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Self-Managed Leisure and Volitional Development in Young People: A Study of Motivational Profiles and Relational Supports Among Spanish Youth

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Abstract

Self-managed leisure is a key determinant of volitional development and the transition to adulthood in young people. This article examines the relationship between perceived family and social support environments and levels of self-management and motivation among young people aged 18 to 29. A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was used to administer the Self-managed Leisure Scale (SLS) [Escala de Autogestión del Ocio (SLS)] and the Environment Scale (ES) [Escala de Entornos (EE)] to a sample of 468 young people living in Spain. The results reveal medium-to-high levels of self-management, highlighting that women have greater perceived competencies and relational connections than men, although they also perceive greater social barriers. It was confirmed that greater family and social support correlates significantly with higher levels of autonomy, competence and social relationships in leisure time. In the area of motivation, multiple orientations are observed to coexist, with slightly higher average scores for the identified regulation. It was concluded that self-management is an essential psychosocial mechanism for integral human development, which enables young people to be the authors of their own experience. Fostering environments that nurture basic psychosocial needs is critical for promoting active, healthy and engaged citizens and transforming leisure into a space of participation and well-being.

Keywords: leisure; youth; self-managed leisure; self-determination theory; volitional development

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1. Introduction

The study of leisure in contemporary societies has evolved substantially, moving away from being viewed as mere spare time to becoming established as a vital sphere for human development, personal agency and psychological well-being (Christtmass, 2025; Doistua et al., 2020; Lazcano et al., 2022). During young adulthood (aged 18 to 29), a stage characterised by developmental transitions towards adulthood and the redefinition of identity, the management of leisure time takes on strategic importance (Coşkun & Dilmaç, 2024; De-Juanas et al., 2020). Within this framework, self-management of leisure—understood as young people's ability to plan, organise and make decisions about their leisure experiences independently—emerges as a key driver of volitional development (Lazcano et al., 2022; Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024).

However, self-management and motivational quality do not occur in isolation. Evidence shows that volitional experience depends on the relational climates of the environment, particularly the family setting and the social context (Alonso Ruiz et al., 2019;

Lamberti et al., 2023). Despite its theoretical relevance, there is a gap in the empirical literature regarding how relational support from the home and the community jointly influences young people's self-management abilities and motivational profiles.

1.1. Self-Determination Theory and Motivational Regulation in Leisure

The study of self-management in leisure finds its main theoretical framework in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), an empirical macro-theory of human motivation, personality development and psychological well-being formulated by Deci and Ryan (2008). In contrast to unitary conceptions that analyse motivation solely in terms of its quantity ('how much'), SDT maintains that the key lies in the quality and type of motivation ('why') that guides behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). In the field of leisure, this approach is fundamental, as human development and personal integrity do not occur automatically, but through a dialectical exchange between the individual and their social environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT is based on an organismic metatheory that conceives of human beings as active organisms oriented towards growth, exploration and the integration of experiences into a unified sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). However, this innate tendency requires the support of the social environment in order to flourish (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). A facilitating environment supports the natural processes of self-motivation and personality integration; conversely, a controlling, chaotic or rejecting context frustrates these tendencies, leading to passivity, alienation or defensive patterns (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Consequently, the quality of leisure does not depend solely on the availability of free time, but on how the relational context satisfies or inhibits essential psychological needs (Guay et al., 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Unlike theories that conceive of needs as personality-dependent variables, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) maintains that there are three basic and innate psychological needs, universal across cultures and life stages: autonomy, competence and relationships (affinity) (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008; Schüler et al., 2013). Their fulfilment is essential for mental health and vitality, whilst their frustration leads to distress and pathology (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b):

1. Autonomy: This refers to the need for individuals' actions to be self-authored or for them to be the originator of their own actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Guay et al., 2000; Schüler et al., 2013). Autonomy should not be confused with total independence, individualism or social isolation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). An individual is autonomous when their behaviour emanates from their integrated sense of self and is congruent with their personal values, acting with a full sense of will and choice (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). In self-managed leisure, autonomy is manifest when a young person makes their own decisions about what activities to engage in, based on their inner values and interests.
2. Competence: This is the need to feel effective in interactions with the environment and to experience opportunities to exercise and express one's capabilities (Guay et al., 2000). It is not an acquired skill but the sense of confidence and effectance that arises from meeting optimal challenges (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Schüler et al., 2013). Leisure provides a vital space to nurture this need, as it allows the individual to seek challenges that match their abilities, facilitating experiences of flow (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2014).
3. Relationships (or Affinity): This describes the need to feel connected to others, to love and be loved, and to have a sense of belonging to a community or social group (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Schüler et al., 2013). Although leisure activities can be solitary, a background of secure relationships provides the necessary grounding

for individuals to explore their interests with confidence. The satisfaction of this need is the foundation for individuals to accept and assimilate the values of their social environment.

Fulfilling these dimensions generates psychological vitality—energy available to act with enthusiasm and persistence—(Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Frustration in these areas drives people to seek compensatory substitutes or extrinsic goals that cause long-term distress (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008).

