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Experiencing B-Values on the Camino de Santiago: A Journey Toward Self-Actualization

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Abstract

This research explores the transformation of individuals undertaking the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. Employing a comprehensive approach, including qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 32 pilgrims' travel narratives and a survey encompassing 501 participants, we unveil a unique fusion of facts ("isness") and values ("oughtness") experienced by pilgrims throughout their journey. This fusion manifests as a moral-cognitive perception that everything in the world aligns with how it should be, aligning with Abraham Maslow's concept of "Being values."

These Being values represent the core of the self-actualization process and encompass notions of interconnectedness, unity, wholeness, simplicity, essentiality, just-rightness, spontaneity, effortlessness, benevolence, honesty, autonomy, and individuality. Our research findings demonstrate the impact of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage on individuals, resulting in an enhancement of self-actualization, as defined within the framework of humanistic psychology.

Keywords: Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, Self-actualization, Being values, Transformation, Qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Introduction

This study is part of a broader research project (Brumec, 2022) aimed at providing a data-driven theoretical understanding of the Camino de Santiago¹ pilgrimage experience in the context of late modernity. It involves a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 32 travelogues² about the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, which was authored by pilgrims and published as books in the Slovene language by the end of 2018, all of which are accessible through the Slovenian library information system COBISS.

Out of the 32 travelogue authors, 23 are Slovenian, while the remaining six are international authors whose works have been translated into Slovene. It's worth mentioning that one of the books attributed to a Slovenian author was written by the author of this article, who had the unique perspective of firsthand experience as a pilgrim on the Camino, enriching the

validity and authenticity of our qualitative research (Tracy, 2010, p. 7).

Our data analysis employed QDA Miner software, focusing on text coding. Initially, we conducted single-stage open coding to derive inductive, content-driven concepts related to the exceptional experiences of pilgrims. We then explored relationships between these codes by calculating similarity and co-occurrence indices among 56 codes associated with these experiences, leading to a nine-cluster solution.

A dominant type of exceptional experience termed the "experience of interconnectedness," was identified, accounting for 28% of all codes related to exceptional experiences. This type describes a deep sense of integration into a larger whole, often perceived as the entire universe, coupled with the awareness of a unifying force or energy, evoking feelings of joy and happiness. Lavrič et al. (2022) confirmed the prevalence of the experience of interconnectedness among Camino de Santiago pilgrims through a survey conducted with 501 participants.

We employed the grounded theory research approach, which involved a continual comparison of academic sources with the findings of our research, encompassing concepts, categories, hypotheses, and emerging data-driven theories. During the development of a typology for Exceptional Experiences (EEs), it became increasingly evident that these experiences bore a remarkable resemblance to Abraham Maslow's concept of peak-experiences. Consequently, we evaluated the pilgrimage experience through the lens of Maslow's theoretical framework centered on peak-experiences.

In subsequent sections, we will delve into the cognitive aspects of "B-cognition" and its relation to the "B-realm," drawing on relevant passages from the pilgrimage travelogues. We will also examine Maslow's "B-values," focusing on the value of wholeness and provide illustrative accounts of how pilgrims experience these concepts.

We will further explore the transcendence inherent in peak-experiences, including the transcendence of dichotomies and the ego's alignment with the authentic self, with reference to the words of the pilgrims. Additionally, we will show how these experiences align with Maslow's definition of peak-experiences, serving as transformative moments rich in intrinsic values and offering glimpses into each individual's unique "heaven," where facts and values coalesce.

Lastly, we will establish the connection between the experience of B-values and self-actualization while addressing the broader implications of our study.

Perception in Peak-Experiences

Peak-experiences entail intense, fully attentive perception, marked by non-evaluative, non-judging cognition. During these moments, the distinction between what's deemed significant and insignificant blurs, and individuals perceive others as unique and idiosyncratic, akin to sacred beings. Maslow (1994) referred to this distinctive mode of cognition during peak-experiences as "B-cognition," with the "B" denoting being and existence. He suggested that through B-cognition, individuals undergo a process of understanding the levels of being or the B-realm.

A similar mode of perception, as described by Maslow in B-cognition, emerges in the accounts of pilgrims who authored

the analyzed travelogues. During the coding process, these experiences were categorized under concepts such as heightened senses, spiritual perception, clarity of perception, and strengthened intuition. To illustrate this alternate and heightened mode of perception, we turn to an excerpt from Nace Novak's narrative, which encompasses several of these concepts, including the notion of enhanced intuition referred to as an inner voice. Novak (2004) credits walking in nature as playing a significant role in this altered mode of perception:

"After a few days of walking, I noticed that I was becoming better at perceiving calls and impulses from the environment. I also tuned into the same wavelength with the inner voice and became attentive to every, even the slightest, sign. My senses were evidently sharpening" (p. 43).

Ivan Gričnik describes his heightened sensory functioning as something truly incredible:

"I felt every part of myself, how I breathe and how my heart beats, I felt every tear that rolled down my face, and when I laughed, I laughed sincerely from the soul, from the heart, a feeling of complete relaxation, something incredible..." (Gričnik, 2014, p. 76).

In the context of these pilgrimages, the reported heightened sensory functioning encompasses the general senses as well as intensified smell, vision, and taste:

"I was able to perceive the juice of life energy of the outstanding image of nature's creativity. I experienced everything in a more animate way, more noteworthy for its one-of-a-kind character." (Artnik Knibbe, 2020, p. 167).

"I started to observe the beautiful nature, and with my newly awakened sense of smell, I could scent every little breath." (Brumec, 2016, p. 41).

"Maybe this is a hint to stop using them, as even my vision has improved." (Steblovnik, 2010, p. 59).

