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# Introduction

“Like a fish out of water” was how Kalervo Oberg described the status of individuals adapting in unfamiliar environments and thereby, he coined the term “culture shock” to explain what happens when the *foreigners* meet the *natives*.

Since 1960, when Oberg first discussed culture shock, this phenomenon has been researched, discussed and criticised by many scholars, especially as in the age of globalisation, the scope of various migratory movements and the contact between culturally diverse individuals have increased massively. Due to better access to jet travel, globalisation of industry, and growing migrant- , refugee- , and foreign worker movements, not only our possibilities, but also motives to migrate have changed, and so these days we travel to work, study, experience, and for various other reasons.

The concept “culture shock” builds on an assumption that social contact between culturally disparate individuals is difficult and stressful (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001: 9) and that many cannot cope with living and functioning in an unfamiliar environment. That is why contact with unfamiliar cultures was categorised as disturbing, unpleasant, and confusing and the migrants’ experiences of depression, withdrawal, and hopelessness were considered the typical symptoms of culture shock. However, the more recent research proved that culture shock is a far more complex process, which in the long run can result in individuals’ development and cultural adaptation in an unfamiliar environment. This approach supports the idea of coping with difficulties and culture learning and it proves that the cross-cultural contact can be beneficial for individuals who learn from each other, rather than focus on the factors, which separate them. In other words, the process of culture shock does not have to start and end with confusion, but can transform into cultural exchange and result in a positive experience, where individuals learn and become confident users of more than just their home cultures.

**Finding our focus:**

Our initial interest was the project Velkomstcentre, whose main purpose was to guide and assist the newcomers coming to live in Aalborg and the surrounding area. We were interested in their work, as it was the only organisation of its kind in Northern Denmark. When we learned that the Velkomstcentre’s project was ending, we wanted to evaluate it in order to see what effects their activities have had on the participants. This made us wonder what kind of help migrants who come to Aalborg actually need and how they experience living in an unfamiliar culture. We were interested in the meeting of different cultures, and here we found the concept of culture shock particularly interesting. Culture shock, being in the focus of migratory research and literature from 1960, recently became directed towards a business context and it made us wonder whether the concept still applies to migrants who come to Aalborg today and how they experience living in an unfamiliar culture.

The issues and considerations above have led us to propose the following problem statement:

**We want to investigate if and how migrants in Aalborg experience culture shock, and to find out how Velkomstcentre’s activities have influenced their ability to cope with an unfamiliar culture.**

In order to answer this problem statement we have developed the following research questions, which will guide us in our research:

* How have Velkomstcentre’s activities helped those who participated deal with culture shock?
* What other activities could be organised to further help migrants cope with unfamiliar environments?
* How do migrants in Aalborg experience culture shock and which stages do they go through after arriving in Denmark?
* What stressors do migrants in Aalborg experience and how do they cope with them?
* How do they view culture learning?
* How do those migrants identify themselves in the host culture?

In order to find out if and how our informants experienced culture shock and whether integrating projects like Velkomstcentre are supportive in the process of cultural adaptation we will study various problems. Firstly, we will look the Velkomstcentre’s offer and try to conclude if their activities had any influence on the adaptation progress of our informants. Secondly, we will present a thorough analysis of culture shock and finally, we will discuss how our informants cope with their adaptation, learn and identify themselves in an unfamiliar culture.

# Methodology

In this chapter, we will describe how our research will be guided in order to answer our problem statement and research questions, and we will describe which design and methods we have applied to do so. We will also discuss the considerations we have had about data collection and analysis, theories, and concepts.

Epistemological considerations concern issues on *“what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline”* (Bryman 2012:27). It deals with how we come to have our knowledge of the world, and a central question is whether social science can and should be studied according to the same principles and procedures as natural science ( Bryman 2012: 27). The epistemological position of this thesis is interpretivism. As a contrast to positivism, which focuses on explaining the world and human behaviour through observation, interpretivsm puts an emphasis on *understanding* human behaviour (Bryman 2012: 28). Through our thesis, we wish to gain an understanding on the phenomenon known as culture shock and how people experience it and cope with it, which is why interpretivism is the appropriate approach to this research.

Ontological considerations are concerned with *“whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can or should be considered social constructions built up from perceptions and actions of social actors”* (Bryman 2012: 32). These two positions are referred to as objectivism and constructivism. In this thesis, we will take a constructivist approach. This means that what we present throughout this thesis is a specific version of social reality and not a definitive one. It also means that we see the concepts used in the thesis, such as culture shock, as social constructions in a constant state of reconstruction rather than being pre-given external facts.

We take a deductive approach to our research, which means that our research departs from a theoretical point of view. We wish to test the theories we have chosen on the real world and real human beings to see whether or not our small case corresponds with the theories. Therefore our interviews and subsequent analysis will be guided by our theoretical framework.

## Research design

The research design for this thesis is a case study design. It will be a case study of migrants in Aalborg and their experiences of culture shock. How we define migrants in this thesis will be described below. More specifically, we will also use the case of Velkomstcentre as an example of an organisation’s ability to help migrants deal with culture shock. A case study allows us to focus on a small group of migrants and get a deeper understanding of the unique features of this group and their meeting with and reactions to an unfamiliar culture. Because we see culture shock as a process, a longitudinal design could also have been interesting, but it is not within our timeframe to do such a study properly. Therefore, we will frame the research as a case study of migrants in Aalborg, which will focus on the migrants’ past and present experiences and feelings.