This framework is complemented by three sub-theories (Ryan & Deci, 2000b): the Cognitive Evaluation Theory, which analyses how external factors (rewards, pressures) affect intrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Guay et al., 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b); the Theory of Organisational Integration, which focuses on the internalisation of activities that are not intrinsically interesting (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b); and the Theory of Basic Psychological Needs, which links the fulfilment of needs to mental health (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Schüler et al., 2013).

From the organismic-dialectical perspective, the SDT distinguishes between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Autonomous motivation encompasses intrinsic motivation and fully internalised extrinsic forms (identified and integrated regulation), characterised by personal volition and support (Black & Deci, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). In contrast, controlled motivation encompasses external and introjected regulation, where the individual experiences pressure, obligation or a need to protect their self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

The Theory of Organisational Integration classifies these regulations along a continuum of relative autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000a):

- Amotivation: A lack of intention to act due to a lack of value, competence or expectation of outcomes, leading to feelings of incompetence (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Martín-Albo et al., 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000a).
- External regulation: Behaviour carried out to obtain rewards or avoid punishments, with a locus of causality that is entirely external (Martín-Albo et al., 2009; Ntoumanis et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2000a).
- Introjected regulation: Partial assimilation of the norm to avoid guilt or boost the ego, yet still experienced as controlled behaviour (Black & Deci, 2000; Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000a).
- Identified regulation: Autonomous motivation in which the activity is consciously valued and accepted as important for one's own goals (Martín-Albo et al., 2009; Ntoumanis et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2000a).
- Integrated regulation: A more advanced form of extrinsic motivation, in which identifications are assimilated in complete harmony with the values of the self (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b).
- Intrinsic motivation: The prototype of self-determined activity, undertaken for the enjoyment, interest and satisfaction inherent in the task (Martín-Albo et al., 2009).

In self-directed leisure, high scores on intrinsic and identified motivation are associated with greater concentration, positive affect and persistence; furthermore, adjacent forms on the continuum show a stronger positive correlation with one another (Guay et al., 2000; Martín-Albo et al., 2009). To facilitate the process of internalisation, the social environment must support basic needs by offering meaningful justifications, acknowledging emotions and using non-controlling language (Deci et al., 1994; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b).

1.2. Autonomy and Self-Management in Young People's Leisure Activities

Adolescence represents a period of change, preparation and exploration that precedes adulthood. During this developmental transition, the development of autonomy—understood as internal control, problem-solving competence and the ability to make decisions—becomes one of the most critical psychological dimensions (Lazcano et al., 2022). In the context of leisure, this development is not automatic, but depends on the individual's ability to act as the initiator or author of their own behaviour, experiencing a sense of psychological freedom and choice (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Schüler et al., 2013). Despite the freedoms that come with growing up, adolescents and young people often find themselves within a restricted environment for developing true independence, as many of their daily tasks tend to be overly structured or controlled by adults (Lazcano et al., 2022). In this regard, for leisure to become a genuine space for development, it is essential that young people possess genuine levels of self-management and decision-making capacity (Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Self-management enables young people to move from being mere recipients of leisure services to becoming the architects of their own experience (Lazcano et al., 2022). When leisure spaces support autonomy—by adopting the young person's perspective, acknowledging their feelings and minimising external pressures—they catalyse the natural processes of self-motivation and personality integration (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Thus, self-management in youth leisure is not limited to individual choice, but often manifests as collaborative agency within the peer group, built upon two fundamental parameters: (a) a shared mission, which reaffirms common goals and a sense of pride in belonging, and (b) shared power, based on negotiation and horizontal relationships (Lazcano et al., 2022).

Various studies have shown that taking organisational responsibility for leisure activities is directly linked to higher levels of enjoyment and satisfaction. When young people actively participate in the planning, preparation and evaluation of their own goals, the activity takes on greater significance. This phenomenon is particularly evident in digital leisure, cultural and artistic activities, and sport, where managerial responsibility strengthens group commitment and adherence to shared norms (Lazcano et al., 2022). Furthermore, self-management is also reflected through 'self-management through association', where those who do not take on active leadership roles experience collective autonomy by choosing to follow and support those who lead, without this undermining their intrinsic motivation (Lazcano et al., 2022). Furthermore, participation in self-managed processes within educational leisure fosters ethical citizenship, where young people construct personal and group identities around values of equity, justice and inclusion (Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024). Maintaining one's own leisure preferences in the face of social pressure from the group is, moreover, a key indicator of mature and internalised autonomy.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, self-management largely satisfies basic psychological needs. On the one hand, it satisfies the need for autonomy, reducing the stress and anxiety associated with controlled or imposed activities and promoting psychological vitality (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). On the other hand, it nurtures the need for competence, which acts as an essential mediator for a satisfying experience, as the individual needs to feel capable and effective within their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). To maintain intrinsic motivation, young people must tackle challenges that are optimally matched to their skills and which trigger experiences of 'flow' (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In this way, the perception of having improved one's skills through leisure fosters respect for diversity, the cultivation of responsibility and personal self-affirmation (Doistua et al., 2020). Ultimately, fostering self-management in young people's leisure activities acts as a strategy for social transformation that promotes cohesion and equips young

people with key skills for their integration as active and self-determined citizens (Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024).

