

# Movement in stillness – Travel without travelling

## Ruch w bezruchu – Podróż bez podróżowania

### ABSTRACT

This article redefines the concept of travel, proposing that it transcends physical displacement to function as a catalyst for internal transformation and psychological growth. By tracing the human instinct to move from ancestral survival to a modern search for meaning, the text applies psychological frameworks to demonstrate how travel enhances personality traits such as openness and emotional stability. The author challenges the necessity of physical movement, introducing the paradox of "travel without travelling," where stillness and presence reveal deeper insights than superficial sightseeing. Furthermore, the paper explores the philosophical dimension of travel as a shared experience, arguing that through stories and memories, individuals can traverse distances vicariously through the lives of others. Ultimately, the work concludes that the essence of travel lies in the self's continuous movement toward understanding, regardless of geographical location.

**Keywords:** psychology of travel, inner journey, personality development, travel without travelling, stillness.

### STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy artykuł definiuje na nowo pojęcie podróży, stawiając tezę, że wykracza ona poza fizyczne przemieszczanie się, funkcjonując jako katalizator wewnętrznej transformacji i wzrostu psychologicznego. Śledząc ewolucję ludzkiego instynktu ruchu – od walki o przetrwanie przodków po współczesne poszukiwanie sensu – tekst wykorzystuje ramy psychologiczne, aby wykazać, w jaki sposób podróże wzmacniają cechy osobowości, takie jak otwartość na doświadczenia i stabilność emocjonalna. Autorka podważa konieczność fizycznego ruchu, wprowadzając paradoks „podróżowania bez podróży”, w którym bezruch i uważna obecność pozwalają na głębsze poznanie niż powierzchowne zwiedzanie. Ponadto artykuł bada filozoficzny wymiar podróży jako wspólnego doświadczenia, argumentując, że dzięki historiom i wspomnieniom jednostki mogą podróżować zastępczo poprzez życie innych ludzi. Ostatecznie praca konkluduje, że istota podróży leży w ciągłym dążeniu jaźni do zrozumienia, niezależnie od położenia geograficznego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** psychologia podróży, wewnętrzna podróż, rozwój osobowości, podróżowanie bez podróży, bezruch.

### INTRODUCTION: THE INSTINCT TO MOVE

Have you ever wondered where the need for change in life comes from? Why do we demand a constant shift in our environment? There is a certain inclination toward seeking the “new” inherent in all of us. I refer to this tendency as travelling.

Our ancestors migrated in search of food and safety; today, we move in search of meaning. This ancient instinct to drift, explore, and evolve has never disappeared. It persists in our nature. It is timeless and seemingly infinite.

However, the question remains: what does travel truly mean? Is it limited to physical movement, or can it also be found in stillness?

At first glance, the concept of travel may appear to refer solely to movement from one place to another, where a place denotes a city, a country, or a continent. However, this understanding can be extended far beyond geographical displacement.

Travel may also occur internally; it can manifest as a feeling, a desire, or a personal aspiration.

Consider a simple example: individuals in modern societies typically progress through kindergarten, school, higher education, and subsequently enter the workforce. This trajectory has long been regarded as a social “norm” and is often taken for granted. Historically, however, this was not the case. In earlier periods, individuals frequently entered the workforce without formal education, driven primarily by the need to survive rather than by a pursuit of personal development.

Today, societal structures and economic conditions in many parts of the world offer greater autonomy in shaping one's life course. Individuals are no longer universally bound to a rigid, linear progression toward professional success. While some choose to remain within familiar patterns, a significant portion

of society actively seeks new experiences, challenges, and self-defined milestones. These choices represent journeys not of physical distance, but of internal transformation.

Such pursuits may be described as inner travel – the movement of the self toward growth, understanding, and personal fulfilment. This observation, however, raises a fundamental question: what underlies this persistent human drive for change?

### 1. ORIGINS OF TRAVEL: FROM SURVIVAL TO SEEKING

To address this question, it is necessary to return to the earliest stages of human history, before permanent settlement emerged. Early humans travelled across regions and, eventually, across continents in search of more favourable environmental conditions. Movement in this context was not merely practical; it was existential. In early human history, such journeys were driven primarily by the need for survival. However, the enduring influence of this instinct should not be underestimated. Although approximately 10,000 years ago humans began to establish permanent settlements, the drive for movement and change did not disappear. Instead, it persisted, becoming embedded in both human biology and psychology.

Consequently, it is natural for individuals to continue embarking on journeys throughout their lives, regardless of the form they take. Movement, whether physical, intellectual, or emotional, remains a fundamental aspect of human identity (Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013).

