



Changing Lusospheres

**Europe, Brazil, Africa. On old and new connections
between centers and peripheries**

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2025



The sense of belonging among Portuguese first-generation immigrants and their descendants in Luxembourg¹

Isabelle Albert

Population aging and migration are often cited as key societal issues of our time. In recent decades, growing numbers of people have been residing in countries other than where they were born. The International Organization for Migration estimates that there were 281 million international migrants worldwide in 2020 (IOM 2022). Luxembourg takes a special place in this picture, given the high proportion of people there who do not have Luxembourgish nationality (currently 47.2%); in addition, among those who are Luxembourgers, 18% have a second nationality. Recently published statistics show that Luxembourg is very culturally diverse: in addition to new arrivals, there are older waves of migrants and their descendants. In fact, 73.7% of the population has a direct or indirect migration background (Statec 2022). While the number of immigrants is higher in the younger age groups, 29% of people over 70 years old do not have Luxembourgish nationality.

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The majority of the immigrants is from other European countries, and Portuguese nationals make up the largest group, accounting for 14.5% of the whole population. The first large waves of Portuguese immigration took place in the 1970s, when Luxembourg was searching for workers in the industrial, construction, and service sectors, and immigration from Portugal has continued since then. Aging first-generation immigrants have thus become a topic of interest in Luxembourg, and questions about their plans for the future have become more and more relevant. This trend is similar in other European countries, where members of the first waves of labor migration in past decades are now entering retirement age (Mandres 2014). Studies suggest that only a portion of immigrants return permanently to their country of origin after their professional life comes to an end, even if they had initially planned to do so. Instead, a transnational lifestyle might become an alternative that is favored by many, especially given that they build up their social and personal links to their country of settlement over time (Nedelcu et al. 2023; Kahveci, Karacan & Kosnick 2020). Considering these dynamics, it is important to understand how migrants establish a sense of belonging to their receiving country while often also retaining links to their country of origin. Studies have shown that the integration of immigrants is a multifaceted process (Fajth & Lessard-Phillips 2022): immigrants might take on some habits or values that they encounter in their country of settlement but retain other traditions and preferences. Interestingly, migrants do not necessarily take on the presumed majority culture; on the contrary, they might also adapt to subgroups in the population of the receiving country (Portes & Zhou 1993). Given that the entire population is becoming more and more culturally diverse, the question of how immigrants orient themselves in the multicultural acculturation context of Luxembourg becomes even more pertinent for societal cohesion and inclusion (Murdock 2016). Migration from Portugal to Luxembourg was typically characterized by its family dimension: The offspring of first-generation migrants have now entered adulthood, having spent most or all their childhood in Luxembourg (Hartmann-Hirsch 2007; Hartmann-Hirsch & Amétépé 2023, 1-11). Families play a key role when it comes to questions of support and care in old age. Intergenerational solidarity and mutual expectations between first-generation immigrants and their adult children can thus be interesting aspects that influence planning and well-being after retirement (Albert, Ferring & Lang 2016).

These general reflections were the starting points for the FNR-funded IRMA project on intergenerational relations in the light of migration and aging, which focused on comparisons between Portuguese immigrant families in Luxembourg and Luxembourgish families. The main interrelated topics were cultural identity construction, intergenerational solidarity, and needs and expectations for intergenerational support. The project also focused on the transmission of values between the generations, and the well-being of older parents and their adult children, in migrant and non-migrant families. Furthermore, perceptions of the multicultural society of Luxembourg, involvement in associations, and individual migration history were taken into account.

The research questions were formulated alongside an integrative model on intergenerational family relations in the light of migration and aging (Albert & Barros Coimbra 2017). This model proposed that parent–child relations are embedded in a specific family culture, in which rules and routines are negotiated, and which is embedded in a larger cultural context. Depending on earlier socialization processes, the family system can be either aligned with or different from the context in which it is situated, for instance, when a family has migrated, the family members were socialized in a different societal context before moving to a new place. Also, historical time and life stage have an impact on the specific preferences, needs, and constraints of different family members (Baltes, Reese & Lipsit 1980; Manzi et al. 2006; Trommsdorff 2006).