## Research methods

The use of qualitative methods seems best suited to the epistemological and ontological position of interpretivism and constructivism in this thesis, as qualitative methods often focus on understanding individuals. We have chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews. We believe that this method is appropriate to apply to our research, as it allows us to investigate more in depth the experiences of our informants, who have come to Denmark and had to deal with a new culture. Semi-structured interviews correspond with the interpretivist approach, as they provide the possibility to get a deeper understanding of the process of adapting to a new culture, as well as the individual feelings and experiences of our informants. It is possible to react to the answers from the informants and direct the interview to their individual experiences, and at the same time keep a level of structure in the interview to ensure a consistency in all the interviews we conduct. It would not have been possible to get the same understanding of our interviewees with quantitative methods such as a questionnaire, which might have given us a more comprehensive description of the experience of culture shock when arriving in Denmark, but not the individual differences and feelings involved in the process. Semi-structured interviews will allow us to answer our problem statement by providing us with various examples of how the process of adapting to a new culture can look like, as well as the informants’ own evaluation of and recommendations for Velkomstcentre.

We have chosen to interview people who have participated in activities by Velkomstcentre as well as people who have not, because we believed it could show how Velkomstcentre’s activities have been able to make a difference in regard to the experience of culture shock and the ability to cope with it. Our informants come from a variety of countries; they have been here for different amounts of time; and they have come for different reasons. This is, among other things, to ensure the validity of the research, as we have a broad representation in our sample. However, we realise that this can cause a problem for generalisation, as the project to a high degree will focus on the individual process people go through. On the other hand, the difference in time spent in Denmark allows us to investigate where our informants are in the different stages of culture shock and how their process and experiences have been up to this moment. This variety also allows us to see how different cultural backgrounds and different motivations for coming to Denmark might have influenced their experience of culture shock. Despite the variety in our group of informants, we have strived to find informants who intend to be here for a few years, e.g. master students, PhD students, work migrants and refugees. Thus our focus will not be on tourists, sojourners or exchange students who are in Denmark for shorter periods of time.

As mentioned above, we take a deductive approach, which means that our research is based on our theories. This is also the case for our data analysis, which will be a thematic analysis. We will go through our interviews and search for the themes identified in our theories, to see how the people we have interviewed correspond with the theoretical ideas and considerations.

## Theoretical considerations

We want to look at the term ‘culture shock’ and how it has developed over time since Oberg introduced the term in 1960. To do this we mainly draw on the work of Oberg (1960), Bochner (2003), and Pedersen (1995). We have chosen Pedersen’s Five Stages of Culture Shock as one of our main culture shock theories because it deals with culture shock as a process and gives a good overview of the development of culture shock and the different stages people can go through over time. This will be useful for our analysis, as it allows us to study these stages on our informants and get an understanding of the many different ways culture shock can be experienced.

Another theory we have chosen to include is the Acculturation theory, which also deals with how people cope with and adapt to a new society. Various scholars have contributed to the literature in this area, but one of the main acculturation theorists is John W. Berry, who we will mainly be referring to. Berry also becomes relevant to our research because he has responded to and criticised Oberg’s Culture Shock theory by proposing his own term ‘Acculturative Stress’, which will also be dealt with throughout this thesis. The final main component of our theoretical framework will be what is known as the ‘ABC Framework’. Referring to the concepts of Affect, Behaviour, and Cognition, this framework deals with different aspects of people’s adaptation to a new society i.e. Stress and Coping, Culture Learning, and Social Identification. The ABC framework was developed on the basis of Berry’s Acculturation theory (Yue and Le 2012). Furthermore, we have observed that other authors, e.g. Bochner, Furnham, and Zhou, use Culture Learning, Stress and Coping, Acculturation, and Culture shock as connected theories, all describing aspects of coping with unfamiliar cultures. It is on this basis that we have chosen Culture Shock, Acculturation, and ABC Framework to make up the theoretical framework for our thesis.

## Concepts

**Migrant**

A migrant can be seen as “*any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country”* (Unesco).

Castles and Miller (2009) mention the distinction between *foreign born* and *foreign national.* When mentioning migrants in our thesis, we will not make this distinction but consider both to be under the term migrant, according to the first definition.

The term migrant can also be seen as “*covering all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reasons of 'personal convenience' and without intervention of an external compelling factor”* (Unesco).

With this definition,’ migrant’ does not refer to refugees or others forced to leave their homes. We realise that there is a difference between voluntary migrants and refugees, and that their background influences how they react and adapt to an unfamiliar culture. We will have this in mind in our analysis and conclusions. However, this distinction will not be a focus and our group of informants consists of both voluntary migrants and refugees. We have chosen to use this broad definition of migrant because we are not interested in any particular ethnic/national groups or any specific type of migrants, as any person who comes to a new country can experience culture shock.

**Host culture / host society**

As Bochner (2003), we use the term host culture or host society mainly to distinguish the culture or society of the ‘visitors’ from that of the ‘visited’. This means that we do not place any deeper meaning into defining what the host culture entails, but use it as a way to make a distinction between the different cultures.

**Transnationalism**

The term ‘transnationalism’ has been used in multiple ways, referring to global corporations and formal institutions as well as non-institutional actors from the civil society. The latter is the form of transnationalism we will be referring to throughout this thesis. Transnationalism has been defined as ‘*the process by which transmigrants through their daily activities, forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic, and political relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement, and through which they create transnational social fields that cross national borders*’ (Basch et al, 1994 in Portes, 2001). In this thesis, however, when referring to transnational ties, the focus will mainly be on social rather than economic and political relations.

## Delimitations

Different levels of language skills from our informants mean that the level of details from our interviewees differs according to how well they spoke English. It also means that we must consider the possibility that some questions were not understood correctly or that our interviewees were not able to answer the questions as they would have liked. This could influence the validity of our findings, which is something we will take into consideration when analysing our interviews.

Despite the diversity within our informants, we have only interviewed people who have been in Denmark for some time; minimum six months. Oberg (1960) describes the second stage of culture shock as critical and as he says, you either overcome it and you stay, or you leave and go back to your home country (Oberg, 1960: 2). This means that there is the possibility that those who experienced the most critical stage of culture shock went back to their home country before we had a chance to talk to them, because they could not cope with the stress or shock of a new culture. If this is the case, these people are not represented in our sample. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the people we have interviewed are people who volunteered for interviews. This means that there might be a group of people who are going through culture shock and have detached themselves from the surrounding world or are not comfortable being interviewed. The lack of this group in our sample can also influence our findings, which we are aware of throughout our analysis.