### 2. MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF MOVEMENT

What does travel represent from a contemporary perspective, and how can it be understood through the lens of psychology?

The Swiss writer and philosopher Alain de Botton (2002), in *The Art of Travel*, observes: “If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness, then perhaps few activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest, in all its ardour and paradoxes, than our travels”.

According to de Botton (2002), travel expresses a search for meaning in life that transcends the significance of everyday existence. He further notes: “We are inundated with advice on where to travel to; we hear little of why we should go [...]”.

From this perspective, travelling is not merely a pastime but a fundamental human need, underpinned by deeper desires for self-understanding and personal growth. A journey enriches the inner world and enables individuals to redefine themselves. In a similar vein, Horolets (2013) compares travel to a pilgrimage – a moment in which individuals detach from everyday life and enter a sphere of the sacred. She observes that whereas in the past pilgrims entrusted themselves to God, in secular societies travellers may instead turn inward, focusing on the self by temporarily disconnecting from daily obligations and worldly concerns.

In this sense, travel becomes a form of self-work and a search for meaning and purpose. Contemporary secular travel thus performs functions analogous to those of traditional pilgrimage. Crucially, adherence to religious belief is not a prerequisite for cultivating spiritual development.

### 3. TRAVEL AS GROWTH AND IDENTITY-MAKING

Contemporary psychology increasingly acknowledges and supports processes of inner growth. Travelling provides both the time and the context for reflection on one's life. It requires individuals to test themselves in unfamiliar situations, navigate uncertainty, and move beyond established patterns. While travelling, people must adapt to new environments, communicate with people who speak different languages, and interact with individuals who hold distinct worldviews, habits, and values. These challenges naturally push individuals beyond their comfort zones and expand their understanding of both themselves and others. In this sense, the processes that occur during travel closely resemble those in a therapeutic setting: with each experience, individuals gain deeper insight into their strengths, vulnerabilities, assumptions, and aspirations. Travel, therefore, contributes directly and meaningfully to personality development.

Empirical evidence supports this claim. Research conducted by Zimmermann and Neyer (2013) examined personality development among long-term travellers. The study involved a large sample of German university students, some of whom spent one or two semesters studying abroad. In contrast, others remained in their home country. The researchers sought to determine how extended stays abroad influenced both personality traits and social networks. Prior to departure, all participants completed the NEO Personality Inventory, developed by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae, which measures the “Big Five” personality traits: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability. The same measures were administered again after the travel period (and, for the control group, after an equivalent time interval).

The results indicated that students who studied abroad, compared to those who remained at home, exhibited significantly greater increases in Extraversion (associated with sociability and engagement in social interaction), Conscientiousness (discipline and responsibility), and Openness to Experience (curiosity, tolerance for novelty, and appreciation of new experiences). Upon returning home, these students also demonstrated higher levels of Agreeableness (cooperation and empathy) and Emotional Stability (resilience and adaptability under stress). In short, travel influenced all five dimensions of personality (Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013).

These personality changes were closely linked to transformations in travellers' social networks. While participants who remained at home tended to maintain relatively stable social circles, those who travelled formed numerous new relationships abroad and often lost contact with acquaintances from their home environment. Changes in social networks were particularly associated with increases in Openness to Experience and Emotional Stability.

### 4. MOTIVATION AND EMOTION IN TRAVEL

An equally important question concerns why people choose to travel. The existing literature offers numerous classifications of

travel motivations. One of the most influential frameworks is that proposed by J. L. Crompton, who identified nine motives for travel participation: escape from routine, self-evaluation, relaxation, prestige, return to roots, strengthening family bonds, social interaction, novelty, and learning (Niezgoda & Zmysłony, 2003). Another well-known typology, developed by V. T. C. Middleton, distinguishes six principal categories of tourist motivation: cultural motives; psychological and educational motives; physical and fitness-related motives; social and ethnic motives; entertainment and leisure motives; and religious or work-related motives (Falkowski & Tyszka, 2001; Gajewski, 1994).

These classifications suggest that participation in tourism is typically driven by multiple, overlapping motives, a phenomenon commonly described as polymotivational behaviour.

## 5. EMOTIONS IN MOTION: THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF TRAVEL

Attention should also be given to the role of emotions in motivating travel. Emotions are consciously experienced psychological states that accompany everyday events, and travel often intensifies them. Travellers frequently seek exceptional and emotionally intense experiences. As W. N. Dember and R. W. Earl note, when travel activity is valued for its own sake, that is, when it is autotelic, the primary motive becomes exploration, driven by human curiosity and the desire to engage with and master unfamiliar environments (Reykowski, 2001). At times, individuals travel to find inner calm, presence, or companionship.