The IRMA project consisted of two parts: a larger quantitative questionnaire survey and a qualitative interview study. Altogether, $n = 72$ Portuguese families living in Luxembourg and $n = 85$ Luxembourgish families (one adult child together with one of their parents in each family) filled out a standardized questionnaire, making up a full sample size of $N = 438$ participants. Furthermore, ten parent–adult child pairs in each of the two subgroups were invited to discuss topics that included migration, multiculturalism in Luxembourg, and the intergenerational transmission of traditions and values within families.

The present contribution will summarize the results of the IRMA study described above with regard to the perspectives of first-generation Portuguese immigrants and their descendants in Luxembourg, their plans for the future, how they negotiate multiple aspects of their cultural iden-

tity, their feelings of belonging, and their intergenerational relations and well-being.

Future plans

First-generation immigrants have often expressed a desire to return to their country of origin. The underlying idea is to earn enough money in the receiving country to build up an economic base for retirement back home. Studies in several countries have, however, shown that these plans are often not realized or that they change over time (Carling 2014). In fact, many choose to stay or to commute between countries after retirement instead of returning permanently as initially envisaged (Hunter 2011). Several factors related to a person's choice of where to live after retirement have been identified; for instance, they may have gotten used to the lifestyle in their country of settlement, which has gained personal importance, and other family members—in particular, their own children—will often continue to live there (Attias-Donfut, Tessier & Wolff 2005; Bolzman, Fibbi & Vial 2006). Structural or practical considerations, such as health issues and the availability of healthcare provision, legal issues, and financial concerns, can also play a decisive role (Mandres 2014). As life in the receiving country goes on, what is experienced as “home” can also change over time (Kunuroglu et al. 2018). Nonetheless, multiple attachments are possible, and special bonds with one's country of origin often seem to be retained (Klok et al. 2017, Palladino 2019). The practice of commuting between both countries after retirement has been described in a survey of middle-aged international immigrants in France on their future plans for retirement (Attias-Donfut, Tessier & Wolff 2005). Recently, a retirement mobilities approach has been proposed as a new analytical framework for addressing the complexities of transnational lifestyles in older age (Nedelcu et al. 2023). This approach takes into account that the lifestyles of many older people are characterized by transnational movements and that the assumption of immobility as the norm is no longer valid.

When it came to the future plans of the first-generation Portuguese immigrants who participated in the IRMA project, we were able to identify similar patterns to those found in earlier European studies (Attias-Donfut,

Tessier & Wolff 2005). We asked participants if they had planned—at the beginning of their stay in Luxembourg—to return to their country of origin in the future, and we wanted to know what their current plans were at the time of data collection.² Although 69% indicated that when they came to Luxembourg years ago they had envisaged that they would return to Portugal, the picture had evolved in the meantime: about 20% of our participants stated clearly that they would still like to return. A proportion of 41% were planning to stay in Luxembourg, whereas 21% preferred to commute between Luxembourg and Portugal and 18% were undecided about what to do after retirement. Further questions revealed that participants had often immigrated to Luxembourg for economic reasons but had formed emotional bonds with the receiving country over the years. Especially family and other social relationships were mentioned as reasons for staying in Luxembourg or for commuting, in addition to practical considerations (Bolzman, Fibbi & Vial 2006). The main reasons driving future plans to return to Portugal tended to be personal, such as a continuing strong attachment to the cultural heritage and lifestyle in the country of origin. Notably, the proportion of people planning to return in the future was slightly higher among those who were still gainfully employed; presumably, for them, the decision-making process was still ongoing. The likelihood of staying in Luxembourg increased with the length of time in the Grand Duchy and with already having grandchildren in Luxembourg. It should be mentioned that all the participants had children living in Luxembourg (due to our study design), but only a portion of them already had grandchildren. The immigrants' adult children were also asked about their future plans. As expected, the majority were planning for a future in the Grand Duchy, where they had grown up and had sometimes already started a family of their own. Notably, they often reported also having close bonds with their parents' country of origin. Interestingly, the majority of participants, irrespective of their future plans, were homeowners in Luxembourg. However, participants who wanted to stay in Luxembourg permanently were less likely to own property in Portugal than those who wanted to return or commute. This could indicate not only the importance of opportunity structures but also the planning ahead of some participants.

