

## Project 2

Andrew Pool

Cultural Communication 2150

My Mother in Portugal

### Overview

In September 2021 my mother, Jennifer immigrated to Lisbon, Portugal from Chicago, Illinois. Portugal is a coastal country in western Europe neighboring Spain. She had been contemplating moving to another country for awhile and loved Portugal's culture when she visited it. I will be comparing her experience to the U-Curve model. Although she has only been there for 7 months she has had a very impressive experience so far, navigating the bureaucracy and language, as well as making friends in her new home.

### Culture

Portugal is in the Iberian Peninsula neighboring Spain to Portugal's east and to the west is the Atlantic Ocean. It is slightly smaller than Indiana (4) with mostly forests and plains. She lives in Lisbon, its capital city, and also its largest. Lisbon is on the Atlantic Coast on a bay at the mouth of the Tagus river. Portugal's official language is Portuguese. Portuguese is a Romance language that is very similar to Spanish, although according to my mom the Portuguese people do not like when they are used interchangeably, or when Spanish is used instead. Portugal has a temperate climate where most homes do not have heating or cooling, reflecting the generally great weather that the country has year round.

The people are friendly and welcoming, with a reputation of being "Portuguese Polite." This refers to how the people try not to show annoyance or anger towards other people, even when they are. For instance protest are very polite and orderly, as my mother witness during Protests into COVID-19 restrictions. Further when the metro

workers strike the dates and times were posted months in advanced, and not at times that would interfere with normal work schedules.

Portuguese people value fresh food, getting most of their food locally. The seafood is fresh and plentiful, and the fruit and vegetables are local to either Portugal or Spain. The cooking is simple but flavorful, emphasizing the quality of ingredients. Shopping for dinner is done generally the day of, with not a lot of food being prepackaged or frozen.

Portugal also has a large immigrant community, with 8.9% of Lisbon's 544 thousand residence being immigrants (2). There are restaurants and other shops in Lisbon that cater to the immigrant population.

### Reason for Migration

My mom has always been a traveler, she loves to visit new places and experience new cultures. She recently had what she likes to call "a break up with the USA" and with retirement she doesn't have a lack of skills preventing her from immigrating to a new country. Portugal actively courts immigration as a part of its domestic economy (6).

Portugal being more affordable than the USA was also a factor. Portugal has a higher ranked healthcare system according to the World Health Organization's 2021 ranking at 12# overall, as compared to The United State's 37# (7). Affordable housing is also a constitutional right, she pays less in housing for a much larger apartment in Lisbon than she did in Chicago. Portugal is the poorest country in western Europe, and as such has lower prices for goods and services that further help her dollar go farther (1).

Jennifer took a "Rick Steves European Vacation" that included a week stay in Portugal and an extended part was in Lisbon. She loved the weather, food, and the people. Her tour guide was very friendly and when she told him about her considering moving to Portugal he offered to help. He provided some translation services and helped navigate the moving process. His help was crucial for helping her get her foot in Portugal's door.

Jennifer's plans on getting citizenship once she is able to pass a conversational language test and is there voluntarily, this makes her an immigrant. (Intercultural Communication in Contexts p310p)

## Theory

I am using the U-Curve Model to analyze Jenny's recent experience because I am interested in how she is adapting to her new home. This Model states that a migrant goes through 3 distinct phases of the process of assimilation/integration; Anticipation, Culture Shock, and Adjustment (Intercultural Communication in Contexts p327-333).

Anticipation is "The first phase is the anticipation or excitement phase. When a migrant first enters a new cultural context, he or she may be excited to be in the new situation and only a little apprehensive (Intercultural Communication in Contexts p.327)." Given Jennifer's voluntary nature of the move, she had high anticipation for immigrating to Portugal. She loved the culture and the people and was very excited to move away from Chicago, a city she had gotten tired from.

Once in Portugal she has been faced with a few challenges in her new environment that could be compared to the second phase; Culture Shock. Culture Shock is when "Individuals face many challenges of transition in new cultural contexts (Intercultural Communication in Contexts p328)."

Portugal is a very bureaucratic country. For instance in order to pay bills one has to provide a tax number, called a NIF or Contribute. Since she is an immigrant she has a special status that pays a discount on taxes. But navigating the bureaucracy to apply for the discount has been a challenge for her because of the maze of administration offices, her not speaking Portuguese, and the deadline that come with the filings. This has been frustrating to the point where she has gotten a lawyer who specializes in international taxes to help her navigate the situation.

Since she doesn't speak Portuguese, and only a little Spanish (that the locals hate being spoken) communicating has been slightly difficult. It hasn't been too frustrating she says because of modern technology and a large portion of the population speak English. English is the second common denominator in Lisbon

because its high immigrant population and English is the world's common language. She encourages locals to speak in Portuguese to her in daily interactions and repeats what they say back. The "Portuguese Politeness" means that everyone pretty much entertains her, unlike her experience in Paris where the locals would speak English to you if your French wasn't passable. They appreciate her attempt to assimilate with local culture. Portugal's elderly population is more illiterate than the average EU country but it's getting better(5). This has caused some problems with communicating with people who don't speak English as written translation technology doesn't help her much.

The third phase is Adjustment, "in which migrants learn the rules and customs of the new cultural context (Intercultural Communication in Contexts p329)." Jennifer has been doing a great job adjusting, in part because so far she hasn't experienced much of a culture shock, and she is determined to do her best to assimilate to her new country.

Mother has a darker complexion and black hair, much like the locals do, this means that she isn't treated like an outsider by strangers. The large immigrant community has provided an anchor for her to attach to, and she has made many native Portuguese friends who have helped her. She, "Loves it here...the locals are so welcoming."

## Analysis

Jennifer's lack of serious Culture Shock is a limitation on the U-Curve theory in this instance. But this could also be a product of her recently moving to Lisbon and she is still maybe in the anticipatory phase, given her continued excitement for being in her new home. Possibly when she finishes her Portuguese language lessons and gets her citizenship the experience might have changed. But this could also be a product of both the culture's welcoming nature, and her enthusiasm for joining it.

## Reflection

I was excited to complete this assignment as it gave me a great excuse to check up with my mom about her big move. I learned a lot about the welcoming nature of the

people and the friends she's made in the new country, as well as random government facts. I had a bit of apprehension about her moving to Portugal as it's a big life choice but I'm happy that it's working out for her. I feel like finding a welcoming population and willingness to assimilate help a great deal in minimizing culture shock. I have been wanting to move to Canada (I have a CDL-A, and am getting a comp sci degree, skills that are in high demand in Canada) and if I do I will be sure to find a community that is as welcoming as the one my mom has found.

### Questions

For the interview I review with my mom the basics of the U-Curve model and asked her: about why she wanted to move there, what gave her high anticipation for the move, what her struggles adjusting to life in Lisbon were, and how she's doing adjusting and assimilating to her new life. I asked follow up questions according to her answers.

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