1.3. Self-Directed Leisure, Environments and Motivational Regulation During Adolescence

As part of the transition to adulthood, young people face the challenge of constructing an autonomous life plan amidst rapid socio-economic and cultural transformations (Coşkun & Dilmaç, 2024; De-Juanas et al., 2020). At this stage, self-directed leisure emerges as an ideal non-formal space for volitional training and free decision-making, moving beyond the excessive directiveness that often characterises other institutionalised settings (Lazcano et al., 2022; Ortega & Lazcano, 2015). However, to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to examine self-directed leisure, support from the relational environment (family and social), and motivational regulation in an integrated manner, recognising that these three factors form an interdependent psychosocial system that shapes young people's trajectories (Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024).

Firstly, self-directed leisure does not emerge as a purely individual or isolated process, but rather requires a supportive contextual environment. In the private sphere, the family exerts a major influence during adolescence. Evidence shows that the perception of a family environment that supports autonomy, provides emotional security and encourages participatory decision-making constitutes a key protective factor for self-regulation (Alonso Ruiz et al., 2019; Álvarez Muñoz et al., 2023). A supportive family unit does not restrict a young person's independence, but rather offers a solid relational foundation that enables them to explore their community and creative interests with confidence and responsibility (Alonso Ruiz et al., 2019; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Secondly, the social or community environment—comprising networks of friends, peer groups and local organisations—is the setting in which young people's leisure activities take place most intensively (Christtmass, 2025; Lamberti et al., 2023). When peer groups and the neighbourhood environment are perceived as safe, inclusive and free from violence, the need for social connection is met and perceived abilities to organise and lead shared activities are enhanced (Doistua et al., 2020; Kleiber et al., 2017; Lazcano et al., 2022). Conversely, experiencing precarious, hostile or distant social environments acts as a contextual barrier that increases vulnerability and hinders the development of self-management skills (Crawford et al., 1991; De-Juanas et al., 2020; García-Castilla et al., 2020).

Thirdly, motivational regulation acts as the intrapsychic mediator through which the quality of contextual support translates into sustained and rewarding self-management behaviours. Young people who perceive their relational environments as controlling or judgemental exhibit a predominance of extrinsic motivations (external or introjected regulation) or states of amotivation, characterised by a search for social approval or apathy towards available leisure options (Coşkun & Dilmaç, 2024; Ntoumanis et al., 2021). In contrast, experiencing strong family and social support fosters the internalisation of values, promoting identified and intrinsic regulations whereby young people engage in self-directed leisure activities because of their personal significance and transformative value (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024).

Furthermore, studies indicate that sociodemographic factors such as gender and age may influence perceptions of social support and levels of self-management. For example, young women have more frequently reported structural and social barriers within the community related to gender stereotypes or the assumption of caregiving responsibilities, which impact their perception of their environment and the availability of self-managed free time (García-Castilla et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2015). Furthermore, as young people progress through the age range, variations are observed in socialisation patterns and

economic autonomy that may influence their modes of motivational regulation (Lamberti et al., 2023).

1.4. Rationale for the Study, Research Gap, Hypotheses and Objectives

Addressing environmental support (family and social), self-management (autonomy, competence and relationships) and motivational regulation as an integrated whole is essential to move beyond narrow perspectives on young people's leisure. This approach enables us to understand how external environmental conditions enhance or inhibit young people's ability to manage their free time, thereby guiding the formulation of public youth policies and community-based educational leisure programmes aimed at promoting well-being and equity (Christtmass, 2025; Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024).

Despite the theoretical relevance described, the scientific literature reveals a clear empirical gap. Most studies that have applied Self-Determination Theory have focused on formal and educational contexts such as academic performance, competitive sport or work productivity (Black & Deci, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ntoumanis et al., 2021). However, there are few quantitative studies that examine, within the specific field of youth leisure and using validated assessment tools, how vulnerability or perceived support within the family and social environment are simultaneously related to the fulfilment of self-determination needs and to different profiles of situational motivation.

To address this gap, we hypothesise that supportive family and social environments are positively related to self-management of leisure time. Specifically, we expect that a higher level of perceived support will be associated with greater autonomy, competence and relationships, as well as with more self-determined motivational profiles.

In line with this hypothesis, the overall aim of this article is to analyse the relationship between the perception of supportive family and social environments and levels of self-management and motivation among young people aged between 18 and 29 living in Spain.

To achieve this general aim, the study sets out three specific objectives:

1. To identify the degree of self-management of leisure (autonomy, competence and relationships) and the profiles of situational motivation (intrinsic, identified, extrinsic and amotivation) in the sample of participants.
2. To detect whether there are significant differences in self-management abilities, perceptions of the environment and motivational profiles according to the sociodemographic variables of gender and age group (18–23 years vs. 24–29 years).
3. To examine the relationship between perceived support in family and social contexts and young people's leisure self-management skills and motivational regulation.