# Discussion of terms

Culture shock was first defined as a concept in 1960 by Kalervo Oberg. However, even though the term originated within the academic literature, it quickly took root in the popular imagination, and the media has been full of references to culture shock (Furnham, 2012). The term has especially been used for sojourners; particularly students and international managers or executives working abroad. In recent years, the term has brought on various guides in how to mitigate the effects of culture shock when travelling abroad (Furnham, 2012) and how to overcome culture shock to succeed in international business (Marx, 2001). However, the focus of this project will be on the academic literature where the term originated, and we will not deal with the more recent, business implications of the term.

However, within the academic literature there have also been discussions about Oberg’s term ‘culture shock’. Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) suggest that the term should not be taken too literally, as the word ‘shock’ places too much emphasis on the threatening circumstances, without acknowledging possible benefits for people going through a cultural transition. Berry (2006) criticises the term for similar reasons and chooses to replace it with ‘acculturative stress’, a term which he finds more appropriate. He has two main arguments for this replacement. First, he says that ‘shock’ tends to be seen as something negative, whereas the term ‘stress’ can have both positive and negative meanings. Since the process of acculturation involves both negative and positive experiences, he argues that the stress conceptualisation matches better with the acculturation experience. He also points out that the term ‘stress’ has a well-developed theoretical framework from cultural and psychological studies associated with it, which is not the case with the term ‘shock’. Second, cultural adaptation involves two cultures interacting. Berry argues that using the term ‘culture’ makes it sound as if only one culture is involved, whereas the concept of ‘acculturation’ implies that two cultures are interacting (Berry, 2006).

According to Pedersen (1995), culture shock happens to those people who face various, socio-cultural changes like divorce, or employment in a new company (Pedersen, 1995: 1). In our project though, we will focus on cultural shock as a result of cross-cultural encounters (1995: viii) and the term culture shock will be applied to foreigners facing culturally unfamiliar environments.

# Empirical data

Our empirical data consists of thirteen semi-structured interviews. We chose to divide the interviews between us and conduct them on a one-to-one basis, rather than doing the interviews together. This is because a one-to-one interview creates a more relaxed situation for the informant, which can make it easier for them to talk about their experiences as they are telling their story to only one person. To get the best answers we also chose to conduct the interviews in the language that the informants were most comfortable with, if it was possible. This means that we conducted one interview in Danish and one in Polish, and they have then been translated to English afterwards. We realise that translating the interviews afterwards can mean that the exact meaning gets lost or misunderstood, but it was important for us that our informants were able to speak as freely as possible in a language they knew. The rest of the interviews were conducted in English.

We asked the informants where they would like to be interviewed so it would be a place where they were comfortable. Most of the interviews were conducted in the library in the city centre because this was a neutral and public meeting point, but other times we went to the office or workplace of our informant to conduct the interview there.

We have conducted thirteen interviews; with four men and nine women, mostly from Europe but also from China and the USA. Because of the structure of the interviews, it was possible to follow the informants and discuss what they were mentioning, and thereby go outside of some of the questions. However, we always tried to return to the fixed questions to ensure we would get a comment on these as well. This means that the length of the interviews vary; our interviews last from 20-50 minutes. Our interview guide was developed on the basis of our theoretical framework, because we have used a deductive approach and aim to test our theories on our interviewees. Therefore, our questions have been divided into different categories matching our theories. We have also included a category of questions about Velkomstcentre, which is the case we use with the aim to evaluate the Velkomstcentre project. The categories we used for our questions are: culture shock and stages of culture shock, coping, culture learning, social identification, and Velkomstcentre.

Throughout the project, we have given our informants new names, which mean that they remain anonymous. In the following, we will briefly outline the characteristics of our thirteen informants.

## The group of informants

Anna

Anna is an American and 43 years old. She came to Denmark ten years ago with her family to start her new job as an associate professor at Aalborg University. She plans on staying in Denmark for the moment because of her two children here.

 Antoinette

Antoinette is 39 years old and from France. She came to Denmark eight years ago to work. She now works as a business developer at Aalborg Hospital. She lives here with her husband and two children but does not necessarily plan to stay in Denmark.

Azar

Azar is 28 years old and has Iranian and Turkish background. He came to Denmark 3½ years ago as a refugee. After some time in Denmark, he was set up with a foster family. Today he is lives alone and studies to be a pedagogue. The interview with Azar was conducted in Danish and later translated to English.

Carmen

Carmen is from Romania and is 24 years old. She came to Denmark 2½ years ago to study her masters here. She lives here with her fiancée and plans to stay in Denmark.

Chen

Chen is 27 years old and from China. He came to Denmark four years ago to do a PhD in international relations at Aalborg University. He plans to go back to China after his PhD.

Elena

Elena is from Lithuania and is 24 years old. She came to Denmark two years ago to study her masters here. While in Denmark, she has found a boyfriend here and might stay in Denmark to look for jobs after she finishes her studies.

Helene

Helene is 34 years old and is Greek but also has Swedish roots. She came to Denmark four years ago to study her masters in economy. She now works in the North Denmark Region and has a Danish husband.

Homaz

Homaz is Kurdish and is 26 years old. He came to Denmark alone only seven months ago as a refugee from Syria. He plans to stay at least a few years in Denmark. The interview with Homaz had to be stopped half way through due to problems of availability with the room in which the interview took place.

Irena

Irena is from Poland and is 40 years old. She came to Denmark four years ago to be with her Danish boyfriend. They now have a daughter together, and Irena works as a pharmacist. The interview with Irena was conducted in Polish and then translated to English.

Iveta

Iveta is 24 years old and from Latvia. She was an Erasmus in Denmark and came back a year later to continue her studies and to be with the Danish boyfriend she had met the first time in the country. She has now been living in Denmark for two years and plans to stay here.