The emotional dimension of travel behaviour is particularly evident in tourism oriented toward sightseeing and cultural heritage appreciation. According to Lucjan Turos, such encounters evoke a wide range of emotional responses, including admiration, aesthetic shock, enchantment, surprise, awe, joy, fear, anxiety, and even disappointment (Turos, 2002). These emotions are elicited not only by monuments and works of art but also by customs, rituals, religious ceremonies, festivities, and dance. Contact with such cultural expressions becomes a specific form of dialogue with their creators, a process through which travellers experience the emotions, values, and histories embedded in other worlds.

Travelling, then, may be understood as a human need underpinned by deeper desires: the search for meaning in life and the pursuit of inner development. Through this ongoing journey, individuals continually enrich their personal constructions of the world.

However, despite extensive theoretical, empirical, and philosophical inquiry into why people travel, something remains unmeasured, something ancient, quiet, and deeply human. Beyond psychology, beyond sociology, and beyond the physical act of movement through space, there exists another form of travel: subtle, internal, and almost invisible. It is the movement that occurs when the body is still, but the inner world expands. Where does this journey begin, and how can it be recognised? The answer lies not in the distance travelled, but in the presence discovered.

## 6. STILLNESS IN MOTION: A JOURNEY WITHOUT DEPARTURE

Let us begin this “journey” together to explore the oneness of movement.

We live in an era oriented toward purpose. Purpose helps us pursue goals, complete projects, and move forward. We often need to see the finish line in order to continue. However, at times, this strong focus on an endpoint can obscure our perception of what unfolds along the way.

As a Zen master once observed: “Only the way to a goal, not the goal itself, helps for the last decisive leap” (Herrigel, 2004, p. 18). This perspective closely reflects how travel may be understood. The destination, the final “goal”, constitutes only a small part of the experience the journey offers.

On one occasion, I took a walk through my neighbourhood in Milan, following the familiar route I usually take to buy groceries. This time, however, I walked without a specific purpose. As a result, I noticed details I had never seen before and perceived the neighbourhood in an entirely new way. I realised that the task-oriented goal of shopping had previously narrowed my perception of my surroundings.

If this can occur within one’s own city, it is likely to occur during travel as well. When rushing to see a main attraction “because it is closing soon,” one may observe what is visible on the surface, yet fail to sense the place itself. In the pursuit of “the best” and the “must-sees,” the subtle experience of what lies in between is often lost.

Not everyone can afford to travel. Not everyone has access to formal education. While travelling to another country naturally offers forms of learning that differ from those available through books, learning may also occur in alternative ways. Through conversation, for instance, individuals may begin to perceive the “in-between”: the emotional worlds of others, conveyed through personal stories. In this sense, it may take only one person’s journey for an entire community to travel symbolically with them.

## CONCLUSIONS: IS THIS TRAVEL WITHOUT TRAVELLING?

There are many ways to understand travel. The most obvious is literal movement, the physical transition from one place to another. For some, travel is temporary; for others, it becomes part of daily life. Migration, the search for a new identity, or the pursuit of a better life all involve movement. However, all these forms remain grounded in physical displacement.

There exists, however, another dimension, one more fundamental than the need for literal movement. It is an inner tension that calls to individuals persistently, shaping who they are and whom they may become. It is a forward impulse, an inner space that seeks continual engagement, a call deeply embedded in human nature.

When this inner space is lost, individuals may lose their sense of self. The most essential journey, therefore, is the one that takes place within. Needs, goals, emotions, experiences, and

relationships all form part of this personal path. This inner movement is what truly propels individuals forward. Physical movement fulfils only a small portion of this process.

The search does not end, and the journey has no final destination. This ongoing movement is intrinsic to the human condition. However, one further question remains: do we ever truly travel alone? Even when travelling individually, regardless of how this is defined, are we ever entirely solitary? Each day brings new thoughts, plans, and anticipations, many of which initially involve only the self. Nevertheless, along the way, encounters occur.

Experiences emerge through interactions with others. What is often attributed to external forces or fate is, in fact, co-created by people themselves. Reality is shaped collectively, through shared presence and interaction. What individuals feel and discover along their journey depends largely on those they encounter.

In this sense, travel without travelling becomes possible. Every memory left behind, every smile, every conversation, resonates through time. Individuals become part of one another's journeys. When others travel, those memories travel with them. They persist, circulate, and continue to move, even without physical motion.

The way, then, is not only found in movement. It also exists in stillness. Movement occurs even when the body remains at rest. This is how travel continues without departure.

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