, which must be adaptable and flexible, allowing us to understand that we must not only focus on a population typology, but also on the diversity that exists within it, from its different classifications; being aware that we must focus on health; generating its transversality and understanding that it is a multidimensional phenomenon, for which the series of strategies that are established must have multiple and inclusive characteristics, because it seems that at some point the processes that are planned in the objectives of the scenarios and the strategies have been separated, preventing them from aligning and which has not allowed these scenarios to consolidate as integral spaces for health promotion and prevention.

If it is pointed out that within these scenarios there is a diversity of activities, tools and methodologies, it is important to remember those who took the first steps in the structuring of machinery and modern visualization of gyms.

(INFOBAE, 2017) Zander as one of the pioneers in the structure and design of machinery, some of which is still a fundamental basis for the proposal of new elements and which raises the body care and health through the progressive effort that describes it as the muscles control through systemic use, which as a result will permit to have a strong body, we still see this in the processes that develop within these scenarios clearly taking into account scientific advances, the theorization that has emerged, the support of other areas such as medicine and that in the end is reflected in the structure and training plans organization that today start from the principle of individualization.

It is important to highlight that since ancient cultures, physical conditioning processes have been developed with various objectives, according to the characteristics of the time and that some are still practiced due to their adaptability and benefits they offer, (Feld, 2020) indicates that in those ancient cultures a practice was generated using body weight, which is currently still maintained and is located as one of the trends in the fitness sector and that also gives rise to other processes such as functional training and high intensity work, in addition, it mentions the broad evolution that the process of work machines has had in these scenarios, from machinery and elements for work with free weights to machinery with wide ergonomic adjustment.



Pedraz and Torrebadella (2019) in their work mention that this process of hygienic gyms takes relevance in the bourgeois part of society, establishing an ideology and a culture and being a breeding ground for the propagation of practices and discourses of the hygiene and therapeutic processes importance; as an autonomous component towards health and leisure, observing this from a critical socio-component finding that the activity in these gyms allowed the emergence of physical culture.

This expansion that is generated allows the visualization of a new sector, which is seen as an industry that moves millions of euros worldwide; it is raised by (Eva, 2021), indicating that according to the report of the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association, it generates movements of approximately 30 million euros per year in the United States and that this figure would have a growth between 3 and 4 percent in the following 10 years from 2018, a situation that has had some obstacles due to the health situation that was experienced worldwide and that has led to a reengineering.

The focus of the movement and physicality industry in general and in particular on fitness in its gym settings, which has allowed this crisis to be addressed through innovation and development and improvement plans to be proposed, seeking to meet these new demands through a broad portfolio of offers.

The evolution process that gym spaces have had is highlighted from the exercise of the human being for survival and an adaptation to the characteristics of each moment of society and its development, (team, 2022) makes it clear that everyone who has been linked to these scenarios is clear about what base activities in the structuring of their operation will never go out of style even if new methodologies, elements, machinery emerge.

This makes some of these activities remain and endure over time, becoming a trend, being so broad that they allow adaptability and flexibility according to the needs and characteristics of the time and of the individuals. Within these processes of evolution and development that have occurred in the area of movement and corporality and in the different sectors that comprise it, we find that it has accompanied the evolution of the human being through a series of activities and methodologies.

Sevilmis et. al (2023) is clear in indicating that humanity has always been concerned with directing itself towards actions of vitality and that the realization of physical activity has had some basic processes, towards the prioritization of musculature, beauty and aesthetics; that also in the course of society it has led to various approaches, from carrying it out for survival processes, using it in propaganda and competition actions, thus allowing a strengthening of body culture in society and resulting in the visualization and development of a physical culture at the

beginning of the 20th century.

The development and consolidation of fitness centers is accompanied by regulatory processes. In Colombia, Law 729 of 2001 stands out, which sets out the characteristics of these settings and the approach they will have towards the population.

In the analysis of these scenarios, (Mercadofitness, 2024) generates an x-ray of the gym sector in Colombia; finding that although there are large gyms, the majority of these scenarios that are found at the local, regional and national level are not linked to these chains, as a characteristic they have a large structural surface and are located in residential areas, having a work team that contributes to the attention of users and have an average cost of \$60,000 to \$90,000 Colombian pesos per month, which are generally paid in cash.

The age group of users with the highest participation is between 26 and 45 years old and it is women who use these settings the most to exercise with clear but general objectives, to lose weight, improve health and well-being; they use the weight training areas and go an average of three times a week, there is a large gap in relation to new clients since they have a permanence between 3 and 6 months, this can be interpreted as a failure to consolidate the participation and continuation of clients.

Gym managers and owners have high expectations of greater activation of the sector, being aware that to do so, they must generate shock plans with clear strategies, since among the challenges they encounter in the sector is maintenance at the level of elements, machinery and infrastructure and the recruitment and retention of new users. This will only be achieved with the establishment of strategic plans that meet current demands and that allow for adjustments to be made for the future.