Julia

Julia is Lithuanian and 26 years old. She came to Denmark 4½ years ago to do a PhD in geotechnical engineering. She now lives here with her boyfriend.

Liisa

Liisa is 26 years old and from Estonia. She came to Denmark six months ago to study at UCN. She is here without family but would like to stay if she can find a job after her studies.

Ondrej

Ondrej is 24 years old and from Slovakia. He came to Denmark 1½ years ago to study his masters here because he thinks studying abroad looks good on his CV. He does not plan to stay in Denmark after his studies.

# Culture Shock

This chapter introduces the theoretical part of this project and here, we will explain the term “culture”; we will discuss the phenomenon of culture shock, its causes and course, which we will visualise in the form of the U-curve model and finally, we will examine the five stages of culture shock. Additionally, a short comparison between *disease* and *growth* models of culture shock will be reviewed, and this part of the project will end with a short chapter in which we discuss a more critical approach to culture shock.

## Culture

To discuss the problematic of culture shock in the first place, we need to define the concept “culture” and the relation between culture and people. According to Oberg (1960:144), all people are born with skills to acquire culture, which is a construct made of social rules, beliefs, and traditions. Our parents and social circle can pass on culture to us and most of us learn it from early childhood. Eating with chopsticks, or going to church every Sunday becomes clear and obvious to us from the very beginning, if that is what our environment does. Moreover, culture is built up over time as well as shaped by history and individuals have no awareness of it, but take it for granted as something correct, evident, and natural.

Oberg writes about acquiring culture as a natural outcome of living and functioning in a certain environment and among certain people who assist in culture passing. When we have already learned *our* culture, we come to conclusions that *our* principles, beliefs and values are the best and right ones. We find it easy to identify ourselves with the environment, which has similar values to ours and, as Oberg writes, we become “human carriers” (1960:145) of our cultures to the next generations. Moreover, he defines culture not only as an effect of history and time, but also gives it a spatial dimension. That is why we can speak of Brazilian culture, or Western cultures.

Ulf Hannerz (1999) seems to argue with Oberg’s (1960) theory on multiplicity of cultures and ethnocentric principle that we can belong or function in one culture only. While Oberg classifies, differentiates and separates cultures according to different societies, regions, and classes, Hannerz disagrees with the anthropological notion of pluralities of cultures and how we can be identified with one culture only. He claims that, apart from situations of cultural encapsulation, we are more and more likely to share our *cultural repertoires* with many various groups, and cross-cultural encounters became our everyday reality. At the same time, he underlines how flexible cultural borders have become:

*There are now surely many different ways of being more or less Christian, more or less Muslim, more or less Confucian; and of being at the same time some number of other things* (1999:402).

What is more, Baumann (1996) studying the connection between culture and community, writes about reaching across cultures. By belonging to many various communities, each characterised by its own culture, individuals do not perceive themselves in unicultural terms. Depending on the context, a member of different communities can change his or her cultural identity by belonging to those groups. Accordingly, culture acquires flexibility, becomes less subordinate to a single group, can be shared and redefined by many various communities.

Through this project, as discussed in the previous chapter, we will study the concept of culture by taking interpretivism as our epistemological position, as our goal is to learn about the issues of culture and culture shock by analysing and interpreting the in-depth, biographical material that we have gathered among the interviewed migrants. Our ontological position is constructivism, as by working with the phenomenon of culture, we construct our understanding and interpretation of it.

## Similarity attraction

The question how the cultures are sustained and cultivated, lead us to the similarity- attraction hypothesis (Bochner, 2003: 5). According to Bochner (2003), people have a strong preference to be around those who they find similar to themselves and, at the same time, to avoid those who they consider different to themselves. It is hard to discuss the issue of similarity, as it is a complex, subjective matter and there are many ways, in which people can be considered similar. Especially, as by *similarity* we mean perceived similarities, which do not include visible, actual similarities, like skin colour or accents. By similarity- attraction hypothesis, we understand situations, in which individuals seek for company of people with whom they share characteristics, which they consider significant. Those can include gender, religious beliefs, ideals, language, age, ethnic and social background and others. According to this hypothesis, individuals choose friends from similar cultural space instead of culturally different people. Those who come from culturally homogeneous places, have similar social background, speak the same language, are in the same age group or share a religion are more likely to spend time together- at work, school or home, and enjoy it. This in-group bias can be explained as natural selection of people who are alike. By offering similar characteristics, qualities and ideas, those groups make their members feel safe and provide them with reassurance. On the contrary, when we encounter people coming from different cultural environments, we often miss the cues of how to behave, which leads to unpleasant misunderstandings, feelings of unsafety and lack of security. When we then come back to the well-known environment, we know how to behave and the risk of possible misunderstandings is minimalised. At the same time, our behaviours and decisions that we make in social interactions with similar people, are considered proper and correct. Oberg (1960: 144) suggests that this particular kind of ethnocentrism makes people identify themselves with groups, where they receive strong confirmation that only their culture shows what is right and what is wrong, unable to accept criticism from outside.

## Culture shock

The feelings of insecurity caused by interactions with dissimilar people can be a result of culture shock (Bochner, 2003: 5) and, as Bochner suggests, the bigger the cultural differences between people, the harder it is for them to establish relationships and life in a culturally different environment. Another major reason of culture shock can be differences in core values of different societies, such as differences in the status and treatment of women (Bochner: 6).

Culture shock was first defined by Kalervo Oberg (1960: 142) as anxiety caused by *“losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse”*. When faced with situations and environments that are familiar, we behave and make decisions subconsciously, while when misplaced from this safe zone, simple tasks like how to behave when we meet strangers, or when to invite them to our homes become hard to deal with. Oberg compares a person facing a different culture to “*a fish out of water”* (1960: 142), as he or she is deprived of all the familiar cues and the well-known and learnt skills of social interaction cannot be used or applied in an unfamiliar culture.

