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Social Agents, Family, and Intergenerational Leisure in Physical Activity Participation

Agentes sociales, familia y ocio intergeneracional en la práctica de la actividad física

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e-MOTION

Revista de Educación,
Motricidad e Investigación

NÚM. 25

ISSN 2341-1473

<https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/remo.vi25.9349>

Editorial
Universidad
de Huelva

EUHU

Abstract:

Shared practices among grandparents, parents, and children demonstrate the capacity to enhance the physical and psychological well-being of all generations, strengthen family bonds, and transmit values of coexistence and citizenship (Sanz et al., 2024; Sáenz de Jubera et al., 2023; Alonso et al., 2019). Consequently, intergenerational leisure constitutes a strategic resource for community policies and programs aimed at sustainable human development. Research conducted in recent years has consolidated scientific evidence regarding the relationship between leisure, family, physical-sports activity, and social agents (Sanz et al., 2018). This approach demonstrates that the practice of physical activity cannot be understood in isolation from family and community contexts, which act as nuclei structuring active behavior. The family and intergenerational networks shape the opportunities and motivations associated with physical practice, transforming it into a space for learning, coexistence, and the transmission of values (Ponce de León et al., 2010, 2015). The importance of intergenerational leisure is confirmed, particularly regarding activities shared between grandparents and grandchildren, which foster mutual well-being, family cohesion, and education in values of sustainability and respect for the environment. Physical-sports leisure is understood as an educational and social agent capable of promoting citizenship, coexistence, and integral development (Sanz et al., 2023, 2024). Future challenges identified include the need for longitudinal studies to track the evolution of family practices, and attention to factors of equity and diversity regarding access to physical activity. The importance of integrating the digitalization of leisure and strengthening coordination between school, family, and community is also underscored (Valdemoros et al., 2017, 2021; Alonso et al., 2022).

Keywords:

Intergenerational leisure; Family; Physical activity; Well-being; Social agents.

Resumen:

Las prácticas compartidas entre abuelos, padres e hijos demuestran su capacidad para mejorar el bienestar físico y psicológico de todas las generaciones, fortalecer vínculos familiares y transmitir valores de convivencia y ciudadanía (Sanz et al., 2024; Sáenz de Jubera et al., 2023; Alonso et al., 2019). Por ello, el ocio intergeneracional constituye un recurso estratégico para políticas y programas comunitarios orientados al desarrollo humano sostenible. Las investigaciones desarrolladas en los últimos años han consolidado las evidencias científicas sobre la relación entre ocio, familia, actividad físico-deportiva y agentes sociales (Sanz et al., 2018). Este enfoque demuestra que la práctica de la actividad física no puede entenderse al margen de los contextos familiares y comunitarios, que actúan como núcleos que estructuran el comportamiento activo. La familia y las redes intergeneracionales configuran las oportunidades y motivaciones asociados a la práctica física, convirtiéndola en un espacio de aprendizaje, convivencia y transmisión de valores (Ponce de León et al., 2010, 2015). Se constata la importancia del ocio intergeneracional, especialmente en las actividades compartidas entre abuelos y nietos, que fomentan el bienestar mutuo, la cohesión familiar y la educación en valores de sostenibilidad y respeto al entorno. El ocio físico-deportivo se entiende como un agente educativo y social, capaz de promover ciudadanía, convivencia y desarrollo integral (Sanz et al., 2023, 2024). Entre los retos futuros se señalan la necesidad de estudios longitudinales que sigan la evolución de las prácticas familiares, y la atención a factores de equidad y diversidad en el acceso a la actividad física. También se subraya la importancia de integrar la digitalización del ocio y de fortalecer la coordinación entre escuela, familia y comunidad (Valdemoros et al., 2017, 2021; Alonso et al., 2022).

Palabras claves:

Ocio intergeneracional; Familia; Actividad física; Bienestar; Agentes sociales.

Received: September 23, 2025

Accepted: November 5, 2025

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1. Introduction

Research conducted at the intersection of leisure, family, physical-sports activity, and social agents over the last three decades (Ponce de León et al., 2019; Lozano et al., 2022; Valdemoros et al., 2017) has built a solid theoretical and empirical body of knowledge explaining how different agents (nuclear and extended family, intergenerational networks, educational institutions, and community organizations) shape, facilitate, or limit participation in physical and leisure activities, and what consequences this has for well-being, socialization, and the transmission of values (Ramos et al., 2007).