"I will always carry this taste in my memory. Just a simple piece of bread with butter, better than the sweetest cake. No, I will never forget this taste." (Vranjek, 2015, p. 37).

This heightened mode of perception gives pilgrims with the impression that everything is amplified:

"Everything that was inside me before has been intensified a thousandfold." (Vranjek, 2015, p. 253).

"Here, everything is intensified." (Brumec, 2016, p. 75).

The unusual mode of perception experienced by pilgrims, which they cannot readily explain through the commonly known senses, is encapsulated within the concept of spiritual perception. This is evident in the words of Potdevin, who perceives it as a form of spiritual hearing, allowing one to access truths:

"It is, therefore, the substance of Truth, which we can receive through spiritual hearing, such a perfect and complete sense that I cannot describe it in words" (Potdevin, 2013, p. 153).

Steblovnik speaks of her spiritual senses guiding her:

"But the greatest gift I received was the realization that I can listen to myself, trust in myself and my spiritual senses. They always lead me where I need to be at that moment" (Steblovnik, 2010, p. 17).

Some pilgrims describe this perception as "seeing with the heart":

"I realized that on the Camino, you are always looking with your heart" (Brumec, 2016, p. 138).

Slovenian pilgrim marvels at the source of her newfound happiness:

"...I was bestowed with the gift of seeing with my heart" (Jenko Simunič and Jenko, 2014, p. 87).

French author Jean-Marc Potdevin, in his analysis of a religious experience in the Pope's book "Jesus of Nazareth," seeks an explanation for what it means to "see with the heart":

"The organ with which a person can see God is the heart: reason alone is not enough... 'Heart' refers to this inner interplay of a person's perceptual abilities, in which the true harmony of body and soul also plays a role" (Potdevin, 2013, p. 47).

Among the analyzed texts, there's also an element of noetic insight, described by James (2015) as a profound understanding of a maxim or formula that can at times overwhelm us. This is evident in the travelogue narratives of Močnik, who refers to it as an "aha experience," and Artnik Knibbe, who characterizes it as an "aha moment":

*"All of this reflected as an **aha experience**" (Močnik, 2009, p. 152).*

*"This was quite an **aha moment** that changed my life significantly for the better" (Artnik Knibbe, 2020, p. 122).*

According to Maslow (1994), B-cognition in peak-experiences is more passive and receptive, fostering humility and openness. This mode of perception is more attuned to listening and to understanding. Pilgrims' readiness for a peak-experience is illustrated in the following quote:

"He is at the height of his powers yet has never felt so humble. His weeks of wandering have plunged him into a state of passive acceptance, his soul is free from all desire or expectation, and his body has overcome suffering

and tamed impatience. And now, in this utterly beautiful, endless but finite immensity, the pilgrim is ready to recognize something greater than himself, in fact, greater than everything. If during this long leg through the mountains, I may not have seen God, I did at least feel His breath" (Rufin, 2016, ch. 25/ para. 20).

According to Maslow (1994), peak-experiences often entail a disorientation in time and space, providing a sense of universality and eternity. In these moments, the normal boundaries of time and space blur or vanish, leading to an experience of universality and eternity. This is reflected in the accounts of pilgrims:

"For a moment, I paused in timelessness, as if I had merged the feeling of what once was and what is now" (Močnik, 2009, p. 152).

"Through time and space, I tumbled... tumbled... tumbled. I felt lost and without a horizon. I felt a frightening kind of limbo. I felt I had lost myself. I felt without purpose, without meaning, without definition. After what seemed an eternity, I awoke on an astral plane" (MacLaine, 2000, p. 279).

In these descriptions, the timeless and spaceless nature of these experiences stands in stark contrast to ordinary reality. The sense of timelessness and universality encountered during peak-experiences parallels Maslow's concept of "under the aspect of eternity."

Peak-experiences open a doorway to a realm of perception and understanding that transcends the ordinary, allowing individuals to perceive the world in a different and enriching way. These experiences go beyond the boundaries of time and space, offering a glimpse into a reality suffused with heightened sensory perception, spiritual insight, and a sense of the eternal. Pilgrims embarking on transformative journeys such as the Camino de Santiago often report experiencing these states of perception, enriching their lives, and deepening their connection with the world around them.

A New Aspect of Reality

Berger and Luckmann (1991) argue that human beings perceive the world as having multiple realities, but they accord one reality a unique status as the par excellence reality. This primary reality, they assert, is the everyday life that we all experience, and it holds this distinguished position because it aligns with collective interpretations, thereby making it the authoritative source for defining what is genuinely real. In this reality of everyday life, where meanings of phenomena for an individual are continually coordinated with the meanings understood by other people, reason, aided by language, affirms the reality of the everyday world.

Within the domain of peak-experiences, as illuminated by Maslow (1994), individuals encounter a distinctive facet of reality characterized by unitive perception. This encounter involves the fusion of the B-realm, representing the realm of Being and intrinsic values, with the D-realm, signifying the world of factual knowledge. Maslow attributes this harmonious fusion to a state of "true reality," in which individuals grasp the essence of reality and its unchanging inner values, often

referred to as B-values. These B-values embody the convergence of "what is" and "what ought to be," rendering them inherent components of reality.

