



# Leisure Constraints and Negotiating in Tourism: Case Study of Croatian Students as Solo Travelers

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Received: December 20, 2024

Accepted: April 17, 2025

Published: June 2, 2025

## Keywords:

Negotiation;  
Tourism;  
Consumer behavior;  
Statistic methods



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**Abstract:** When deciding to consume a tourist service or product, tourists sometimes go through a process of negotiating with their perceived constraints. The sources of those constraints may be interpersonal, intrapersonal, structural or other, and they present a deterrent to making a decision. A tourist's ability to successfully negotiate those constraints may be the deciding factor that determines whether one chooses to travel or not. This paper aims to add to the scientific literature on the constraint-negotiation process of tourists by investigating the constraint-negotiation strategies and processes of Croatian students when deciding about solo travel. The research was conducted using a structured questionnaire developed based on relevant literature and with a sample of Croatian students. Collected data was analyzed with different quantitative methods, using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The results point to the constraints Croatian students face when deciding to travel solo as well as negotiation strategies they use when trying to overcome those constraints. Recommendations for tourist business subjects as well as limitations and future directions for research are also presented in the conclusion of the paper.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourists face many and diverse constraints to their engagement in tourism activities, the number and variety of which is even more considerable concerning solo travel. Traveling and other tourist activities impose various and significant challenges on tourists who partake in solo travel that may not only affect their experience but even hinder their participation. Since solo traveling is one of the fastest-growing segments due to lifestyle changes in different cultures around the world (Mill & Morrison, 2009), understanding leisure constraints and negotiation strategies of tourists who travel solo might result in important findings both for academia and tourist operators. This paper attempted to add to the literature dealing with leisure constraints and negotiation strategies of a specific group of tourists, namely, Croatian students as solo travelers.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Leisure Constraints

Constraints were usually considered as obstacles to participating in leisure and leisurely activities (Crawford et al., 1991). Aforementioned construct was also defined as „people's reasons for refraining from participating in leisure activities and refer to the probability that people will alter their activities and preferences“ (Lenggogeni & Syafrizal, 2023) or „factors and barriers that affect individuals or tourists to participate in leisure activities, either locally or internationally“ (Andreani & Njo, 2021).

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Crawford and Godbey (1987) were often considered and referenced as authors of seminal research on leisure constraints. The aforementioned authors classified leisure constraints based on their research into intrapersonal (stress, depression and anxiety), interpersonal (concerned with relationship between individuals), and structural barriers (opportunity, time or money). Intrapersonal constraints refer to psychological states or cognitive obstacles derived from individual beliefs and experiences such as family issues (Karl et al., 2021), safety and security issues (Shin et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2018), lack of interest, anxiety, stress, religiosity and depression (Andreani & Njo, 2021; Aziz et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021). Interpersonal constraints refer to social interactions and can include a lack of a person with whom one may participate in tourist activities (Andreani & Njo, 2021; Fredman & Heberlein, 2005). Structural constraints can be considered as external obstacles that can encompass a lack of time, limited financial resources, climatic factors, information and access (Andreani & Njo, 2021; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008).

Leisure constraints have also been investigated in the touristic context and found to influence travel behavior (Ahmad et al., 2022), travel intention (Andreani & Njo, 2021; Aziz et al., 2022), travel decision making (Chen et al., 2021; Karl et al., 2020), destination choice (Sun et al., 2022) as well as travel plans (Karl et al., 2021) of various tourists segments such as people with mobility disability (Tao et al., 2019), individuals with mental health conditions (Park et al., 2025), senior citizens (Hou & Li, 2024), tourists that travel with their pets (Ying et al., 2021) etc.

As aforementioned, there were several relevant papers dealing with leisure constraints employed by different groups of tourists, and some also dealt with the leisure constraints of students. Although leisure constraints among North American students have been extensively researched, different authors showed that leisure constraints among students from different cultural contexts differ (Chung et al., 2013; Li & Stodolska, 2007; Mei & Lantai, 2018; Sivan, 2003; Walker et al., 2008). Additionally, authors investigating student leisure constraints regarding travel found specific constraint factors, such as constraints concerned with the opinions of close others (Mei & Lantai, 2018), lazy solo, lack of leisure activity companion, university student's life without time to rest and enjoy (Lee et al., 2020), lack of time, language barrier and cultural differences, lack of friends and feeling of lack of entitlement to pursue leisure (Li & Stodolska, 2007).