Paul Pedersen (1995) also describes culture shock as a state, in which people find themselves when faced with unfamiliar people and unexpected situations. Culture shock is thus a response to those situations of strangeness and can vary from person to person. In other words, it is complex and subjective. According to Pedersen (1995: vii), culture shock has five main features:

1. It is a process.
2. It can appear on multiple levels during interactions in various situations.
3. It can be experienced with different intensity according to the individual’s ability to deal with the encounters or fail to deal with them.
4. It teaches various strategies of coping in and with an unfamiliar environment.
5. It can be observed in any situation, in which the individual faces a change of his or her environment and life situation.

It is important to notice that in the multicultural reality, culture shock manifests itself as a feeling of unknowing, in which the individuals are not certain of what to expect from the others as well as what is expected of them. Kalervo Oberg (Oberg in Pedersen, 1995: 1-2) describes six anxiety indicators, which can describe the individuals when entering a new culture:

1. The individuals are missing some important cues about how to behave in the new culture.
2. Their values developed in- and by home cultures become unimportant and ignored in the new culture.
3. They are likely to feel depressed, angry and frightened.
4. They compare new and old cultures and idealise the latter.
5. They cannot apply the previously learned skills in order to recover.
6. They feel overwhelmed by the infinity of cultural differences and think that the feeling will never change.

To sum up, anxiety connected to the process of environment change is a common feeling, which most of the sojourners have to face. Although sometimes the effects of culture shock are mild, it can also happen that culture shock can have a more severe effect on sojourners, leading them into feelings of deep anger or even depression, forcing them to leave the host culture in search of this particular reassurance, which can be provided only by the well- known and learned home culture.

## Disease and growth models of culture shock

Over the past fifty years, scholars have developed two models of interpreting culture shock. The first, disease model, focuses on the negative outcomes of the phenomenon. The second, more recent, growth model emphasises the possibilities for development and learning that culture shock brings.

Oberg describes culture shock as a disease that can be cured (1960: 142) and he focuses on finding its symptoms and subsequently, its cure. This model presents the symptoms of culture shock as negative and includes feelings such as rejection, sense of loss, confusion, fear and the feelings of helplessness. Moreover, the individuals experiencing culture shock are said to be prone to anger outbursts, feel dependent on help from their co-national friends, refuse to learn a new language, be constantly scared of being abused or sick, as well as miss home culture, familiar people and places. The disease model compares a person who experiences culture shock to a sick person, who is unable to work or socially interact with others (Oberg, 1960: 144). A cure to the culture shock disease is finding friends among host culture people, as well as learning the language of the natives, as it facilitates the interactions and communication between the locals and newcomers. Additionally, assistance and support from compatriots proves to help individuals overcome culture shock by giving the desired reassurance (Oberg, 1960: 146).

The more contemporary scholars, who are in favour of the growth model of culture shock (Pedersen, 1995: 2), have abandoned this problem-oriented, disease model of culture shock. The newer explanation of the phenomenon presents it as a development- oriented process (Pedersen, 1995:7). According to Bochner (2003: 4), even the term “culture shock” is inappropriate, as it suggests the negative outcomes of cross-cultural travel and interactions, while the more recent studies have shown how fulfilling and satisfying the contact with foreign cultures can be. Pedersen emphasises that the phenomenon produces not only negative, but also positive outcomes such as inter-cultural learning, feelings of growth and long- term adaptation in a new culture. Moreover, prior understanding of culture shock and foreign cultures provides a better start in an unfamiliar reality and helps to go through the negative aspects of culture shock (Pedersen, 1995: 11).

This change from a negative to a positive approach to culture shock can be a result of the higher degree of mobility that we experience nowadays (Castles, 2009). According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA, 2013), 3,2% of the population live away from their home countries. This number equals 232 million people and it is over three times bigger than in 1960, when the theory on culture shock was first introduced. What is more, the research made by UN-DESA shows that through the past decades, the global mobility has been continuously growing.

Globalisation processes have influenced global mobility by enabling people to travel cheap an fast, share and spread various information with the use of electronic means of communication, as well as create informal migration networks, which help to build a migration industry (Castles 2008: 56).

What Bochner (2003:3) calls “inhabiting a culturally homogeneous space” is not as common as it used to be 50 years ago and between-society contact has been practiced more and more by those, who search for holidays, work, education, refuge, etc.

Along with the higher level of mobility comes a higher level of exchanging knowledge and communication between the immigrants and the natives. As Castles writes: *“Migration is a process which affects every dimension of social existence, and which develops its own complex dynamics”* (2008: 21). Although over 96 per cent of the world’s population live in their home countries, their lives are still influenced by the migratory processes. It means that not only migrants experience the previously discussed feelings of anxiety, or quite opposite- of growth and development, but the natives are also actively participating in the process, learning from and being influenced by the newcomers. In other words, the more people migrate, the more affected the host societies become.

Summing up, while the less contemporary studies on culture shock focused on the negative impact of cross-cultural encounter on the traveller, the recent studies show how the traveller is both influenced by and influencing the foreign culture. This model shows how reciprocal the exchange of the ideas is and that not only the travellers, but also the host culture persons might experience culture shock (Bochner 2003: 6).

## Five stages of culture shock

As mentioned above, culture shock is a process, rather than a single event and, as Pedersen suggests (1995: 26), this process is based on five stages.

The U-curve hypothesis by Sverre Lysgaard (Lysgaard in Pedersen, 1955) was the first model presenting cultural adaptation and it is to visualise the stages, in which individuals find themselves after moving to an unfamiliar environment. According to Lysgaard, cross-cultural adjustment happens over time, in stages, where individuals start by feeling successful and full of positive energy, after which a stage of unhappiness and helplessness appears, just to finish the process by coming out of the crisis to feel better adjusted with the host society. This simplified pattern of adjustment forms a U- curved pattern that can be visualised by this picture:

Honeymoon

Adaptation

Withdrawal

Adjustment

Crisis

Paul Pedersen (1995) suggests the division of culture shock into five stages. He writes that the individuals can be on different stages at the same time when facing different experiences, they can withdraw to former stages or skip the stages, depending on how different their own culture is in comparison with the host society culture and how well-prepared they are when facing the unfamiliar culture.