Maslow (1963) articulated two distinct directions in which this merging of reality can occur. One direction involves the augmentation of facts, while the other entails a reduction in expectations leading to acceptance. He postulated that facts are akin to vector quantities, each possessing a unique direction of action and an internal impetus that propels them toward a specific transformative state. To illustrate this concept, let's consider a person falling ill – their body instinctively activates mechanisms aimed at facilitating recovery. The fact of illness inherently carries the impulse toward recuperation. An even more straightforward illustration can be drawn from the travelogue of two American pilgrims:

"The many pilgrims sitting, breaking bread, and enjoying wine tonight remind me of what the church is supposed to mean, what it is supposed to represent. We are a community—or at least we should be—where all are welcome, all are loved, and the unexpected challenges of life are faced with others at our side" (Gray and Skeesuck, 2017, pp. 132-133).

In this passage, the authors vividly exemplify the fusion of "is" and "must" within the context of communal life on the Camino, emphasizing the innate directionality that facts carry, guiding individuals toward their shared experiences.

Pilgrims embarking on the Camino de Santiago, as conveyed in their travel narratives, immerse themselves in a distinct reality, one that deviates from their shared intersubjective reality. Potdevin termed it "experiential reality," Artnik Knibbe referred to it as "authentic" or "glittering reality", Rufin described it as "reality beyond," or "unquestionable" reality, and Škarja labeled it "reality beyond scripted lives":

"A readiness related to the experiential reality that becomes visceral and permeates one's core" (Potdevin, 2013, p. 164).

"I deeply appreciate silence as the window into an exciting, authentic reality" (Artnik Knibbe, 2020, p. 260).

*"I trusted it, the dear **Camino**, and it showed me a way towards a glittering reality that I had consigned to oblivion in my grief"(Artnik Knibbe, 2020, p. 278).*

"However, at the peak of my mystical experience of the Way, I had the feeling that reality was disappearing, allowing me to glimpse what lies beyond it and extends into each of its creations. In addition to Buddhist bliss, I now felt a new fullness. The world had never seemed so beautiful to me" (Rufin, 2016, ch. 27/para. 16).

"On that path, it felt as if reality was dissolving, letting me perceive what lies beyond it, something which flows in every living creature" (Rufin, 2016, ch. 25/para. 24).

"More than solace, I gained insight into reality. Insight into a reality beyond the scripted lives of people on Facebook, beyond the scripted Hollywood influences, beyond the stories and testimonies of people with masks on their faces and shields on their hearts" (Škarja, 2017, p. 21).

Maslow further contends that during peak-experiences, shifts in attention can lead to new knowledge. These shifts involve changes in the organization of perception, realization, and noticing, ultimately leading to the revelation of experientially valid knowledge, which Maslow referred to as B-knowledge. Importantly, individuals come to realize that this knowledge was present all along, awaiting perception, provided that the perceiver was ready and open to it. This represents a change in the perceiver's perspicuity and efficiency, akin to adjusting one's "spectacles," rather than a change in the fundamental nature of reality or the invention of entirely new aspects of reality that did not previously exist.

For many pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, understanding transcends mere perception and involves a unique form of comprehension. Pilgrims seem to directly apprehend the essence of something, bypassing the need for conscious thought. It's as if they possess a form of cognition; it enables them to spontaneously perceive and comprehend things. French pilgrim Potdevin offers an illustration:

"After this experience, I suddenly understood everything that generations of contemplative Christians and mystics, but I think not only they, have lived and tried to convey with their testimonies and writings [...], which in my rational and conceptual spirit resonated only as a theory, symbolic words. What they wrote not only existed but was the truth, tangible, concrete, experiential, accessible, and a deep source of peace and satisfaction" (Potdevin, 2013, p. 87).

In their travel narratives, pilgrims frequently report experiencing an "irrational" form of understanding, different from their prior knowledge:

"I had known it on an intellectual level but now I knew it within" (McManus, 2014, ch. 15/para. 11).

" Yes, I understood that intellectually, but to absorb it emotionally was another matter" (MacLaine, 2000, p. 109).

"... I knew it in theory before but grasping it in practice is truly a fantastic experience" (Novak, 2004, p. 19).

Interestingly, some pilgrims frequently encounter challenges when attempting to articulate specific perceptions, sensations, and experiences. This suggests the possibility that, for some pilgrims, contact with another reality or an aspect of reality occurs, wherein meanings diverge from the limitations of language. Furthermore, in line with Maslow's (1994) perspective, it is worth considering that peak-experiences may inherently elude adequate verbal expression, implying that even the most precise words may inadequately capture the essence of such moments. We captured these aspects of the text with the concept of ineffability. Consider Potdevin's description:

"I have no words to describe what happened afterward. Because words cannot express and describe what I saw. They can only distort and corrupt it. Nevertheless, I will force them out to convey what I saw or experienced. But know that real experience completely transcends them, and they are only a pale shadow of the invisible energy

that was before me" (Potdevin, 2013, p. 42).

Furthermore, some pilgrims express the challenge of others not fully comprehending their pilgrimage experience:

"I knew then that few would understand what had happened on that long month in Spain; I didn't even know how I would begin to communicate it" (McManus, 2014, epilogue/para. 9).

"When talking to those who had walked the Camino, we all feel the same, while talking to many of those who have not soon proves a waste of time" (Kapetanović, 2017, p. 335).

Conversely, pilgrims frequently describe instances of communication that transcend language. These encounters are marked by mutual understanding without the need for words, highlighting the deep connection among pilgrims:

"Among us peregrines, there are no barriers; even different languages merge into one common language because we all understand each other and converse without problems. This seems like a miracle to me because I've only noticed this phenomenon among children, who can play together despite speaking different languages and understand each other" (Steblovnik, 2010, p. 52).

"Although I didn't understand almost anything, I felt and knew what the priest was saying from the tone of his voice. Tears flowed from my eyes, and I wasn't the only one" (Vranjek, 2015, p. 176).