Studies that investigated solo tourists' constraints or factors that affect their non-participation in travel activities were few. For instance, Chung et al. (2017), as well as Yang et al. (2025), confirmed that structural, intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints factors can be extracted with tourists who travel solo. However, Wilson and Little (2008) found four specific constraints while investigating women as solo travelers: others' perceptions and opinions, proneness to vulnerability, restrictions to access, and temporal immobility and conspicuousness. In addition, according to Yang and Tung (2018), single students as tourists are more prone and more exposed to constraints that originate from their family's concerns and pressure than those that travel in company.

Based on the review of the relevant studies concerning leisure constraints, that mainly found the existence of different groups or factors of leisure constraints, the following hypothesis was set:

**Hypothesis One:** Different factors of leisure constraints to solo travel of Croatian students can be extracted.

## 2.2. Negotiation Strategies

Some researchers on leisure constraints reported that people might participate in leisure activities despite perceiving certain leisure constraints (Kay & Jackson, 1991; Shaw et al., 1991), which led

to the conclusion of the existence of certain means some employ in order to overcome or negotiate constraints. Based on the aforementioned, negotiation strategies and leisure negotiation were introduced to the literature (Jackson & Rucks, 1995). Leisure constraint negotiation can be defined as “a series of measures individuals apply to avoid and reduce the impacts of constraints on leisure participation” (Lyu & Oh, 2015).

There are different strategies one might resort to during the decision-making process. Jackson and Rucks (1995) classify aforementioned negotiation strategies into cognitive strategies, which refer to changes in cognition that one should make in order to choose with regards to travel; and behavioral strategies, which refer to changes in behavior that one has to introduce in order to make the travel happen. Some behavioral constraint negotiation factors are related to travel styles, travel planning, life changes, on-site travel decisions (Karl et al., 2021), time management, skill acquisition, changing interpersonal relations, and improving finances (Jackson & Rucks, 1995); while cognitive negotiation factors may refer to the change of perception, cognitive restructuring, and attitude change (Karl et al., 2021). Constraint negotiation was researched in order to provide a better understanding of their impact on the travel decisions of different tourist segments such as senior citizens (Wen et al., 2020), mountaineering tourists (Doran & Pomfret, 2019), international students (Mei & Lantai, 2018), etc.

According to Li and Stodolska (2007), there is only a limited number of studies dealing with leisure constraints and negotiation strategies applied by students, namely international students. The aforementioned authors attempted to fill this gap by finding that Chinese students negotiated leisure constraints on behavioral and cognitive levels, but were more likely to modify leisure rather than adjust their lives to find leisure time. Additionally, Lee et al. (2020) found several types of negotiation strategies applied by South Korean students (“replacer”, “continuer”, “quitter”). Furthermore, the authors claimed that different negotiation strategies can be induced, such as having willpower, being sociable and preference of single person (solo) leisure activities. Based on conducted relevant studies, the following hypothesis was set:

**Hypothesis Two:** Different factors of negotiation strategies to solo travel constraints of Croatian students can be extracted.

Based on negotiation strategies they applied; different segments of respondents could be extracted as could be confirmed in the relevant literature. For instance, Boo et al. (2014) successfully segmented the nonparticipants from participants in a large festival event. Even though this study is among the rare studies that attempted to segment the respondents based on the negotiation strategies they use, it showed that consumers could be segmented based on the negotiation strategies they apply, so the following hypothesis could be set:

**Hypothesis Three:** Based on negotiation strategies they use when deciding on solo travel, different segments of students can be discerned.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The empirical part of the research was conducted with a survey method in September 2024. In order to collect the data, a questionnaire was developed based on quantitative studies of leisure constraints and negotiation strategies (Jun & Kyle, 2011; Karl et al., 2021; Lyu et al., 2013; Nyaupane et al., 2008). The measurement instrument consisted of three parts: 18 items were used to measure leisure constraints perceived by the respondents in the first part and eight items were used to measure negotiation strategies in the second part of the questionnaire. The third part of the questionnaire consisted of demographic questions.

The authors used a sample of students exclusively from the University of Applied Sciences “Nikola Tesla” in Gospić, and a total of 48 students were included in the survey. The collected data was analyzed with SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed in the analysis in order to test the set hypotheses: Cronbach’s Alpha, factor analysis, cluster analysis (TwoStep and K-means) and independent samples T-test.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

After the descriptive statistical analysis was conducted, it was concluded that the respondents were predominantly female (64.4%), obtained a bachelor’s degree and studying to obtain their master’s degree (44.4%), had a family income between 1001 and 2000 euros (51.1%) and lived in households that consisted of 3 members (33.3%) or four members (31.1%).