The first stage is called a honeymoon or a tourist stage and it is connected with feelings of excitement and fascination with the new culture as well as craving for adventure. According to Oberg (1960: 143), this stage can last from a few days, up to six months and it gives the most superficial experience of a host country and culture. It is a starting point of the U-curve, in which the individuals are likely to behave with interest, curiosity and self-confidence while interacting with the host culture persons. This stage is about adventure and freedom and the individuals often do not think about the consequences of their behaviour. The individuals, accompanied by a feeling of unreality, expect to experience adventure without the fear or worries they would sense at home. Although they still keep their back-home identities, they suspend or ignore the back-home rules. In addition, the honeymoon stage shows the level of unfamiliarity, ignorance or misunderstanding of the customs and traditions of the locals. On this stage, the individuals observed by Pedersen in his research on students and their response to culture shock got drunk and misbehaved towards the locals (1995: 29), got into trouble with the locals by photographing them (1995: 49), swam in the Amazon River with the piranhas (1995: 42) or suspended the back-home rules by skydiving topless (1995: 48). Students forgot about the back- home rules and conducted those actions without considering their consequences.

The next stage is called disintegration and it turns out to be the most painful phase of culture shock. It is a moment in the process of adaptation, when the novelty and excitement of the change disappears and when the host culture begins to impose on the individual’s life. On this stage, a clash between the home and host cultures becomes clearer to individuals, when practical problems occur and need to be solved. This produces a sense of loss and failure, as the individuals blame themselves for all the disappointments and fiascos they experience on the way. The term *disintegration* is used for this stage as, in some cases, individuals feel so different and isolated that it can lead to depression and to *disintegration* of their personalities (when the back-home personality is unfit to deal with the struggles of unfamiliar environments, the individuals cannot turn to a new personality, as it has not yet been produced). Moreover, feelings of guilt, disorientation, low self- confidence and helplessness are very common on this level of cultural adaptation. The examples of behaviours on this stage can be situations in which individuals victimise themselves (Pedersen, 1995: 83), feel defeated in and by the host culture (1995: 82), experience imagined danger (1995: 88), or feel irrational self-blame and embarrassment (1995: 123, 126, 130). This stage is often resulting in withdrawal, embarrassment for not knowing or understanding the local culture and failure as a self-fulfilling prophecy. At this point, we can assume that the individuals reach the bottom of the U-curve.

The third, reintegration stage, is a beginning of a recovery process and it resembles recovery from depression or illness. The previously felt self- blame and anger are not directed towards the self anymore, but towards the host society. On this stage, the host society persons are blamed and deemed responsible for all the trouble, misunderstandings and pain experienced by the foreign individuals. According to Oberg (1960: 144), this particular kind of hostility can be sensed by the host culture persons and result in the rejection of the newcomers. The individuals are likely to generalise and judge the host culture persons, who become scapegoats blamed for failures in communications and misunderstanding between the two parts. At the same time, those individuals consider themselves vulnerable and under constant attack of the host society. They develop strategies, which allow them to compare the host culture with their home culture and the outcome of such a comparison is an ethnocentric preference and a strong desire to protect the home culture. Moreover, the co-ethnic groups support those ethnocentric attitudes by offering the feelings of security for the individual and reassurance that the home culture is the true and only one (Oberg, 1960: 143). Although the individuals on this stage can openly show rebellion and hostility, as well as feel frustration and rage towards the host cultures, it is nevertheless the beginning of reintegration. On this stage, individuals start to create a new identity based on their experiences. Pedersen gives various examples of individuals’ behaviour on this stage. Openly offending persons of the host culture (1995: 141), the need for revenge (1995: 156), negative generalisation (1995: 163), judging the locals by using the back-home standards (1995: 170), or disregarding and rejecting the new system and its rules (1995: 194) are a few situations experienced by individuals on the reintegration stage. During reintegration, the feeling of anger and hostility is easily evoked and individuals are in the most unstable condition. As Oberg (1960: 143) sums up, on this stage individuals are likely to take an *“I just don’t like them attitude”* and if this phase is over, they continue to go through the process of adaptation. If it cannot be fought, they are likely to give up and come back home.

Autonomy is the fourth stage of culture shock and it is a phase, in which individuals produce a more objective view on both home and host cultures, which allows them to notice both advantages and disadvantages of those cultures. A feeling of better awareness of oneself and the others steps in and individuals become more independent and better functioning in the new culture. A new set of skills to understand and cope with unfamiliar situations is developed, as well as the ability to enjoy the host culture. What is more, sometimes individuals consider themselves specialists regarding the host culture and they feel competent enough to help some other foreigners who are worse off (Oberg, 1960: 143; Pedersen, 1995: 202). At this point, individuals develop a new identity; they do not consider the host culture hostile anymore but have a more relaxed attitude to it. Although individuals might still not act properly in various situations, they are ready to accept their failures and learn from them. They develop feelings such as self- confidence to make decisions or a feeling of being in control with their lives as well as sense of humour about their own mistakes (Pedersen 1995: 202, Oberg 1960: 143). Pedersen notices that individuals on this stage are more likely to notice and focus on similarities between home and host cultures instead of differences between them (1995: 208), develop the ability to speak and negotiate without the feeling of embarrassment towards oneself or blame towards the others (1995: 209), or have positive expectations for future experiences (1995: 214). On this stage, individuals reach a balanced perspective on the host culture as well as become independent and competent during interactions with the host society.