"This encounter will remain in my memory because of the enchantment of nonverbal communication between two perfect strangers who simply feel each other" (Klug, 2018, p. 68).

"Even without a common language, this was a beautiful moment of communion that only shared experience on the Road can give" (McManus, 2014, epilogue/para. 1).

"Although I didn't understand almost any words, I felt great, as if I were chosen and sent on a mission" (Kvaternik, 2015, pp. 56–57).

"Everything happens without words. It just flows. We exchange glances and know where to continue. We've become a pair that has walked countless kilometers and knows that words are unnecessary" (Sluga, 2017, p. 130).

"Words are not needed since communication is possible without them" (Novak, 2004, p. 70).

"I think they understood me, or rather, they all felt it, although Marjana was the only one in the room who spoke Slovenian" (Brumec, 2016, p. 160).

Experiencing B-Values

Maslow (1963) recognized that in moments of peak-experiences, individuals encounter distinct values that they perceive as inherent to the genuine nature of reality. These values are considered the "highest human values" because they are most frequently encountered during an individual's finest moments and under optimal conditions. The term "B-values" or "Being values" was coined by Maslow (1994) to describe these intrinsic aspects of existence. The B-values encompass an array of qualities, including truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness (with the subcategory of dichotomy-transcendence), aliveness, uniqueness, perfection (with the subcategory of necessity), completion, justice (with the subcategory of order), simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness, and self-sufficiency. Maslow argued that this list of fundamental values serves as a reflection of the attributes of reality when perceived during peak-experiences. He posited that these values resonate as timeless truths and spiritual values, providing humanity with a deep sense of certainty, unity, perpetuity, and universality rooted in human nature.

Maslow (1994) emphasized that B-values, often considered ultimate and indivisible, possess a unique quality of mutual definition. In his own words, "These Being values are perceived as ultimate and as further unanalyzable (and yet they can each be defined in terms of each and all of the others)" (p. 93). We believe that by focusing on the B-value of wholeness, we can vividly and comprehensively illustrate the experience of B-values among pilgrims. Therefore, we chose to examine these experiences through the specific lens of B-value Wholeness. Maslow described the value of wholeness as encompassing interconnectedness, unity, and, notably, an inclination towards oneness. Within this framework, the typical dichotomies, polarities, and conflicts that define life tend to either transcend or find resolution. This perspective signifies a shift toward perceiving the world as a harmonious and unified entity. Furthermore, individuals themselves tend to move toward a state of fusion, integration, and unity while moving away from division, conflict, and opposition.

Based on a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the travelogues discussed in this article, Brumec, Lavrič, and Naterer (2022) have previously demonstrated that pilgrims undergo this type of experience. They identified the experience of interconnectedness, particularly within the codes encompassing this cluster (including feelings of oneness and interconnectedness), as a strong perception of an individual being deeply integrated into a larger whole, often described as the entire universe. This experience aligns closely with Maslow's description of peak-experiences, marked by complete absorption and a perception of the universe as an integrated whole, leaving a lasting impact on an individual's character and worldview.

Lavrič et al. (2022) have confirmed the prevalence of the experience of interconnectedness among pilgrims during the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. This confirmation was derived from a survey involving 501 participants, of which 64% reported having this kind of experience during their pilgrimage. A vivid description of this experience can be found in the words of Rufin:

"Only once the pilgrim is truly alone and almost naked, unencumbered by liturgical glitter, can he rise toward heaven. All religions merge in this face-to-face encounter with the Fundamental Principle. Like the Aztec priest on his pyramid, the Sumerian on his ziggurat, Moses on Mount Sinai, Christ at Golgotha, the pilgrim in these high and lonely places, up among the winds and the clouds, detached from the distant world far below him, and freed from his suffering and vain cravings, can at last attain Oneness, the Essence, the Origin" (Rufin, 2016, ch. 25/para. 21).

Another perspective on interconnectedness is provided by Artnik Knibbe (2020), who captures the essence of oneness and interconnectedness with these words:

"Mindful awakening through the poetry of the body that once suggests drama, another time romantic fusion into Oneness, is an exceptional channel of reclaiming your wholeness" (p. 171).

"Present communication refers to the free flow, wisdom, compassion, authentic cooperation with Oneness that leads the soul and body towards grace, joy, and integrity. In silence, I became aware of the sanctitude of life and the space that I am part of" (p. 260).

"When you allow energy to connect you without any limitations, you send information about wholeness into the Universe, a sign that people are not separated from one another" (p. 101).

"You feel that you are a small part of the whole, a component of Oneness where everything is connected to everything else in a field of unconditional love" (p. 212).

Oneness and interconnectedness also resonate in the following two quotes, where Grešak evokes the ineffable with the phrase "orphaned words" and encompasses three additional B-values in both passages: lightness, playfulness, and liveliness. Intriguingly, both passages culminate with a timeless component:

"Because we are connected on a deeper level than these orphaned words could ever achieve. They can never replace that white horse and the Holy Night on the organ, the laughter that brought tears in the communal bathroom under the cold shower when we made fun of the so-called 'intellectual services' and even poked fun at our own smelly feet. The evenings in the albergues when we'd take off our shoes. There are no words for all the joyful and sorrowful melodies beyond the sentences about this journey. For that ancient, melancholic Oliver guitar on the last night. How many roads must a person walk for complete silence in our hearts when we said goodbye. And stayed. Forever" (Grešak, 2017, p. 66).

"It was an agreement without words; we took off our pants and ran into the water in our underwear and T-shirts. There was relaxation, playfulness, lightness, and timelessness. Generational differences disappeared. There were bare feet and hot sand. It was like Sufi spinning, sand hopping carried by the wind, and a pilgrim's 'laundry' of shirts and pants in the wind. There were three cans of beer. And a feeling that we could stay there forever" (Remškar, 2017, p. 68).