Further statistical analysis encompassed the inferential statistical analysis methods. Firstly, the reliability analysis of the questionnaire was conducted by applying the Cronbach’s Alpha test. Cronbach’s Alpha results (0.892) indicated the items of the leisure constraints questionnaire were internally consistent. After the preconditions for conducting factor analysis were assessed (KMO = 0.782, Bartlett’s test of Sphericity = 0.000), the principal component analysis was conducted. Based on the conducted analysis, four leisure constraint factors of students as solo tourists were extracted: *family related*, *intrapersonal*, *finances and time related*, and *interpersonal*. As can be seen in Table 1, the extracted factors explained 74.4% of the total variance.

**Table 1.** Total Variance Explained of Leisure Constraints Factors

Factors	Eigenvalues	Variance Explained
Family related	4.624	42.036
Intrapersonal	1.405	12.774
Financial and time related	1.081	9.831
Interpersonal	1.068	9.712
		74.352

Source: Own calculations

The factor loadings of the extracted factors are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Leisure Constraints’ Rotated Component Matrix

Items	Family related	Intrapersonal	Financial and time related	Interpersonal
LC 1	<b>0.782</b>		0.254	0.210
LC 2	<b>0.749</b>	0.192	-0.103	0.154
LC 3	-0.109	<b>0.885</b>	-0.116	0.141
LC 4	0.437	<b>0.732</b>	0.380	0.204
LC 5	0.448	<b>0.662</b>	0.263	
LC 6	-0.160	0.699	<b>0.860</b>	0.236
LC 7	0.406	0.328	<b>0.691</b>	
LC 8	0.455		<b>0.599</b>	0.233
LC 9	0.286		0.133	<b>0.847</b>
LC 10		0.300	0.164	<b>0.831</b>
LC 11	0.445	0.172	0.300	<b>0.484</b>

Source: Own calculations

The family related factor has the highest factor loading to the first two items of the questionnaire, and thus refers to the effect of opinion and needs of family members on the decision-making process when deciding on solo travel. This finding was consistent with Yang and Tung (2018) who concluded that single students perceive constraints originating from their family's influence as very important. The second factor was named *intrapersonal*, because it is most connected to emotional states and feelings of respondents when considering solo travel, such as feeling comfort or emotional burden when deciding about solo travel. *Financial and time related* factor refers to considering financial means and time limits as hindrances for solo travel. The final extracted factor, *interpersonal*, deals with privacy issues, risks and relationships with other potential tourists and travelers students consider when deciding on consuming tourist services and products solo.

Further analysis is demanded to verify the second and third hypotheses. The first part of the analysis consisted of the reliability analysis of the questionnaire investigating negotiation strategies; the results of which indicated the questionnaire was internally consistent (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.861). After confirming the reliability of the measurement instrument, the preconditions for factor analysis were tested proving that the collected data was adequate for factor analysis (KMO = 0.817, Bartlett's test of Sphericity = 0.000). Factor analysis was conducted based on principal components analysis that extracted two factors which explained 67.5% of total variance; the results of this part of the analysis are depicted in table 3.

**Table 3.** Negotiation Strategies' Total Variance Explained

Leisure Constraints Factors	Eigenvalues	Variance Explained
Behavioral, travel planning and life changes factor	4.357	54.468%
Cognitive negotiation strategies factor	1.043	13.036%
		67.504%

Source: Own calculations

Extracted factors of negotiation strategies were named *behavioral, travel planning and life changes factor* and *cognitive negotiation strategies factor*. Factor loadings of the extracted factors are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Rotated Component Matrix of Negotiation Strategies Factors

Items	Behavioral, travel planning and life changes factor	Cognitive negotiation strategies factor
NS 1	0.869	0.263
NS 2	0.844	0.142
NS 3	0.785	
NS 4	0.676	0.519
NS 5		0.730
NS 6	0.453	0.699
NS 7	0.276	0.693
NS 8	0.587	0.603

Source: Own calculations

The *behavioral, travel planning and life changes* factors described the behaviors a person was willing to undertake, such as adjusting the schedule, organizing their obligations, learning new skills, and working overtime to be able to travel. The second factor, *cognitive negotiation strategies*, refers to perceptions of the effort a person might put forth to travel, or attitudes about the obstacles in planning.