2 <https://repository.mruni.eu/handle/007/14580>

However, for the first generation, having plans to stay in Luxembourg did not mean that their ties with their country of origin were completely broken. On the contrary, no differences in the emotional attachment to Portugal were found among this group; however, those who wanted to stay in Luxembourg or commute indicated a stronger attachment to Luxembourg than those who wanted to return to Portugal. The latter group also indicated scarcer Luxembourgish language competences. This confirms earlier claims that when migrants build ties in their country of migration, a permanent return to their country of origin becomes less likely a choice (ibid.). A transnational lifestyle and continued cross-border mobility resulting from multiple social and personal links to both countries then become more probable (Nedelcu et al. 2023).

This brings us to the question of how first-generation migrants establish new bonds and define their cultural identity and belonging across their life course.

Cultural identity

Settling in a new country can be regarded as a critical life transition that requires sociocultural and psychological adaptation, a process termed *acculturation* (Berry 2005; Redfield, Linton & Herskovitz 1936). Whereas earlier theories regarded acculturation as being a unidimensional adaptation to the receiving culture, it has become evident that migrants build new bonds with their receiving country while retaining aspects of their culture of origin, as described in two-dimensional or multidimensional models of acculturation (Berry 2005; Kunuroglu et al. 2018). In fact, migration might trigger changes in cultural, social, and emotional belonging, as migrants leave behind a familiar living context and an established social network when moving to new surroundings. Nonetheless, people do not migrate without a past. The recently introduced concept of *pro-culturation* accounts for the fact that people who migrate as adults have been enculturated in other cultural contexts and carry with them a kind of imprint—that is, they see and interpret the world and new experiences through the cultural lenses acquired earlier (Gamsakhurdia 2019). Therefore, individuals differ in how they internalize old and new cultural influences and integrate them into the self (Schwartz et al. 2010). The bicultural

tural identity integration model refers to different ways in which people might view their belonging to different cultures: The first dimension refers to the perception of both cultures as blended or distant, while the second dimension describes whether people experience their cultures as rather harmonious or conflicted (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos 2005). People might also engage in cultural frame-switching; that is, adapting their behavior to the specific cultural context when moving between different cultural systems (Hong et al. 2000; No 2013). On the basis of these cognitive and behavioral components, earlier research identified different ways of being bicultural: blended biculturals perceived their cultures as overlapping and felt competent in different cultural contexts, whereas alternating biculturals were found to make a clear distinction between both cultures but were able to move between them without problems (Phinney & Devich-Navarro 1997). Importantly, a third group was labeled as separate: although living with multiple cultural influences, they did not identify as bicultural but felt that they belonged only to one or the other culture. More recently, a transformative theory of biculturalism has been proposed (West et al. 2017). This theory suggests frame-switching, hybridizing, or integrating as ways in which people dynamically negotiate different aspects of their different cultural identity. Following the above-described approaches, the bicultural identity integration of first-generation Portuguese immigrants and their adult children was examined in the IRMA project. We considered the dimensions of compatibility, conflict, and frame-switching (Barros & Albert 2020a). We assumed that first-generation migrants face different developmental tasks from those in the second generation when reconciling and negotiating different cultural aspects. Whereas the former group were socialized in a different cultural context before they migrated, the latter have grown up with multiple cultural influences (Birman 2006). Interestingly, both first- and second-generation participants indicated on average low conflict with regard to their multiple cultural belonging, and both groups engaged equally in frame-switching, adapting their behavior when navigating between different cultural systems. However, there were significant differences in the dimension of compatibility. More precisely, the older generation experienced both cultures as more separate, whereas the younger generation saw both cultures as more overlapping.