2. Materials and Methods

This article presents some of the findings from the pilot phase of the research project 'Self-management of leisure among young people: contexts, perceptions of rights and well-being' (Youth Autonomy). This multidisciplinary study evaluates how self-directed leisure influences the well-being and rights of young people aged 18 to 29. The study focuses on the importance of developing intrinsic motivations and skills so that young people can act autonomously, make their own decisions and build positive social relationships. It is believed that a self-directed approach to leisure not only reduces the risk of social exclusion, but may also be linked to life satisfaction and psychological and social well-being.

The study employs a descriptive-correlational quantitative design. Data collection was carried out using a self-administered questionnaire comprising validated scales (barriers to leisure, psychological well-being and life satisfaction), alongside instruments designed

specifically for the project: the Environment Scale and the Self-managed Leisure Scale (SLS). This article focuses specifically on the results obtained from these latter two scales.

2.1. Sample, Methodology and Ethical Considerations

The sample corresponds to the pilot phase (n = 468) of the project, representing approximately 10 per cent of the final sample planned for the next stage of the research. The study population consisted of young people aged between 18 and 29 living in Spain. The sample was selected using non-probability sampling by proportional quotas based on gender and age groups, in line with the distribution of the reference population as established by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample profile.

		%
Age	18 to 23 years old	51.90%
	24 to 29 years old	48.10%
Gender	Male	45.70%
	Female	52.60%
	Non-binary/Other	0.60%
	I prefer not to say	1.10%

The inclusion criteria were established as follows: being aged between 18 and 29 at the time of the survey, and residing within the geographical scope of the study. The exclusion criteria involved discarding records corresponding to incomplete questionnaires, automated response patterns or responses with abnormally fast completion times ('speeders'). The dropout rate was 60.6 per cent, calculated based on the total number of panellists who accessed the questionnaire but either did not meet the inclusion criteria or voluntarily abandoned the session. With regard to the handling of missing data, the online administration platform required a response to every item in order to proceed, thereby ensuring a complete data matrix (0 per cent missing values).

The limitations inherent in the use of an online panel and non-probability sampling are explicitly acknowledged. Firstly, non-probability sampling precludes strict statistical generalisation of the results to the entire young Spanish population. Secondly, the online administration (CAWI) entails a potential self-selection bias (greater willingness to participate amongst those with a greater interest in or digital literacy) and a coverage bias regarding those young people with less access to or less frequent use of digital platforms. To mitigate these biases and maximise structural representativeness, the sample was adjusted using cross-quotas by age and gender in line with data from the INE, combined with rigorous quality controls on the panel platform (ISO 26362 (ISO, 2009) verification and screening for anomalous responses).

2.2. Procedure for Accessing Data

The fieldwork was conducted via an online survey between 31 March and 3 May 2026, using the CAWI methodology, which offers great flexibility by allowing the use of various devices such as mobile phones or tablets. Participants were recruited via a panel certified to the ISO 26362 standard, which comprises thousands of users profiled to reach specific target groups. This system ensures full traceability through the automatic recording of metadata, enabling researchers to monitor results in real time to detect unexpected patterns.

The research was conducted in strict accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the university's Ethics Committee. The platform's welcome screen informed participants about the aim of the research, confidentiality and the anonymised

processing of data. Participation was voluntary and required the signing of a digital informed consent form before accessing the questions; no direct financial incentives were offered.

2.3. Instruments and Measurement

The dimensional structure and psychometric properties of the constructs were analysed using an integrated approach comprising Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Composite Reliability (CR), Mean Extracted Variance (MEV) and the Hetero-trait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio for discriminant validity.

2.3.1. Environment Scale

Designed ad hoc to assess the influence of the immediate context on self-management capacity and well-being, the scale is based on Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT)—which posits the value of positive social relationships for personal growth—and on Keyes' Theory of Social Well-being, relating to community integration and contribution. The scale consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree), structured across two dimensions:

1. Family Environment (6 items): Assesses perceptions of support and protection within the immediate family, support in decision-making, emotional support and the absence of judgement (e.g., 'I can count on my family's support when making decisions').
2. Social Environment (6 items): These measure the depth of friendships, close ties with the community and perceived safety within social groups, loneliness and the ease of building networks of trust (e.g., 'I am always surrounded by friends I can trust').

Both dimensions help to demonstrate whether positive environments can contribute to improving young people's personal autonomy and life satisfaction. The scale is designed such that high overall scores indicate a lower level of perceived support, interpreting the construct in terms of contextual vulnerability and barriers to autonomy.

2.3.2. Self-Managed Leisure Scale (SLS)

The SLS is a tool designed to capture the phenomenon of leisure as a space for volitional development and self-regulation amongst young people. It is based on Deci and Ryan's (1995) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that psychological well-being and personal growth depend on the fulfilment of innate psychological needs and the quality of motivational regulation. It consists of 34 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, distributed across two main subscales:

1. Situational Motivation in Leisure (16 items): This adapts the SIMS by Guay et al. (2000) and its Spanish version, the EMSI (Martín-Albo et al., 2009), to the context of leisure, assessing the 'why' behind participation in leisure activities across four dimensions (four items each):
    - Intrinsic motivation: participation driven by the interest, fun and enjoyment inherent in the activity (e.g., "Because I enjoy these activities").
    - Identified regulation: the young person engages in the activity because they consciously value it and consider it important for their own goals, even if it is not always fun (e.g., "By personal choice").
    - External regulation: participation motivated by external pressures, to obtain rewards or avoid punishment (e.g., "Because I have no other choice").
    - Amotivation: a state of lacking intention or value towards the activity; participation occurs out of habit or without seeing the point (e.g., "I don't know; I don't see what these activities offer me").