The subsequent quote conveys a sense of unity and interconnectedness. The passage narrates an experience where the individual, accompanied by fellow pilgrims, feels deeply connected to nature, each other, and the divine:

"There was nothing in particular that inclined me more than anything else to meet God. But He found me anyway

and filled me. More than generously, very lavishly. Not only me but other pilgrims too. Some confided a piece of the secret to me. How many are still out there, carefully guarding the treasure for themselves, just like me? As I walked through blooming thorns, through meadows and forests, as I stepped on a carpet of pine needles and moss-covered paths, harmony with the whole creation intertwined with the love that filled me every day. Slowly, human beings became part of this harmony: on Pentecost, I first walked with one, then two, six, and ten pilgrims. From all corners of the world. We have good relationships, we feel safe and balanced, for we are all part of the same whole" (Potdevin, 2013, p. 59).

Dichotomy Transcendence

Within the subcategory of B-value wholeness, Maslow (1994) introduces the concept of dichotomy transcendence. This aspect of wholeness encompasses the acceptance, resolution, and integration of polarities, contradictions, and synergy. In essence, dichotomy transcendence refers to the transformation of contradictions into unity. Maslow suggests that peak-experiences, through the value of wholeness, tend to transcend or resolve dichotomies, conflicts, and polarities, ultimately fostering unity and integration. This process also reflects in the individual's personal growth, as they move toward fusion, integration, and unity while distancing themselves from splitting, conflicts, and oppositions. The transcendence of polarity through the value of wholeness is vividly illustrated in the following quotes of Artnik Knibbe (2020):

"This experience revealed how 'rich' I am and how 'rich' we all are. A mirror of the fact that, when you accept life in all its polarity, an opportunity for the middle point, for Oneness, harmony, and profoundness, is born" (p. 67).

"Miracles that loved me, while I summoned the courage to accept the authentic nature of myself, of both being in Oneness and the polarity of the separated mind simultaneously" (p. 225).

"We are grateful for the ability to experience this aspect of life and humbly flow with the authentic dance of polarities, with the ultimate goal of returning to the neutral point of Oneness" (pp. 253-254).

Božič provides a personal account of this transcendence as she describes her inner struggle between intuition and the mind, culminating in self-acceptance, reconciliation, and the transcendence of dichotomies:

"With the first step on the Camino, I started back on the path to myself and my inner library of knowledge. To my intuition. Of course, the mind fought and tried to prevent it in every way. I wrote down all the daily reasons it sent me as obstacles to keep it from taking power and control. The mind is used to leading the game and does not want a decision-maker named intuition by its side – or above it. On the vast paths of the Camino, the teacher of life, I somehow managed to prepare them both (the mind and intuition) to accept me, and in a month of walking, I met myself again" (Božič, 2018, p. 305).

This unification of the mind and intuition, the achievement of wholeness, and the transcendence of dichotomies are attributes that she attributes to the transformative effect of growth, which she describes more comprehensively in the following paragraph:

"Because it's a moment of harmony with oneself. The body, the mind, the heart, and the soul sit at the same table and are a loving family that accepts each other. Inner conflicts calm down, and although you remain here and now many things still bother you the same way, and even if you don't necessarily agree with them, it doesn't affect your essence. You know it's just part of the agreement that the soul has decided to experience as a lesson to grow" (Božič, 2018, p. 214).

Ego Transcendence

The earlier quote from the Slovenian pilgrim provides valuable insights into the concept of transcendence and underscores the essential role of integrity in its attainment. It suggests that one can transcend the ego and the inherent duality between the ego and the authentic self through the experience of B-value wholeness. This transcendence is depicted as a transformation, often symbolized by the breaking down of the ego:

"At the culmination of the ritual, he invited us to the altar, to Jesus. We formed a circle and, each in our own language recited the intention and prayer to walk the path of love and cooperation. The path of self-respect and respect for others, and the path on which we would do everything in our power to spread love. The priest went from one pilgrim to another, embracing us all. Even as I write this, I find myself in tears. This mass was a ritual of the universal religion of love within the church. It was an experience I hadn't encountered before. I had dreamed of it, visualized it during meditation, and imagined it while reading books. And now, I was here, surrounded by open hearts - people from all corners of the world who had walked countless miles and broken down their egos. They were here because they were devoted - devoted to themselves and to the belief in a brighter future" (Božič, 2018, p. 195).

From the passage, it becomes apparent that the pilgrim undergoes a transformation that aligns with a fundamental characteristic of peak-experiences, often referred to as "unitive consciousness" in Maslow's terminology. In this state, one transcends worldly distinctions, perceiving the realm of Being where the sacred seamlessly intertwines with the secular. This shift in consciousness is exemplified by B-cognition, where the sacred is discovered within the secular. However, even after experiencing this complete transformation, doubts begin to creep in, fueled by the rational mind's skepticism regarding the reality of the encounter, particularly in the context of the universal ritual of love. The pilgrim contemplates:

"A complete transformation. When I left the church, I was in ecstasy. What had happened? Was it merely another empty illusion, as the mind questioned, digging further: What was it? Nevertheless, the soul remained undisturbed"

(Božič, 2018, p. 215).