When taking a closer look at patterns based on the combination of the aforementioned dimensions, we found four different identity types

among participants from the first generation and their adult children: (a) blended biculturals, (b) alternating biculturals, (c) ambivalent, and (d) separated (Barros & Albert 2020b). Blended, alternating, and separated types have already been described in earlier studies; the newly discovered ambivalent type included participants who identified with both cultures but experienced them as conflicting. Participants with this pattern also indicated more explicitly that they use cultural frame-switching and adapt their behavior depending on the context they find themselves in. Portuguese migrant fathers were most frequently found to be among the alternating biculturals and the ambivalent types. Both these types engaged in frame-switching, but the alternating biculturals perceived their multiple belonging more positively than the ambivalent types did. The latter seemed to feel conflicted about the two distinct cultures they belonged to, although they felt capable of alternating between them. For Portuguese migrant mothers, the most frequent pattern seemed to be separated types, followed by blended biculturals and alternating biculturals. For first-generation migrants, cultural contact with their culture of origin and the receiving culture occurs one after the other, as they are socialized in one country before settling into a new context with new values, norms, and practices. The asynchronous sequence of experiences in different cultural contexts could account for the higher numbers of people from the first generation who clearly distinguished their multiple cultural aspects. Among the adult children we found the same patterns as for the first generation in that blended biculturals were the most common. Having grown up in and between two cultures, members of the second generation in migrant families might have simultaneously internalized both the culture of their parents and that of the societal context in which they lived during their formative years. This simultaneity of cultural influences could have contributed to the perception of a certain overlap of both cultures. However, the results also showed that, especially for the second generation, reconciling different cultural identities can be a difficult task depending on a person's life experiences and contexts. This was further demonstrated in the qualitative interviews.

Most of the respondents from the second generation regarded Luxembourg as their focus of life while recognizing their Portuguese roots. The majority said they felt a sense of belonging to both cultures, but there was variety in how they reconciled both influences (Barros & Albert 2020a). Some participants reported experiencing ambivalences concerning their

bicultural identity (Barros & Albert 2020b). More precisely, some of the respondents reported that the views of others had undermined their own cultural identity constructions in relation to one or the other culture—being labeled as Portuguese by Luxembourgers and being seen as a Luxembourger when in Portugal (Barros & Albert 2020a). This denial of cultural identity has been described by other authors and is recurrent in reports of second-generation offspring in migrant families (Clark, Glick & Bures 2009).

The next section will focus more closely on the sense of belonging and how it evolves in the context of migration.

Sense of belonging

A sense of belonging gives meaning to individuals' lives (Lambert et al. 2013), and it speaks to their basic need for communion and agency (Abele & Wojciszke 2007). Belonging is a basic need (Baumeister & Leary 1995) inherent in the processes of acculturation and cultural identity. However, while the sense of belonging has been widely addressed in migration research, it is still difficult to find a common definition. It has been defined in different ways depending on the disciplinary perspective; for instance as identification, connectedness, or attachment to a group (Halse 2018). People can feel they belong to social groups on different levels (such as family or friends, or other groups that share similar values or characteristics), to social institutions (e.g., school), or to transnational networks (ibid.). Apart from the social aspects, some authors have underlined the importance of place in belonging (Antonsich 2010). For instance, one might feel that one belongs to a geographic area or to a symbolic space, and the immediate neighborhood where migrants settle and interact with the other inhabitants might have an impact on feelings of belonging too (Wessendorf 2019). Importantly, these neighborhoods can be characterized by high levels of cultural diversity or be inhabited by specific groups (e.g., peer migrants from the same or a different community), or there might be a majority of long-established local residents in the neighborhood. This can, of course, have an impact on how social contacts unfold. Further, language competence is an important factor for the sense of belonging (Amit & Bar-Lev 2015). Notably, a sense of belonging in the

country of settlement does not necessarily entail the desire to become a full part of what is perceived as majority culture or to take over the apparent characteristics of the majority (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. 2021). It is also possible for migrants to develop a sense of belonging to the migrant community or to other subgroups in their country of settlement.