2. Psychological Needs in Leisure Subscale (18 items): measures the fulfilment of basic psychological needs specifically in the context of leisure.
    - Autonomy (6 items): freedom of choice and resistance to undue external pressure. The items designed for this dimension seek to capture voluntary action and decision-making free from external pressure. Emphasis is placed on aspects such as feeling that one decides for oneself what to do and how to organise one's time, and/or freedom in decision-making... (e.g., 'I feel that I decide for myself which activities I do').
    - Competence (7 items): focuses on perceived effectiveness and the ability to feel capable in interactions with one's environment; feeling competent to achieve positive outcomes in leisure; having the ability to overcome new challenges and improve skills or knowledge; and perceiving that one's own effort directly influences the success of leisure activities (e.g., "I feel competent to achieve positive outcomes...").
    - Relationships (5 items): focuses on the need to feel connected to others and to have a sense of belonging to a group or community; it assesses the quality of the connection and the perceived support within the leisure group, feeling recognised and fully accepted, and seeing that the people with whom one shares leisure time care about each other's well-being (e.g., "I feel a strong connection with the people with whom I share my leisure time").

2.3.3. Psychometric Evidence

Data processing was carried out using the R environment (lavaan, semTools and psych packages). Due to the ordinal nature of the Likert-type items and the presence of multivariate non-normality, the CFA models were estimated using the Robust Maximum Likelihood (MLR) estimator. Psychometric validity was assessed using the following standardised criteria:

- Overall Fit: Robust CFI $\geq$ 0.90 (acceptable) and $\geq$ 0.95 (excellent); Robust RMSEA $\leq$ 0.08 (acceptable) and < 0.05 (excellent); SRMR $\leq$ 0.08.
- Reliability and Convergence: Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\geq$0.70) with automatic recoding of reverse-scored items (check.keys = TRUE), Composite Reliability (CR $\geq$ 0.70) and Mean Extracted Variance (MEV $\geq$ 0.50).
- Discriminant Validity: This was verified using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), requiring values < 0.85 to rule out conceptual overlap.

The psychometric analyses confirmed performance consistent with an initial validation phase:

- Leisure Self-Management: This demonstrated excellent psychometric performance across its seven dimensions. The CFA models showed optimal fit (CFI $\geq$ 0.95, RMSEA $\leq$ 0.068, SRMR $\leq$ 0.035). Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha between 0.74 and 0.79) and composite reliability (CR $\geq$ 0.730) comfortably exceeded the recommended reliability thresholds ($\geq$0.70).
- Family and Social Environment: This scale demonstrated acceptable psychometric performance across its two dimensions. The CFA models showed optimal fit (CFI $\geq$ 0.91, RMSEA $\leq$ 0.057, SRMR $\leq$ 0.031). Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha between 0.69 and 0.70) and composite reliability (CR $\geq$ 0.710) exceeded the recommended reliability thresholds ($\geq$0.70).

2.4. Data Analysis and Statistical Inference

Data analysis for this article was carried out using SPSS 27.0 software, following the sequence below:

1. Descriptive statistics and consistency: calculation of means (M), standard deviations (SD) and reliability coefficients to characterise the motivational and self-management profiles.
2. Inference of differences: comparison of means by age (18–23 years vs. 24–29 years) and gender using Student's *t*-test for independent samples and ANOVA. The magnitude of the differences was assessed using Cohen's d.
3. Type I Error Control: To correct for the inflation of the $\alpha = 0.05$ error resulting from multiple simultaneous comparisons, the Benjamini–Hochberg correction method was applied to control the False Discovery Rate (FDR). Only those comparisons with adjusted *p*-values < 0.05 were considered significant.
4. Association between constructs: Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to analyse the relationships between support in family and social environments and the dimensions of self-management and motivation in leisure, testing the central hypothesis regarding the relationship with context.

3. Results

3.1. Metric Properties and Internal Consistency of the Instruments

In order to estimate the degree of internal consistency of the scales, Cronbach's alpha (α) was calculated for both the total scores and their respective subscales and factors (Table 2).

Table 2. Internal consistency of the Environment Scale.

Scale/Subscale/Factors	Number of Items	α *
Environment Scale (ES)	12	0.767
Family Environment	6	0.700
Social Environment	6	0.670
Self-managed Leisure Scale (SLS)	34	0.880
Psychological Needs in Leisure Subscale (18 items):	18	0.903
Autonomy	6	0.766
Competence	7	0.784
Relationships	5	0.778
Situational Motivation Subscale	16	0.704

* $\alpha \geq 0.70$.

The Self-managed Leisure Scale (SLS) showed high overall internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.880$). Its two main dimensions also showed optimal levels of reliability: the Situational Motivation subscale obtained an $\alpha = 0.812$, whilst the Basic Psychological Needs subscale achieved an $\alpha = 0.845$.