These studies (Ponce de León, 1998; Sanz, 2005; Ramos et al., 2010; Sanz & Ponce de León, 2006; Valdemoros et al., 2014) agree that leisure-time physical activity cannot be understood independently of the relational contexts in which it takes place. The family emerges as the core that structures active behavior, where dynamics of support and accompaniment determine the frequency, motivation, and meaning of physical-sports practice. From childhood to adulthood, family shared leisure constitutes a space for learning, coexistence, and education in values such as cooperation, sustainability, and respect for the environment.

Along these lines, studies on intergenerational leisure (Alonso et al., 2020; Ponce de León et al., 2021) highlight the educational and emotional role of physical activities shared between grandparents and grandchildren, which foster mutual well-being, cultural transmission, and family cohesion. In this type of leisure, the shared experience strengthens empathy, the sense of belonging, and intergenerational continuity.

This relational approach goes beyond the view of the isolated individual and places emphasis on processes of interaction and shared responsibility: negotiation of free time, choice of activities, and the joint construction of meanings. When leisure is experienced as a shared experience, its educational and symbolic potential increases, reinforcing perceived well-being and the sense of community (Alonso et al., 2024).

The relevance of this perspective for Physical Education (PE), Physical Activity (PA), and Sport Sciences is considerable. First, because it places physical practice within its social and cultural context, showing that active habits emerge from family and community networks, not only from individual decisions. Second, because it opens the door to integrated interventions, in which family, school, and community are articulated as co-responsible agents of well-being. Third, because intergenerational leisure is revealed as a privileged setting for education in values, social cohesion, and emotional well-being throughout the life cycle (Lanuza, 2012; Ponce de León, 1998; Sanz, 2005; Ramos et al., 2010; Ponce de León et al., 2010).

2. What We Know So Far

Recent research agrees that family leisure has a decisive influence on physical activity habits, especially during childhood and adolescence. Family participation can take three relational forms (Ponce de León et al., 2015):

- Alliance, when joint activities are carried out that strengthen cohesion and the sense of belonging.
- Rivalry, when individual preferences or family dynamics generate tensions or exclusions.
- Independence, when family members engage in separate activities but within an environment of respect and coexistence.

This diversity of forms determines both the frequency and continuity of practice and its educational and symbolic value.

Studies by Sáenz de Jubera et al. (2021), Sanz et al. (2023, 2024), and Valdemoros (2021) have, in recent years, shifted attention toward intergenerational leisure, highlighting that physical activities shared between grandparents and grandchildren are privileged spaces for cultural transmission, mutual learning, and emotional well-being. A significant number of children and adolescents participate in physical-sports activities together with their grandparents, reporting psychological and social benefits: greater motivation, stronger emotional bonds, and a sense of family belonging. These experiences also tend to incorporate values of sustainability and environmental care, especially when they take place in natural or community settings (Ponce de León et al., 2021; Sanz et al., 2024).

Physical-sports leisure transmits values of citizenship, coexistence, and cooperation, favoring the integral development of individuals (Sáenz de Jubera et al., 2017). The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in these studies has made it possible to observe how family and school contexts act jointly in the internalization of social and civic values through leisure and physical activity.

Research thus offers a view of leisure and physical activity as relational, educational, and cultural phenomena, deeply rooted in family and intergenerational networks, and with a strong potential to promote values, social cohesion, and well-being throughout the life cycle.

3. Challenges and Future Perspectives

Although the accumulated evidence is robust, future challenges remain. Longitudinal studies could make it possible to track the evolution of family and intergenerational practices over time.

It has been found that opportunities for active leisure are conditioned by economic resources, time availability, and cultural capital. Therefore, one field to be explored in the coming years concerns factors of inequality (gender, social class, migration, or disability) and the promotion of inclusive interventions that recognize the diversity of family structures and contexts.

Likewise, the digitalization of leisure poses new challenges. Generational differences in the use of technologies, platforms, or devices require rethinking how to mediate between digital and face-to-face worlds in order to foster intergenerational encounters and shared physical activity (Alonso et al., 2022; Valdemoros et al., 2017).

At the practical level, the evidence suggests that public policies promoting physical activity are more effective when they incorporate family and intergenerational strategies supported by coordination among schools, social services, and sports organizations. Community programs

that integrate generations and promote the sustainability of leisure represent a promising path toward more equitable and collective well-being.

4. Key Conclusions

The body of research on leisure, family, physical-sports activity, and social agents has contributed decisively to understanding that physical activity and leisure must be analyzed as social and relational practices, embedded in interpersonal networks where generations, values, and learning converge (Sanz et al., 2018).

Shared practices among grandparents, parents, and children demonstrate their capacity to improve physical and psychological well-being, strengthen family bonds, and transmit values of coexistence and citizenship.

Therefore, intergenerational leisure constitutes a strategic resource for community policies and programs aimed at sustainable human development.

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