In the IRMA project, we addressed the question of immigrants' sense of belonging by drawing on qualitative interviews with $n = 10$ Portuguese immigrant family dyads (one parent and one adult child each). The focus was on several facets of belonging, namely, spatial, social, and cultural. As expected, for most of the first-generation migrants interviewed, Luxembourg as their country of settlement and as their living context had over the years become a home to which they felt they belonged. Interestingly though, their connection to fellow Portuguese migrants in the Grand Duchy and to Portuguese culture was stronger than their feeling of being a member of the Luxembourgish community or being part of Luxembourgish culture. This was different for their adult children: they not only reported a greater attachment to Luxembourg in more general terms as a living context that provided economic stability but also expressed a strong attachment and identification with the Luxembourgish social and cultural setting (Afonso, Barros & Albert 2023). Interestingly, within the second generation a difference became obvious between those who were born in Luxembourg and those who were born in Portugal and migrated to Luxembourg with their parents at a young age: the latter underlined the importance of the multicultural context, whereas those born in Luxembourg identified more strongly with the Luxembourgish culture as their own.

Migrants' experiences during their acculturation process are key for their development of a sense of belonging. To examine the pathway of how a sense of belonging evolves over time, we focused on a case study with one selected mother-daughter dyad, retracing their remembered migration history (Albert & Barros 2021). The selected case included a mother in her sixties, who had been living in Luxembourg for forty years and who was interviewed with one of her daughters. The daughter had been born in Portugal but migrated to Luxembourg with her family at the age of seven. She was in her forties at the time of the interview. It should be noted that while the mother had been employed as a low-skilled worker,

her daughter had a professional degree and worked in an administrative position in the health sector.

The conversation provided a detailed account of how, in retrospect, an unfamiliar context that was experienced as hostile and even ugly at first, changed meaning over time, and eventually became a home for the mother. Her clearly stated intent to stay in Luxembourg and not to move back to Portugal permanently was in stark contrast to what she remembered as her initial thoughts; namely, a strong impulse to take a train back to Portugal immediately. It should be noted, however, that at the time of the interview she was in retirement and practicing a transnational lifestyle, commuting between both countries and spending part of the year in Portugal. Within this case study, the practical restrictions and opportunities that shape life became evident: the lack of a house in Portugal and a comparatively worse living situation back there eventually pushed our interviewee to stay in Luxembourg. She also remembered that her living conditions had a significant impact on her well-being. In addition, she identified turning points, for instance, an important improvement in the initially very difficult and poor living conditions in Luxembourg. When she started to receive an adequate salary and felt that her work was finally being recognized, her perception of Luxembourg changed, and she started to see it as a friendly and welcoming context (*ibid.*).

The qualitative interviews underlined the importance of experiences that are shared by first-generation migrants and their descendants, but they also demonstrated that memories can differ between family members as they undergo the same experiences at different points in their life course. Recollections from the past also have an impact on the regulation of relationships between older, first-generation migrants and their adult children (Albert, Barros Coimbra & Boulanger 2020). In the final part of this chapter, we will therefore focus on the regulation of intergenerational relations in the context of migration.

Intergenerational relations

Our focus was on the intergenerational relations in Portuguese migrant families, which we compared with Luxembourgish families. Past studies have shown that in families with a migration history, expectations that each generation has on the other generation(s) can be particularly high (Baykara-Krumme & Fokkema 2019), and intergenerational solidarity is negotiated in relation to the well-being of members of the family (Barros et al. 2023). Notably, in our research we found that conflict around cultural identity is related to intergenerational conflict and loneliness (Albert 2021). A motive behind the migration of first-generation parents might have been to provide a better life for their children (Kang & Larson 2014), and this can be recognized by the children. Strong mutual expectations of solidarity and supporting older parents might be related to the parents' earlier efforts and sacrifices (Merz et al. 2009). For instance, in the Turkish 2000 families' study (Baykara-Krumme & Fokkema 2019), migrant families more often corresponded to the full-solidarity family type than to the autonomous type. At the same time, research has shown that younger generations might have adopted values and norms from the country of settlement and not fully agree with parental expectations. Such a generational or acculturation gap can lead to intergenerational ambivalences and conflicts (Albert, Abbey & Valsiner 2018).