This example aligns with Maslow's (1994) observation that peak-experiences are characterized by ego-transcendence, self-forgetfulness, and a sense of unselfishness. The idea that pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago can more readily transcend the ego is also articulated by Eva Remškar:

"The ego says: once everything falls into place, I'll feel peace. The spirit says: find your peace, and then everything will fall into place. While I contemplated the Camino's teachings, this thought struck me: the Camino is a rebirth, or at the very least, a significant refreshment of the flow of life. This is because on the Camino, it becomes much easier to set the ego aside, as nature gently caresses us for most of the day. Thus, the pieces of the puzzle effortlessly fall into place" (Remškar, 2017, p. 70).

During her pilgrimage, Shirley MacLaine's spiritual guide shared a visionary experience that explained how the development of the ego had led to feelings of selfishness and a sense of separation from others:

"The individual souls lived for harmony until they partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and rejected the Divine Deity and their spiritual selves. With the development of the ego, they were divided among themselves. You may perceive yourselves as separate, but it is not so. You are benevolent when you desire harmony and love" (MacLaine, 2000, p. 280).

In her own experience, Artnik Knibbe (2020) achieved self-acceptance by transcending the polarity between her authentic self and the ego:

"I realized that mercy was the power that opened all doors. That it was a force that co-created miracles in the world of the ego. Miracles that loved me, while I summoned the courage to accept the authentic nature of myself, of both being in Oneness and the polarity of the separated mind simultaneously" (p. 225).

Tendency To Real Self

The inclination toward the real self, as described by Maslow (1994), is an integral part of experiencing B-values, marking a transition into a new realm of being. During peak-experiences, individuals tend to draw nearer to their perfect identity, uniqueness, idiosyncrasy, and true selves, becoming more real and authentic in the process. This enhanced sense of perfect identity and uniqueness finds resonance in the reflections of pilgrims during their journeys along the Camino de Santiago:

"I was in touch with nature and with myself. That was really Me" (Jernejčič, 2014, p. 87).

"The last steps of the Camino. The last steps towards myself" (Lepej Bašelj, 2009, p. 83).

"The last days were full of examining my conscience and discovering myself" (Gray and Skeesuck, 2017, p. 219).

"It is a happy surprise to rediscover yourself, like suddenly bumping into an old acquaintance" (Rufin, 2016, ch. 19/para. 3).

"How far does a person have to go to meet themselves? To meet oneself" (Gričnik, 2018, p. 48).

"Yes, I had walked toward those unknown worlds, looking for who I am" (MacLaine, 2000, p. 301).

"The Camino is a time when you get to know yourself" (Škarja, 2017, p. 3).

"... this is also a long meeting with me" (Rigler and Rigler, 2000, p. 133).

"I was alone, and I had to accept myself so openly. I had to look at myself in the mirror" (Božič, 2018, p. 56).

"They say it's a sign that God touched my shoulder. I don't know, but I do know it was a contact with my soul" (Steblovnik, 2010, p. 52).

"The Camino invited me this time to return to myself" (Božič, 2018, p. 213).

These quotes poignantly convey how the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage often acts as a transformative journey, enabling pilgrims to explore their true selves.

End-Experience

According to Maslow (1994), peak-experiences are self-validating and carry intrinsic value, often instilling a sense of purpose and meaning in life. They can deter individuals from contemplating suicide and infuse existence with a sense of significance. Acknowledging these experiences as end-experiences, rather than mere means to an end, serves an essential purpose. It underscores the idea that there are ultimate goals and objectives in the world, things, objects, or experiences that are inherently worthwhile. This challenges the notion that life and existence are devoid of meaning. In other words, peak-experiences contribute to the operational definition of the assertion that "life is worthwhile" or "life is meaningful." To exemplify this perspective among pilgrims, we have chosen a selection of quotes from their travel accounts. The first three quotes eloquently express the concept that life is imbued with meaning because it simply exists—life is, therefore, one must live it:

"Life is beautiful if you live it" (Božič, 2018, p. 32).

"I love living – because life is beautiful if you live it..." (Gričnik, 2018, p. 73).

"The awareness that every single moment is invaluable and that it is worth living" (Artnik Knibbe, 2020, p. 162).

"Above all, the Camino is an opportunity to fall in love again—with life. Life in its primal simplicity, new and fresh every day" (Remškar, 2017, p. 55).

These quotes vividly exemplify how the sheer existence of life implies a natural yearning to live it to the fullest. Additional quotes further emphasize the beauty and worth of life:

"... life is beautiful. It truly is beautiful" (Škarja, 2017, pp. 315–316).

"Life is beautiful" (Brumec, 2016, p. 231).

"Life is beautiful. It's a fairy tale. It's paradise" (Škarja, 2017, p. 136).

Lastly, the following quote reiterates that "Life is worth it," solidifying the idea that life holds intrinsic value:

"La vita vale! Life is worth it! It is worth living!" (Novak, 2004, p. 43).

Intrinsic Value of Experience

Drawing from Maslow's research (1994), B-values emerge as "fundamental truths" experienced by individuals during peak moments, universally applicable to the human species. These values are intrinsic aspects of human nature, an indispensable element of the essence of being "human", and as such, they are inherently self-evident. Examining travel narratives reveals that pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago frequently encounter these values in a similar manner. They perceive love as the quintessential essence of life, constituting the overarching truth of human existence. Importantly, this perception is not purely intellectual; it transcends mere understanding.

"Love is truly the essence of life. Every individual constantly yearns, searches, and follows this energy. Its absence is always felt as a complete separation from everything, as utter solitude, abandonment, danger, isolation, suffering, fear, anger, and sorrow. And this is the truth" (Steblovnik, 2012, p. 11).

"The only issue lays in the fact that we do not see the real picture, that our mind is blind. We have forgotten that we are love. Our cells are love. Our heart which pumps insane amounts of blood every day is love. Our illness and potential to be cured is love as well. Everything happening within us is love. Because we are love!" (Artnik Knibbe, 2020, p. 240).