The impact that gyms have on society leads them to analyze; what is the responsibility they have with individuals and the community. Sousa (2024) indicates that promoting well-being in the community is something fundamental that gyms must take as an outstanding of social responsibility processes, since these scenarios play a relevant role in the actions to promote the community health and well-being.

In addition to the fact that the good development of social responsibility processes will allow the gym to improve its image, increase customer loyalty, attract new customers, and contribute reciprocally to the community; this can be done through establishing actions and activities that promote health and well-being, in addition to establishing inter-institutional actions that allow supporting social causes and generating internal processes of environmental protection through the proper use of resources, the selection of recyclable material, among others; a gym that establishes an adequate

social responsibility process will have a wide differential with the competition, standing out for its support in sustainable development in the community.

Rodríguez (2008) shows that gyms are spaces that have been little studied at an academic level, and that being an industry with a significant impact on society, it is essential that they are characterized, analyzed and the information is disseminated, but this is not the only difficulty that gyms encounter, but also the high rate of user desertion is something that must be studied and reviewed.

Although the population fluctuates, it is necessary to identify why participants stop attending and abandon their training process; It is identified that the population that attends the most is young people and young adults, on the other hand, the older adult population has found in these scenarios a space for integration and participation where objectives directed towards health and well-being begin to be established without leaving aside those focused on aesthetics and the physical, but also those of a psychological and social nature arise for which these scenarios and their staff must be trained to meet these needs.

It is essential that the gym begins to observe the users in a comprehensive way, transversalizing the process that is carried out through the actions and activities that are proposed, (Health & fitness, 2019) refers that scientists make a relationship between social processes and physical activity where health and happiness are achieved, indicating that a person who exercises begins to feel less alone and part of a community, of a group; finding various spaces for integration and participation where technology manages to shorten distances and allows communication between users and gyms; this analysis of understanding that people do not only go to the gym for a physical motor process, but that they should go to it for various reasons that allow them to develop comprehensively.

People are increasingly aware of the benefits they can find by attending and participating in the different activities offered within gym settings. Veigler Business School (2021), mentions that people seek to improve their physical fitness and the functioning of their body, they also want to establish activities that allow them to reduce stress and anxiety in addition to identifying themselves and working on self-esteem. This can be achieved through various methodologies, which are established in gyms where the person becomes aware of the body and its care.

Physical activity is aimed at all types of population; based on the principle of individualization, it is customized for each individual, allowing for gradual improvement, finding results day by day; in addition to having a variety of activities, elements that will facilitate the development and adherence to the performance of systematic physical activity.

## METHOD

**F**or the methodological process of this work, the objective is to identify the relevant elements and aspects that occur within PCC, which have a social impact and lead to the transformation of the individual. Directing this to observe not only the physical motor process that is executed within these scenarios, but also the series of activities that help the development and integral participants' formation that will later lead them to replicate them in their particular and daily contexts.

A mixed method with a descriptive phenomenological approach is used to collect information and analyze the situation from the integrality of perception and statistics, based on the participants' experiences, managing to generate the relationship description between events and the environment.

A characterization of the population that attends the PCC is established, generating an observation of the interaction and development of activities that occur within the setting and interviews and questionnaires are established that allow collecting information in relation to: objectives, perception, users motivation and the impact that attendance and connection of the activities offered by the PCC have generated in their daily lives.

The sample population group is made up of 40 individuals, ranging an age of 25 to 40 years; it is a heterogeneous sex men and women, continuous practicing attendees of PCC activities, with priority of 6 months to 1 year and a half, belonging to two headquarters located in the city of Bogotá.

The analysis is carried out from the components of physical, cognitive, communicative and social human development; interpreting the impact that is happening in each of these areas based on the participation, integration and development of extramural activities at the PCC, and the application and replication of these activities in the user's daily life.

## RESULTS

The results show that the PCC scenario has a great impact on the development and performance of its participants, highlighting the generation of positive benefits; in the same way, some negative situations are detected that put participants at risk and that must be addressed by the professionals and administrators of the different PCCs; in order to neutralize and reduce these situations, directing and strengthening the use of the scenario and the performance of physical activity in an appropriate, reasonable and responsible manner.

**Table 1.** *Comprehensive impact on CAF's participation*

Component	Impact	
	Yeah	No
Physical Motor	100%	0%
Cognitive	85%	15%
Communicative	95%	5%
Social	80%	20%
Clothing	70%	30%
Accessories	78%	23%

**Note:** Comprehensive impact on PCC participation designed by the authors, developed in Google forms

It is observed that the body is used as a facilitating tool in learning, socialization and communication processes by users; identifying that from the evolution of the PCC, there is a wide range of scenarios, machines and elements, which adapt to the needs and characteristics of the population that attends; Similarly, differential strategies and methodologies are generated that allow users to adapt and adhere to the process of carrying out continuous physical activity and integrating it into their daily lives.