For its part, the Environment Scale achieved satisfactory overall internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.767$). On analysing its subscales, the Family Environment subscale showed an adequate value of $\alpha = 0.700$. However, the Social Environment subscale had a value of $\alpha = 0.670$, which was slightly below the conventional threshold of 0.700. For this reason, the data relating to this specific dimension should be interpreted with due caution.

3.2. Descriptive Analysis of Self-Management and Motivational Profile

In order to describe the behaviour of the variables analysed, the descriptive statistics for the SLS are calculated, including the mean ($\bar{x}$), the standard deviation (SD), and the minimum and maximum values observed (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the ES and the SLS.

Scale/Dimension	$\bar{x}$	SD	Min	Max
Self-managed Leisure Scale (SLS)	3.55	0.51	1.00	5.00
Psychological Needs in Leisure Subscale	3.71	0.67	1.00	5.00
Autonomy	3.72	0.73	1.00	5.00
Competence	3.72	0.72	1.00	5.00
Relationships	3.67	0.71	1.00	5.00
Situational Motivation Subscale	3.38	0.51	1.00	5.00
Intrinsic motivation	3.31	0.68	1.00	5.00
Identified Regulation	3.46	0.63	1.00	5.00
External regulation	3.31	0.64	1.00	5.00
Amotivation	3.42	0.65	1.00	5.00

With regard to the SLS, the overall mean score in the sample was $\bar{x}$ = 3.55 (SD = 0.51, on a scale of 1 to 5), indicating medium-to-high levels of perceived self-management in leisure activities. When examining the fulfilment of Basic Psychological Needs, high and consistent scores were observed across the three dimensions assessed: Autonomy $\bar{x}$ = 3.72 (SD = 0.73); Competence $\bar{x}$ = 3.72 (SD = 0.72); Relationships $\bar{x}$ = 3.67 (SD = 0.71). This indicates that participants perceive themselves as having the capacity and freedom to make decisions regarding their leisure activities.

With regard to the Motivational Profile (assessed using the SIMS scale adapted to leisure contexts), it was observed that the identified regulation recorded the highest mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 3.46; SD = 0.63), followed by amotivation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.42; SD = 0.65), intrinsic motivation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.31; SD = 0.68) and external regulation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.31; SD = 0.64).

Given that the mean scores for identified regulation, amotivation and intrinsic motivation fall within a very narrow range, it is not possible to assert the existence of a clearly predominant self-determined motivational profile; rather, the data suggest the coexistence of multiple motivational orientations in the leisure behaviours of the young people surveyed.

3.3. Inferential Analysis by Sex and Age

For the comparative analysis by sex, of the total number of participants (n= 468), 280 identified as women, 185 as men and 3 as non-binary or unspecified. Given the small sample size of this latter subgroup (n = 3), their data were excluded from the bivariate comparisons using Student's t-test to avoid estimation bias; the test was therefore carried out on a subtotal of n = 465 participants. Prior to this, the assumption of normality and homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's test.

The results indicate statistically significant differences in the following dimensions (Table 4):

1. Competence: Women reported higher levels ($\bar{x}$ = 3.83; SD = 0.72) than men ($\bar{x}$ = 3.63; SD = 0.65).
2. Relationships: Women scored higher ($\bar{x}$ = 3.78; SD = 0.73) than men ($\bar{x}$ = 3.58; SD = 0.64).
3. Social Environment: Women scored higher on their perception of barriers in the social environment ($\bar{x}$ = 2.64; SD = 0.73) compared with men ($\bar{x}$ = 2.50; SD = 0.71).

Table 4. Differences in the ES and the SLS by age group and sex.

Variable	18–23 Years Old $\bar{x}$ (SD)	24–29 Years Old $\bar{x}$ (SD)	t (Age)	*p*	d	Male $\bar{x}$ (SD)	Female $\bar{x}$ (SD)	t (Sex)	*p*	d
Environment Scale (ES)	2.34 (0.66)	2.41 (0.69)	−1.11	0.269	−0.10	2.32 (0.66)	2.42 (0.69)	−1.48	0.070	−0.14
Family Environment	2.11 (0.79)	2.24 (0.80)	−1.80	0.072	−0.17	2.14 (0.77)	2.19 (0.82)	−0.66	0.254	−0.06
Social Environment	2.58 (0.72)	2.59 (0.74)	−0.08	0.933	−0.01	2.50 (0.71)	2.64 (0.73)	−2.03	0.022	−0.19
Self-managed Leisure Scale (SLS)	3.53 (0.53)	3.57 (0.49)	−0.94	0.347	−0.09	3.52 (0.43)	3.61 (0.52)	−2.01	0.045	−0.19
Psychological Needs in Leisure Subscale	3.68 (0.69)	3.73 (0.64)	−0.81	0.418	−0.08	3.63 (0.57)	3.80 (0.69)	−2.82	0.005	−0.26
Autonomy	3.72 (0.75)	3.73 (0.71)	−0.20	0.840	−0.02	3.68 (0.64)	3.79 (0.76)	−1.64	0.051	−0.15
Competence	3.67 (0.75)	3.77 (0.68)	−1.48	0.141	−0.14	3.63 (0.65)	3.83 (0.72)	−3.09	0.002	−0.29
Relationships	3.65 (0.74)	3.68 (0.69)	−0.40	0.688	−0.04	3.58 (0.64)	3.78 (0.73)	−3.05	0.002	−0.29
Situational Motivation Subscale	3.36 (0.51)	3.40 (0.52)	−0.81	0.419	−0.08	3.39 (0.45)	3.40 (0.51)	−0.07	0.473	−0.01
Intrinsic motivation	3.29 (0.70)	3.34 (0.65)	−0.95	0.342	−0.09	3.30 (0.66)	3.35 (0.67)	−0.74	0.459	−0.07
Identified Regulation	3.46 (0.63)	3.47 (0.63)	−0.25	0.805	−0.02	3.47 (0.60)	3.49 (0.62)	−0.49	0.626	−0.05
External regulation	3.29 (0.63)	3.33 (0.65)	−0.71	0.481	−0.07	3.36 (0.62)	3.28 (0.63)	1.39	0.165	0.13
Amotivation	3.41 (0.67)	3.44 (0.63)	−0.63	0.527	−0.06	3.44 (0.59)	3.46 (0.65)	−0.33	0.738	−0.03