Glimpse in Heaven

Within Maslow's exploration (1994) of peak-experiences, he employed a metaphor, likening them to personal visits to

heaven. This challenged the conventional perception of heaven as a distant realm one enters only after earthly life concludes. His interpretation suggests that heaven, as derived from peak-experiences, is ever-present, enveloping us and occasionally within reach. This concept aligns with the idea that the divine is not an external place but resides within everyone, as expressed in Shirley MacLaine's words:

"... the kingdom of heaven and God is within everyone" (MacLaine, 2000, p. 184).

The idea of heaven arising from peak-experiences comes to light in the writings of Camino de Santiago pilgrims. French writer Rufin, reflecting on this transformative journey, encapsulates the concept that on the Camino, heaven is not a distant realm but an intimately experienced reality:

"Now that these places had made me receptive to the great mystery, I was finally admitted into its presence. Only once the pilgrim is truly alone and almost naked, unencumbered by liturgical glitter, can he rise toward heaven. All religions merge in this face-to-face encounter with the Fundamental Principle" (Rufin, 2016, ch. 25/ para. 21).

This perception is shared by some others who have walked the Camino, like the authors of the following quotes:

"I can feel emotion welling in my chest as tears fill my eyes. I don't know what heaven will be like, but I am guessing today is a glimpse of what we will experience" (Gray, and Skeesuck, 2017, p. 264).

"When you are, then you know and only love, compassionately feel, surrender, receive, and create. Is it paradise? Well, perhaps not the paradise that is depicted by many, but so much more real and thus so much more fascinating" (Artnik Knibbe, 2020, p. 219).

These accounts underscore the idea that heaven, as experienced on the Camino, is a deeply personal revelation, representing a connection with the divine and the sacred. In this sense, the Camino provides a glimpse of heaven that is present, enchanting, and accessible within the experiences of the pilgrims.

Everything Is as It Should Be

Maslow (1994) observed that individuals experiencing peak-experiences perceive a convergence between what "is" and what "should be," experiencing perfect harmony with their inner selves and a strong sense that everything is as it should be. He noted, based on "hundreds of responses" to the question "How does the world look different in a peak-experience?" (p. 70), that for those experiencing peak-experiences, the "world appears as it truly is" (1963, p. 118).

The notion that everything is as it should be also emerges in some of the analyzed travelogues:

"This is the moment when everything is exactly as it should be; it is a moment of redemption and complete

freedom. Thank you, Camino" (Božič, 2018, p. 203).

Maslow (1963) proposed that such moments involve a duality in perceiving the world or reality. This duality allows an individual to simultaneously describe reality with a cognitive statement and a value statement, describing the world as it should be. This "double" cognitive-emotional statement of "everything is as it should be" can be associated with Maslow's (1994) seventh B-value, Perfection, which encompasses notions of nothing superfluous, nothing lacking, everything in its right place, unimprovability, just rightness, just-so-ness, suitability, justice, completeness, and a sense of "oughtness." Within Perfection, a subcategory, Necessity, also features (inclusively, inevitability, it must be just that way, not changed in any slightest way, and it is good that it is that way):

"Memories of my life's journey emerged from reason, and reason is earthly dual. Divided into justice and injustice. It judges and condemns. It can evoke emotions. Due to human nature, we feel joy, sadness, and everything in between. Nevertheless, beyond all of this, when reason becomes calm, the soul and higher truth always stand. The soul is calm. Calm because it knows that everything is just as it should be. I am open to my path and my mission. Everything else will happen as it should." (Božič, 2018, p. 258).

Maslow (1994) noted that most religions have either explicitly or implicitly affirmed some relationship or fusion between facts and values. Giddens (1991) supported a similar notion, stating that traditions offer ontological security by combining cognitive and moral components, such as the belief that "the world is as it is because it should be." This creates a sense of stability in our surroundings. Explicit ontological ideas are found in many traditional cultures and almost all rationalized religious systems. However, as Maslow (1994) argued, one of the recurring problems for revealed religions in the past century has been the contradiction between their claim to a final, total, unchangeable, eternal, and absolute truth and the cultural, historical, and economic relativism supported by the developing social sciences.

Despite this contradiction, the human yearning for peace, stability, unity, and a sense of certainty persists. Peak-experiences combine both cognitive and moral elements, as illustrated in the following quote from one of the analyzed travelogues, where the Camino experience granted inner peace, stability, sovereignty, harmony with oneself, and the conviction that everything is as it should be:

"I also experienced some feelings again, one of which was quite special and one that I hadn't experienced for a long time - inner peace. I don't even know when it settled in me. It was strong and omnipresent, yet calm, serene, and quiet, and precisely for that reason, it was something special. I experienced it as stability, sovereignty, as a kind of envelope that surrounds you and protects you from doubts, bad thoughts, problems, and small fears. It's the feeling of silence within, harmony with oneself, a kind of self-sufficiency and awareness that what is, is enough and just right, and as it is, it's the best for me" (Močnik, 2009, pp. 177–178).

We can find further support for this in the words of the Slovenian pilgrim who speaks of her realization on the Camino that people in the world are not alone and can trust that they are safe because everything is as it should be:

"A tree is waiting for you at the other end of the world... it was waiting. The tree of knowledge that we are truly not alone in this world, that with us and around us everything is full of those we have not yet been given to see, we can only feel them and trust them, that we are safe and that all the time everything is as it should be" (Vranjek, 2015, p. 221).

In another quote by Vranjek, she expresses her belief that everything will be as it should be:

"I trusted so much that if I had been called to this path, it was for a reason, and they would help me make everything as it should be." (Vranjek, 2015, p. 23).