In this way, we seek to address the diversity of objectives in which participants and/or users attend, and strengthen the integral development process from shadow training; by promoting the realization of responsible physical activity, where clearly from the exercise and stimulation of the body in physical actions it begins to respond and generate a transformation, but it does not only remain in the muscle action, but the execution of these activities and the participation in this scenario contributes to other user components.

Starting with this physical-motor exercise, users generate a cognitive process of identifying and learning new things from exercises, execution, to comprehensive processes of healthy habits; also developing communicative actions through technical language that they begin to use and understand when being in the context of sport and physical activity and social integration is achieved by interacting with other people, learning new visions and thoughts of other users.

This identifies that not only are physical stereotype processes beginning to be visualized within the context of the PCC, but it is going one step further and starting with a culture of food and nutrition; the component of clothing, elements and accessories that facilitate the practice of different activities is also explored; in many cases, a process of using social networks



at an individual or collective level is initiated where topics of interest are generated that allow interaction with other people.

All of these situations are very positive and are used in different ways depending on the chronological development stage of each individual. During adolescence, in the search for identity, acceptance and participation, important connections are made that contribute to this integral development. As for other stages, such as that of older adulthood, this attendance at fitness centers allows for maintaining an active social process. In general, the impact obtained in the PCC space allows the individual to acquire habits that will benefit them in their daily lives.

Unfortunately, risky and negative situations are also detected, this may be due to lack of support, inadequate development of physical activity, lack of clarity in objectives, social pressure, among others; At this time is where eating disorders, consumption or use of chemical substances begin to be seen, which are some of the most common in the search for stereotypes or quick results; in view of which it is important to generate awareness processes and campaigns regarding the benefit generated in the development of physical activity and sport and in the use of scenarios such as PCC.

The latent risks to which they are exposed must also be shown and made evident; one must be aware that within these scenarios a micro-society is generated and that very positive aspects and situations that lead to progress can be found; negative situations can also be found that lead to risks of different levels.

## DISCUSSION

**I**n relation to the work carried out on the global and comprehensive impact that fitness centers have on the people who attend and participate in their activities and settings, there is a broad relationship with previous research; (Rodríguez, 2014) indicated that gyms are seen as spaces directed towards recreation and sociability, a situation that is clear when analyzing the impact achieved at the social level of integration and participation of those users who were taken as a reference to examine the situation.

Also, (Sousa, 2024) suggests the work of promoting well-being in the community from the gym spaces, this is reflected when considering the individual as an integral subject and not only from the physical-motor field, this allowing to attend to the process of social responsibility by accompanying and directing the individual generating transformation that will have a positive impact on the context and community.

In this way, it is found that the processes developed within the PCC generate a development in different components of the individual, (Health & fitness, 2019) indicates that the relationship between sociability and physical activity allows the participant to acquire health and happiness, a situation that is reflected in what is found within the work, in terms of the social impact achieved within the actions carried out in the PCC and that will possibly be replicated by the user in their different environments.

Finally, we reaffirm what we found in the work regarding the importance of activities that address the integrality of the human being and that lead to an impact on it transcending the physical motor process, (Veigler Business school, 2021), where it indicates that although people seek to improve their physical process and understand the functioning of their organism, they also aim to generate activities that reduce stress, anxiety and strengthen the self-esteem process; with this we confirm that PCCs have a high impact from different components on the user.

## CONCLUSIONS

As outlined in Table 1, we found that the attendance and participation of users in the CAF has a significant impact, so it is important to continue with the consolidation of these spaces, as centers of social development, aimed at health and well-being with the collaboration of interprofessional groups and the generation of in-depth studies and analysis from different areas and entities.

This indicates that physical activity is for all individuals, the particularity and specialty of the individual and the population must be taken into account, being clear that there will be different objectives that must be addressed in these spaces; seeking the adherence of the participants by generating new experiences; establishing situations of pleasure that lead to permanence and integral development.

It is recognized that fitness centers have an impact within the individual process at the level of comprehensive development, finding that physical-motor action stands out, identifying improvement in physical capacity, body composition; equally the social component in integration, participation and recognition of other people, directing it to a broader communication process and with greater impact on verbal and non-verbal actions.

In the feeding component, nutritional actions are highlighted, finding interest in a balanced diet, recognition of nutritional supplementation and, in a negative way, in some cases, the use of chemical substances such as steroids and anabolic steroids. Cognitive actions are strengthened, when identifying and learning new things in the environment of physical activity and sport such as: terminology, recognition of exercises, importance of development and benefit thereof.

Among other aspects that have an impact on the individual and that occur in these scenarios is the clothing process, marking a trend in the use of specific elements for sports practice such as t-shirts, pants, shoes and complementary accessories that help the development of activities, thus establishing different fashions.

This proves that the development of physical activity and its practice in PCCs not only has a physical impact, as has been mentioned continuously, but is seen in the overall and integral nature of the individual, having different contributions, directing them towards healthy habits, generating more active populations on the path towards health and well-being.

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