Based on extracted factors, cluster analyses were conducted. TwoStep cluster analysis indicated the existence of two diverse clusters of respondents. K-means cluster analysis resulted in extracting two statistically significantly different clusters of respondents. Those segments were named the *cognitive adaptative segment* and *cognitive maladaptive segment*. The difference between the extracted factors was tested with ANOVA and the results indicated there were statistically significant differences between the clusters considering the second factor. The first segment, the *cognitive maladaptive segment*, is more likely to be between the ages of 26 and 35 (35%), have a bachelor's degree (50%), have lower levels of family income (45%) and live in three-member households (45%). Furthermore, they are less likely to find solo travel appealing (50%). They are statistically significantly more likely to fear embarrassment if traveling solo, be less prone to solo travel due to negative attitudes of others and feel the lack of support of their surroundings to solo travel. The second segment of students, the *cognitive adaptive segment*, is a predominantly female segment (69,6%), and also a younger segment since most of the respondents were in the youngest age group (52,2%). Furthermore, they are equally as likely to have a high school degree as a bachelor's degree (39,1%), none of the respondents have the lowest levels of family income and mostly live in households consisting of four members. They mostly express a preference towards solo travel in order to gain new experiences (47,8%). Unlike the *cognitive maladaptive segment*, this segment is less likely to be influenced by their surroundings' attitudes and lack of support for solo travel.

## 5. FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of this study should be emphasized in order to point to future research directions. Namely, the research was conducted on a student sample, so it could be recommended that other tourist groups be included in future research. Additionally, a more comprehensive questionnaire might provide a deeper insight into the constructs investigated in this research. Furthermore, only Croatian students were investigated in this paper. It could be recommended to compare the results to student populations from different countries of Europe and also the world.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on leisure constraints and solo travel by investigating and describing perceived leisure constraints of solo travel and negotiation strategies aimed at dealing with those constraints used by Croatian students. Based on the relevant literature, hypotheses about the aforementioned variables were set. The empirical part of the research enabled the collection of data and implementation of statistical methods that confirmed or partially confirmed the set hypotheses.

The first hypothesis was confirmed by factor analysis that enabled extracting four diverse leisure constraints for solo travel: *family related*, *intrapersonal*, *financial and time related* and *interpersonal*. The extracted factors further our understanding and knowledge about students as solo tourists. Firstly, some of the factors mostly collide with those extracted in the relevant literature (*intrapersonal* and *interpersonal*), but Croatian students also emphasize the importance of family needs and opinions as possible constraints when deciding on solo travel, as well as time and financial constraints. This can be expected, because students are still reliant on their families to a higher degree, but also lack the time to travel due to college obligations and also feel financial limits due to not having their own source of income. It could be advised that marketing experts include information about various aspects and advantages of solo travel to introduce this mode of travel to students' families. Furthermore, organizing more affordable tourist products and services for student solo tourists and when students have no classes or exams could also be advised.

In order to test the second hypothesis, factor analysis of negotiation strategies applied by students was conducted. The hypothesis was confirmed when two statistically significantly different factors were extracted: *behavioral, travel planning and life changes factor* and *cognitive negotiation strategies factor*. Based on the extracted factors, cluster analysis was conducted for confirmation of the third hypothesis that resulted in the extraction of two segments of Croatian students (*cognitive adaptive segment* and *cognitive maladaptive segment*). However, since the two segments statistically significantly differ based on the *cognitive negotiation strategies factor*, but not on the *behavioral, travel planning and life changes factor*, this hypothesis can only partially be confirmed. The segments were further described with descriptive statistical methods and the independent samples T-test that showed the existence of certain differences. It was shown that the younger, predominantly female segment was more likely to have a positive attitude towards solo travel, and included the influence of their surroundings into their solo travel decision-making to a lesser degree. It could be advised to marketing and tourist practitioners to develop solo tourist products and services aimed at younger female Croatian students. Furthermore, addressing the negative attitudes about solo travel in Croatia, in general, might prove to be beneficial since the second segment was more influenced by them when deciding on solo travel. Appealing to the freedom, and security but also new experiences and educational benefits provided to young students when traveling solo might positively influence the aforementioned attitudes and thus attract more solo student travelers to a tourist destination.

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