Note. $\bar{x}$ = mean; SD = standard deviation; d = Cohen's d.

Although statistically significant, the effect size estimated using Cohen's d indicates that all these differences are small in magnitude (d < 0.300).

To analyse the age variable, the sample was divided into two age groups: early adulthood (18–23 years, $n = 251$) and established adulthood (24–29 years, $n = 217$). Student's *t*-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups in either overall self-management or its subscales ($p > 0.050$), indicating stability in scores across the age range studied.

3.4. Correlational Analysis Between Environments and Self-Management of Leisure

The Environment Scale is reverse-coded, such that higher scores represent a greater perception of barriers, constraints or less support within the personal and social environment. Consequently, a negative Pearson correlation coefficient (r < 0) indicates that a lower perception of barriers (i.e., greater support from the environment) is associated with higher levels of self-management and satisfaction of psychological needs.

When analysing the relationships between variables (Table 5), it is observed that the Environment Scale (Total) shows a weak but statistically significant negative association with the Total SLS (r = −0.135; $p = 0.003$; 95% CI: [−0.223; −0.045]).

When analysing the Basic Psychological Needs dimension specifically, the correlation with the Environment Scale (Total) shows a stronger association (r = −0.271; $p < 0.001$; 95% CI: [−0.352; −0.185]), indicating a small to moderate relationship. In particular, both the Family Environment (r = −0.219; $p < 0.001$) and the Social Environment (r = −0.264; $p < 0.001$) show significant inverse associations with the fulfilment of the needs for autonomy, competence and relationships in leisure.

Given the number of tests carried out and to control the Type I error rate arising from the sample size ($n = 468$), a Bonferroni correction was applied, setting a more conservative significance level ($\alpha = 0.010$). Under this criterion, the associations identified retain their statistical significance, confirming the existence of a systematic, albeit modest, relationship between supportive relational environments and self-management capacity in young people.

Table 5. Correlation between ES and Self-Managed Leisure.

Scale/Subscale/Factors		Environment Scale (ES)	Factors	
			Family	Social
Self-managed Leisure Scale (SLS)	Pearson correlation	−0.135 **	−0.091 *	−0.151 **
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.003	0.049	0.001
Psychological Needs in Leisure Subscale	Pearson correlation	−0.271 ***	−0.219 ***	−0.264 ***
	Sig. (two-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Autonomy	Pearson correlation	−0.301 ***	−0.259 ***	−0.276 ***
	Sig. (two-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Competences	Pearson correlation	−0.239 ***	−0.192 ***	−0.233 ***
	Sig. (two-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Relationships	Pearson correlation	−0.203 ***	−0.145 **	−0.219 ***
	Sig. (two-tailed)	<0.001	0.002	<0.001
Situational Motivation Subscale	Pearson correlation	0.110 *	0.126 **	0.066
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.017	0.006	0.154
Intrinsic motivation	Pearson correlation	0.124 **	0.157 ***	0.058
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.007	<0.001	0.209
Identified Regulation	Pearson correlation	0.065	0.085	0.028
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.106	0.067	0.548
External regulation	Pearson correlation	0.139 **	0.152 ***	0.092 *
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.003	0.001	0.047
Amotivation	Pearson correlation	0.019	0.004	0.031
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.687	0.934	0.510

Note: n = 468. The Environment Scale is reverse-coded (higher scores indicate a greater perception of barriers or less support). * The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). ** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). *** The correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (two-tailed).