In the IRMA project, we took a closer look at the family cultures in Luxembourgish and Portuguese families living in Luxembourg. Our interviews suggested that intergenerational relations and mutual expectations are, not only in Portuguese families but also in Luxembourgish ones, characterized by high cohesion: a sense of being there for each other in case of need (Albert & Barros Coimbra 2017). But we also found differences between these two groups: intergenerational support between Luxembourgish parents and their adult children was mostly downward, whereas support patterns were more reciprocal in the Portuguese families living in Luxembourg, who also rated family obligations higher (Albert, Ferring & Michels 2013)—a finding that was in line with the results of earlier studies (Fleury et al. 2011). We carried out cluster analyses to identify different relationship patterns in our survey data. More of the Luxembourgish adult children were found to be in clear-cut clusters—characterized either by high adherence to obligations or by inde-

pendence—while more of the Portuguese adult children were found in ambivalent clusters. Thus, some adult children might find it difficult to reconcile their striving for independence with their family obligations, especially in the context of migration.

In order to delve deeper into the topic of relationship regulation and better understand the processes and mechanisms behind different relationship patterns, we then carried out thematic content analyses of our qualitative interview data. In doing so, we focused on the specific topic of moving out of the parental home. We expected to find differences in how autonomy and relatedness or solidarity and reciprocity are negotiated when comparing Portuguese families with Luxembourgish families (Albert & Barros Coimbra 2017). A typical pattern was that of Portuguese parents exhibiting a tendency to move back and forth between granting autonomy and holding their children back, while their young adult children reassured them of their solidarity. Luxembourgish parents assumed the need to let their children grow into independence, because this is an expected part of children growing up that parents must come to terms with. As a tendency, these results hinted at a dyadic co-regulation of autonomy and relatedness in the Portuguese families and at more individual cognitive regulatory strategies in the Luxembourgish families. As described above, cohesion was strongly expressed in both the Luxembourgish and the Portuguese families, but the Portuguese families had higher expectations around frequency of contact than the Luxembourgish families did, and they underlined more clearly the importance of geographical closeness between family members from different generations. The Luxembourgish participants placed more emphasis on the importance of being there for each other in case of need, whereas frequency of contact seemed to be less important. These observations were in line with a theoretical model on assurance (which is typical for intergenerational relations in interdependent cultural contexts) versus trust (which is more central in independent cultural contexts) (Rothbaum & Trommsdorff 2007).

The Portuguese adult children in our project were aware that their parents had worked hard to provide their families with a good life. In exchange, they helped their parents with administrative issues and translation. Recently, the sense of indebtedness has been introduced into the study of intergenerational relations in migrant families. This refers to sec-

ond-generation members of immigrant families and their wish to give something back to their immigrant parents, who have made many sacrifices to provide a better life for their children Pfammatter & Schwarz 2022). Feelings of gratitude, shame, and guilt have also been described in relation to intergenerational transfers (Carling 2014; Simoni & Voirol 2021).

Conclusions

The present contribution has focused on the first generation of Portuguese migrants to Luxembourg, who have started to reach the retirement age. While it was once unknown whether a large number of them would return to Portugal after completing their professional life, it has now become evident that many are choosing to continue living in Luxembourg or are opting for a transnational lifestyle, where they spend some time in Luxembourg and some in Portugal. The research results from the IRMA project have indicated that Portuguese migrants who were part of the first waves of immigration have formed strong ties and roots in the Grand Duchy; they have found their place in their country of settlement and have become an integral part of the culturally diverse society of Luxembourg. At the same time, these first-generation immigrants have retained strong links to Portugal and have transmitted their cultural traditions to their offspring who have grown up in the Grand Duchy. Despite adopting cultural influences from Portugal and from Luxembourg, the first generation continues to keep the two cultural contexts more separate; but for their offspring, both cultures have become integral, and sometimes blended, parts of their identities. The IRMA study has shed light on intergenerational regulatory efforts and on the intraindividual negotiation processes that take place when reconciling these two cultural influences. We have discussed the challenges and opportunities of living with diverse cultures and outlined the importance of intergenerational relations in the context of migration.

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