The fifth and the last stage of culture shock process is the interdependence stage, which is about unfolding a new self. On this level of adaptation, individuals are likely to develop bicultural or multicultural identities, which results in development and growth of those individuals, just like explained above, in the chapter about the growth model of culture shock. The individuals develop a new sense of belonging to the host culture and the continuous comparing of the home and host cultures loses its meaning. That is why the previously noticed differences cease to dominate in their lives. On the contrary, a common ground for both cultures is found. Individuals no longer find only privileges or responsibilities connected to the new culture, but find a balance between the two. The new reality becomes satisfying for individuals, who often find it enjoyable and positive (Oberg 1960: 143). The examples of experiences on this level can include finding true friendships among the locals and leaving behind the status of a tourist (Pedersen, 1995: 253, 263), developing skills which allow individuals to find similarities and common ground with the locals (1995: 252,255) as well as understanding and respecting the local rules and values (1995: 257). The interdependence stage is the last one in the development of the U-curve and a final achievement of reaching a multicultural identity. It is not very common though to reach this level of adaptation, and very few can appreciate the feeling of being fluent in more than just home culture.

Experiencing culture shock is a very complex matter. Some individuals go smoothly through the process, some do not recall going through certain stages, while some might never experience culture shock at all. Those who experience it, might also find themselves on different stages with different situations, or withdraw to the previous stages instead of moving forward towards the final stage. The subjectivity of culture shock manifests itself in various ways. Firstly, we cannot say how long it takes the individuals to go through certain stages of culture shock, just as we cannot say how much time it takes to cope with certain difficulties. Secondly, some difficulties are considered harder to deal with than others are, and people’s skills to deal with them may vary.

Individuals going through the stages of culture shock experience both joys, but also unexpected and unpleasant situations being results of removal from the familiar places and environments. It takes time to go through the painful crisis and quite often a long recovery, but if we listen to the scholars, the final result of the process is worth of going through the ordeal. Culture shock is a development process, in which individuals learn to adapt to new cultural environments and manage to change their attitudes towards it. This development often manifests itself in becoming fluent in a foreign culture and producing a bicultural or multicultural identity.

When individuals reach the point of self-confidence and fluency in different cultural spaces, they realise that each culture should be understood on its own terms. Pedersen (1995: 245) enumerates a few ideas that can be learned on the last stage of culture shock. Firstly, it is important to realise that every culture and every individual is different. Secondly, we cannot explain or define cultures as better or worse, good or bad. Thirdly, all the cultures must be examined according to their own rules. Finally, people are culture-connected, which means that they are products of the cultures they were born into. According to that, multicultural identity is reached when a person does not look at an unfamiliar environment through the prism of his or her home culture.

Summing up, culture shock is a complicated phenomenon and, although we can try to classify people’s experiences into different stages, or judge their level of adaption by looking at their behaviour, it is hard to give a specific answer to how long the process of adaptation lasts and impossible to ensure that regress to previous stages of culture shock will not take place.

## Critical considerations

As discussed above, culture shock can be a very tough and challenging experience, a complicated way to cultural adaptation. Some scholars go further and argue that the progress of adapting in an unfamiliar environment cannot be as straightforward as U-curve visualises it (Pedersen, 1995: 26). They say that it is impossible, or at least very rare to achieve a level of fluency in more than one culture, so visualising cultural adaptation in the form of U-curve is wrong. They suggest J-curve as a more suitable model, which explains the actual process of cultural adaptation. J-curve is visualising progress of individuals, who do not or cannot move forward from the reintegration stage. This pattern shows that individuals are fluent in their home cultures, and reach a certain level of adaptation and fluency in their host cultures, but argue the possibility of reaching the equality between the home and host culture.

# Acculturation

In this chapter, we will present a different view on dealing with unfamiliar cultures, namely acculturation theory and John W. Berry’s concept of “acculturative stress”, which he claims is a more appropriate term than “culture shock”. This theory also includes a distinction between psychological and socio-cultural adaptation into a new society.

Acculturation is a process of change, which happens when groups or individuals from different cultures meet. Through the history of the 20th century, acculturation theory has focused on how immigrants change individually when settling in a new society, as well as how different ethnic groups relate to each other. An early and highly cited definition of acculturation comes from Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits:

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups... under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from culture change, of which it is but one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation.

(Redfield,Linton, & Herskovits 1936: 149-152 in Berry 2006: 2)

In this definition, there is a focus on the group level, and acculturation is considered to generate change in both cultural groups. Other authors, e.g. the psychologist John W. Berry, focus more on the individual level by looking at psychological acculturation, which refers to the changes that happen within an individual in culture contact situations.

Berry developed the following general framework for understanding acculturation, which links cultural and psychological acculturation:

**Fig. 1:** General Framework for Understanding Acculturation, Berry 2006



He divides the acculturation process into two levels; the cultural/group level and the psychological/individual level. If you are looking at the cultural/group level it is important to understand both cultures; the key features of the original cultures before they came into contact, the nature of their relationship, and the changes occurring in both groups during the process of acculturation. These changes can be small or substantial, and they can range from being easily accomplished to being a major source of cultural disruption. The psychological/individual level is about considering the psychological changes that the individuals in both groups undergo in the process of acculturation, and to understand their eventual adaptation to their new society. These changes that the individuals undergo can again lead to a rather easily accomplished set of *behavioural shifts* (e.g. ways of speaking, dressing, eating) or the changes can prove to be more problematic and lead to *acculturative stress,* which can manifest itself as a form of lowered mental health e.g. anxiety or depression*.* The eventual adaptation to the new society can also be seen on both levels; it can be internal/psychological as in a sense of well-being or self-esteem or it can be socio-cultural, linking the individual to others in the new society.

