

## TIME TO GO? A Qualitative Research Study Exploring the Experience & Impact of Emigration on Ireland's Youth: Stages of Adapting



### Stages of Adapting

Emigration is often associated with a journey or life path that one takes. This journey often entails going through a number of stages. There is extensive literature documenting this experience which often starts with a honeymoon phase when the emigrant is experiencing a positive perception of their new country and continues on this road going through a further 4 stages of what Oberg called 'culture shock.' Culture shock is a term Oberg coined to describe 5 distinct stages people experience travelling to or living in another country. This transition through the 5 stages has a cause, symptoms and resolution. According to Oberg, cultural shock is "precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs and cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life" (1960:1).

For many emigrants there tends to be five stages they experience as emigrants as they adapt to life in a new culture.

**Phase 1:** Honeymoon The honeymoon period is typically a period of excitement, happiness and fascination with your new home. The emigrant tends to experience this phase before or shortly after arriving in their new country. Everything is new and interesting and emigrants tend to focus on similarities between the country they have emigrated to and home.

**Phase 2:** Rejection During the first months emigrants may begin to feel a sense of disappointment, frustration, confusion and irritability with their situation. The differences between the new country and home tend to be ever present in one's mind and emigrants may

miss family and feel a lack of connection to their new home. Finding employment may be difficult. It is not uncommon for emigrants to feel Literature Review 28 lonely and homesick for home and friends. Some may have feelings of guilt about leaving family members behind.

**Phase 3:** Regression After a period of time, an emigrant may experience more acceptance or openness to their new surroundings. Such feelings will usually manifest in feeling more familiar with and understanding the new cultural cues of the new country. Emigrants tend to be more receptive to meeting new people, experiencing new things and enjoying life in your new country. Phase 3 is a period of acceptance when an individual finally learns the local language, customs and way of living and adjusts slowly without losing your own cultural identity.

**Phase 4:** Recovery Phase or At- Ease-At-Last The recovery phase or at-ease-at last phase is a period when things start to become normal. You are comfortable in your new surroundings. You have integrated into life in your new country, made friends and are now leading a relatively new lifestyle to your old way of life.

**Phase 5:** Reverse Culture Shock or Return Culture Shock The final stage of Oberg's culture shock - phase 5, the period when an emigrant experiences what Oberg calls 'Reverse Culture Shock or Return Culture Shock'. This is when the emigrant returns home but finds that home is no longer the home they identified with before they emigrated. They feel lost between two worlds and have now become so adjusted to their new culture that the old culture they left at home has become somewhat alien to them. They experience a reverse or return culture shock. They view Ireland differently now than before. They view Ireland as an emigrant and not as a native.

Joseph O'Connor captures this experience so well in his introduction to *Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers Abroad*, when he describes a visit home to Dublin after living for a period of time abroad. The experience starts with a strong desire to be home and to experience the comfort of home amongst friends. The next experience is the feeling of being an outsider amongst friends and not being able to relate completely to their lives or the conversations taking place. O'Connor describes the feeling of uneasiness and lastly the dawning realisation that they are in fact an emigrant.