4. Discussion

The results of this study suggest a relationship between the perception of relational environments and indicators of self-directed leisure among young people. In particular, the data indicate that a family environment perceived as having fewer barriers or greater support is positively associated with indicators of well-being and cohesion, which is consistent with young people's motivational regulation. These findings are consistent with research describing shared leisure time at home as a setting linked to the strengthening of intergenerational relationships and personal development (Alonso Ruiz et al., 2019; Álvarez Muñoz et al., 2023). From the conceptual framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the observed associations are consistent with the notion that the perception of relational support within the family context is linked to the fulfilment of the need for relationships, which in turn relates to the internalisation of leisure behaviours and values (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Meanwhile, the relationship between the perceived social environment and self-management reveals specific nuances. Although young people's leisure activities take place predominantly in spaces shared with peers, the perception of the social environment is not always directly linked to intrinsic motivation in the abstract, but is sometimes associated with needs for interaction, status or identity construction (García et al., 1999). The results suggest that experiences within the social sphere are related to self-regulated leisure to the extent that they are accompanied by a perception of free choice and individual volition (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

In the sample analysed, self-management tends to emerge as a factor linked to the perceived quality of the leisure experience. In line with previous studies, taking on organizational responsibilities in leisure increases participants' enjoyment and satisfaction (Kleiber et al., 2017; Lazcano et al., 2022). These patterns are consistent with the idea that the transition from highly directed leisure practices towards initiatives offering greater scope for personal decision-making is associated with perceptions of autonomy and personal value during leisure time (Lopez Noguero et al., 2016; Ortega & Lazcano, 2015). Furthermore, these associations align with multidimensional models that link the capacity for self-determination with psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989).

However, the associations between context and self-management must be analysed whilst taking environmental barriers into account. In light of the framework of constraints on leisure (Crawford et al., 1991), intrapersonal and structural limitations may be linked to actual opportunities for self-management. In this regard, the data reveal gender differences: female participants perceived a significantly higher level of barriers in the social environment, a finding consistent with the literature highlighting the presence of social barriers and traditionally assumed caregiving roles as factors influencing the availability and management of leisure time (García-Castilla et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2015).

Situational motivational regulation proved to be stable across gender and age groups. This pattern differs from that of the psychological needs subscale, on which women scored higher in competence and relationships. At a descriptive level, identified regulation had the highest average score, suggesting that young people tend to engage in their leisure activities by consciously valuing their personal significance. The closeness of the mean scores for identified regulation, amotivation and intrinsic motivation indicates a coexistence of different motivational orientations rather than an exclusively self-determined profile.

Furthermore, the interpretation of the findings presented must be examined in the light of various methodological limitations. First, the cross-sectional and correlational design prevents inferring direct causality or temporal direction among contextual support, self-management, and motivational profile. Secondly, the collection of data using self-report instruments may introduce social desirability bias or variations linked to the participants' own subjective perceptions. Thirdly, non-probability quota sampling using an online panel limits the strict generalisation of the results to the entire young Spanish population. Furthermore, this design entails a potential risk of self-selection bias or digital coverage bias. Finally, from the perspective of psychometric properties, it should be noted that the Social Environment subscale recorded internal consistency slightly below the standard threshold; therefore, the relationships associated with this specific dimension should be interpreted with due caution.

5. Conclusions

This study has analysed the relationship between perceived support in family and social environments, the dimensions of self-management and the motivational profile in a sample of young people living in Spain. The descriptive empirical findings reveal medium-to-high levels of perceived self-management of leisure and a high degree of satisfaction with the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relationships. With regard to the motivational profile, the results show the coexistence of multiple orientations, with slightly higher average scores for identified regulation, followed by amotivation and intrinsic motivation.

In relation to sociodemographic variables, no statistically significant differences were observed across age groups (18–23 years versus 24–29 years). However, significant differences were identified by gender: women reported higher scores on the competence and relationships subscales, but also perceived a greater level of barriers in their social environment compared with men, with a small effect size observed in all cases.

From the correlational analysis, the data support the existence of significant inverse associations between the perception of barriers in the environment (family and social) and the dimensions of self-management. Specifically, a lower perception of constraints in the family and community spheres is linked to higher scores in the fulfilment of the needs for autonomy, competence and relationships in leisure activities. These results are consistent with theoretical frameworks that highlight the role of relational support in the perception of autonomy and self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Lazcano et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

In summary, the findings provide empirical evidence on the associations between supportive relational environments and indicators of self-management among Spanish young people. In light of these findings, policy and socio-educational interventions should cautiously focus on reducing contextual barriers and fostering youth autonomy, avoiding rigid or controlling frameworks (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024). Future research using longitudinal designs will make it possible to verify the stability of these relationships and to explore in greater depth the volitional processes associated with young people's leisure activities.

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the non-probabilistic nature of the sample, these correlational data allow us to suggest, on a preliminary basis, some practical guidelines for promoting self-management amongst young people. In the field of youth development, the evidence suggests creating spaces that promote decision-making and personal responsibility, whilst avoiding rigid structures that restrict young people's autonomy. To strengthen family support, community initiatives should guide families to provide emotional support and respect young people's autonomy during leisure. As regards educational settings, the findings support the integration of participatory methodologies and co-design experiences within educational leisure activities, thereby fostering the development of organisational and interpersonal skills (Lazcano Quintana & Madariaga Ortuzar, 2024).

Finally, at the community level, these findings suggest that the feasibility of gradually incorporating co-management approaches should be explored, paying particular attention to equity and accessibility for diverse groups or those in vulnerable situations (Christtmass, 2025; Evans et al., 2017).

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