Steblovnik (2010) expresses that everything is as it should be "Everything is arranged as it should be" (p. 32).

Self-Actualization and B-Values

According to Maslow (1994), the ultimate goal for individuals and life as a whole is to discover their innermost potential, unlocking their true humanity. Maslow also stressed the importance of helping others in their quest to uncover their inner selves while striving for this objective. This form of growth, referred to by Maslow as "healthy growth," plays a pivotal role. Peak-experiences, as defined by Maslow, offer individuals a glimpse of what they could and should be through B-cognition, akin to momentary self-actualization. The Camino de Santiago pilgrimage provides an ideal environment for individuals to express their authentic humanity, embody self-actualization, and transcend the pursuit of business success or commercial gain. Artnik Knibbe (2020) captures this perspective in a longer quote:

"Observing people that I came across with the Slovene version of this book and my mindfulness workshops around Europe, it became clear to me that there's an exceptional quality of awareness that increasingly helps the mind to remember its true potential. Not one's career or financial success, which nowadays follows so many as a measure for having realized your potential, but the potential of humanity and love waiting to gain full momentum. The true face of awakened individuals, who, ever more passionately, devote themselves to the inner impulses of creating the collective good, is more and more frequently and ceaselessly shown to the world daily: awakened individuals rising like a phoenix from the ashes of their burned victim role, flying high on their compassion and faith. Two exceptional values that individuals powered by the ego have sought to suffocate for millennia, but which continue to re-turn, all the time, in one form or the other. The truth simply cannot be destroyed. You can 'change its clothing', disguise it, and try to transform it or manipulate it, but you can never weaken it, as it is not a substance, thought, or form, it is not duality and is thus untouchable. It simply is. What we search for with doing is a state of being. All it takes is to stop, breathe, hear, vulnerably love, and see" (pp. 217-218).

In alignment with this perspective, Irish pilgrim Jesuit McManus echoes a similar sentiment:

“Anything can be helpful and a path to God, as long as it genuinely originates from God and deepens one’s humanity. This entails scrutinizing our choices to determine their origin and direction, whether they stem from what is truly good (from God) or whether they arise from the ego, rigidity, negativity, or even self-loathing” (McManus, 2014, ch. 9/para. 4).

This perspective of unity is further corroborated by Kaufman's recent psychological research (2018, 2020) on individuals progressing toward self-actualization. Kaufman's findings reveal that those on the path to self-actualization more frequently report self-transcendent moments, particularly those marked by a sense of unity. Kaufman contends that this substantiates Maslow's claim that self-actualizing individuals can paradoxically feel deeply connected to humanity while maintaining a strong sense of self.

Recent research by Brumec (2023) supports the connection between late modern society and self-actualization, specifically through the lens of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. Brumec conducted an online survey involving 500 participants, employing the Characteristics of Self-Actualization Scale (CSAS) developed by Kaufman (2018). The study results confirm that engaging in the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage significantly bolsters individuals' commitment to self-actualization. Pilgrims reported substantial enhancements in various dimensions of self-actualization, including an enriched appreciation for life, heightened equanimity, greater self-acceptance, and a strengthened moral compass.

Furthermore, the pilgrimage acted as a catalyst for recognizing a personal life mission and a deep desire to contribute to the well-being of humanity. Pilgrims also expressed a heightened likelihood of self-transcendent experiences, particularly those where they feel a connection with all people and things on this planet.

Conclusions

Findings from this study reveal that pilgrims, while on their journey, encounter B-values, which represent a harmonious fusion of facts ("isness") and values ("oughtness"). This fusion finds expression through a moral-cognitive sense that perceives everything in the world as it should be. Within these Being values lies the essence of the self-actualization process, encompassing concepts of interconnectedness, unity, wholeness, simplicity, essentiality, just-rightness, spontaneity, effortlessness, benevolence, honesty, autonomy, and individuality.

The discoveries of this research illuminate the impact of peak-experiences during the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage on individuals. These transformative moments bring forth B-knowledge, providing pilgrims with invaluable insights and revelations. They affirm the presence of joy, ecstasy, and rapture while emphasizing the inherent beauty and worthiness of life. Additionally, these peak-experiences enable individuals to authentically uncover their true selves and instill in them a deep appreciation for the intrinsic value of certain aspects of life.

It is evident that the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage contributes significantly to the process of self-actualization, as

delineated in the realm of humanistic psychology. Numerous studies have not only acknowledged self-actualization as a pivotal factor (Compton, 2001) but have also recognized it as a potential predictor of psychological well-being (Kaufman, 2018, 2020). As such, our findings hold implications for the field of contemporary positive psychology. Pilgrimages such as the Camino possess the potential to serve as potent instruments for enhancing the overall well-being of individuals through the avenue of self-actualization.

In a broader context, the popularity of the Camino in late modernity can be attributed, at least in part, to the growing prevalence of self-actualization values. This framework revolves around the belief that by unlocking the untapped potential within individuals, one can attain a life marked by exceptional quality, replete with contentment, creativity, and a sense of well-being. The Camino de Santiago pilgrimage stands as a testament to the appeal of self-discovery and personal transformation, transcending geographic boundaries to become a symbol of human aspiration and the quest for a more fulfilling life.

Footnotes

¹ The Camino de Santiago consists of a network of pilgrimage routes leading to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. It's become more popular since being recognized as the first European Cultural Itinerary. Over 437,500 people embarked on it in 2022, up from fewer than 3,000 in 1987 (Pilgrim's Reception Office, 2023).

² The list of analyzed travelogues is in the appendix.

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