However, not all individuals go through acculturation in the same way. In the 1980s, Berry developed a framework of four acculturation strategies (Berry 2006). The behavioural changes and acculturative stress, which can occur during the process of acculturation, as described above, are influenced by what choices people make during their acculturation, i.e. influenced by the four acculturation strategies. The long-term outcomes of acculturation, such as both psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (see later), are also seen to correspond to the acculturation strategy of the group or individual. The four acculturation strategies are developed from a distinction between a preference for maintaining one’s own cultural heritage and identity, and a preference for participating in the dominant society with new ethno-cultural groups. When individuals do not wish to maintain their own cultural identity and instead seek interaction with other cultures with the aim of moving into the dominant society, *assimilation* is the strategy. In contrast, when individuals want to maintain their original culture and identity, and avoid contact with other cultural groups than their own, the *separation* strategy is defined. When there is an interest to maintain one’s original culture as well as interact with other cultural groups, it is the *integration* strategy. With this strategy, both the culture of the newcomers and the host culture are seen to become part of a larger societal framework. Finally, if there is little interest in maintaining one’s original culture and little interest in relations with others, the *marginalisation* strategy is defined. Marginalisation often occurs as a result of involuntary loss of cultural contact with both groups caused by e.g. discrimination in the new society (Berry, 2006). It is important to remember that acculturating groups or individuals do not necessarily make a deliberate choice of which strategy to follow. As it can be seen with the marginalisation strategy, often structural or social aspects of the new society can intervene and force the individual to follow a certain strategy. As mentioned above, Berry has a focus on the individual level and on the actor going through acculturation. However, it is important to also keep the macro level in mind, and consider the institutional and structural forces, which influence the individual in a society, as it is not possible to only look at the individual as an isolated actor when it comes to acculturating in a new society.

With his acculturation strategies, Berry references some larger concepts within the migration literature. Rodríguez-García explains that there are two main models of incorporating immigrants; the assimilationist model and the pluralist or multicultural model. Variations and sub-branches of these two general models of course also exist. Host countries incorporate immigrants into society in different ways in accordance with these models, and in accordance with the historical, political and social particularities of each country (Rodríguez-García, 2010). How individuals acculturate i.e. which of Berry’s acculturation strategies they follow is highly influenced by the host country’s larger approach to incorporating immigrants. An assimilationist model focus on *“the idea that equality can be achieved through the full adoption of the rules and values of the dominant society and through the avoidance of any considerations of diversity”* (Rodríguez-García, 2010: 4), which is consistent with Berry’s assimilation strategy. In countries believing in assimilation, immigrants are often to some degree forced to follow a similar strategy, whereas in countries with a focus on multiculturalism it will be easier for immigrants not to choose the assimilation strategy, as there is a respect for and protection of cultural diversity. Castles and Miller (2009) describe how multiculturalism may lead to the creation of ethnic communities, where different ethnic groups live side by side in a multicultural society. In such a society, it will be much more possible to choose the separation strategy. An ideal model proposed by e.g. Modood and Shachar (Castles and Miller, 2009) is an interculturalist model, with a focus of living together in diversity with the participation of and exchange between all members from various cultural groups. Generally in the migration literature, there seems to be a consensus that managing diversity should be a bidirectional adaptation or mutual accommodation (Rodríguez-García, 2010), which corresponds with what Berry also claims to be the ideal strategy; namely the integration strategy.

## Acculturative stress

According to Berry, there are three ways to conceptualise outcomes of acculturation. As described above, one is *behavioural shifts* which happen rather easily. This involves a process of culture shedding, culture learning, and most often also some degree of culture conflict, which can however be overcome easily because the acculturating individual yields or adjusts to the new ways. This process is often termed ‘adjustment’, and the acculturation process is generally experienced as non-problematic. When acculturation becomes more problematic and greater levels of conflict and stress are experienced, *acculturative stress* is the appropriate conceptualisation. Here the individual realises that he is facing problems that cannot be dealt with easily, simply by adjusting to them. Berry also mentions a third approach, *psychopathology*, which has been used in clinical psychology and psychiatry, and where acculturation is seen to almost always be problematic. However, this approach will not be dealt with in this project.

 As mentioned earlier, Berry developed his term ‘acculturative stress’ as a response to the term ‘culture shock’. It is important to note that acculturative stress refers only to those stressors, which are associated specifically with the acculturation process, and not other stressors that might exist in an individual’s life. There is often a particular set of behaviours associated with acculturation which can be seen as stress symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, and identity confusion (Berry and Zheng, 1991). However, some people see acculturative changes not as stressors but as opportunities, and therefore the acculturation experience can also be a positive one. Berry and Zheng (1991) mention the following factors as important for the development of acculturative stress:

**Factors moderating the relationship between acculturation and stress:**

* The nature of the larger society (multicultural/monocultural, prejudice, discrimination etc.)
* Type of acculturating group (immigrants, refugees, native people, etc.)
* Modes of acculturation (assimilation, integration, separation, marginalisation)
* Demographic and social characteristics of individual (age, sex, status, etc.)
* Psychological characteristics of individual (coping, attitudes, etc.)

Acculturative stress is low in pluralist cultures where ethnic diversity is priced, and high in assimilationist cultures with a lot of acculturation pressure. Similarly, acculturative stress is also greater in communities where there are many differences between the two cultural groups. Looking at the individual level, an important factor is how dependent on the society an individual is. Individuals who depend more on events in their community will be more susceptible to changes in their community and will therefore be more likely to experience acculturative stress when joining a new community (Berry and Anis, 1974). With regard to acculturation strategies, evidence shows that individuals following the integration strategy tend to be less stressed than those following the assimilation strategy. However, both are significantly less stressed than those seeking a separation strategy or those experiencing marginalisation (Berry and Zheng, 1991).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have identified two major coping mechanisms for challenging behavioural changes, which are both likely to be used by someone going through the process of acculturation. The two strategies are: problem-focused coping, where the individual tries to solve the problem; and emotion-focused coping, where the individual tries to regulate the emotions associated with the problem. Making use of these coping strategies may lead to long-term adaptation (Berry, 2006).

## Adaptation

As a result of trying to cope with acculturation, it may be possible to achieve long-term adaptation. Adaptation does not necessarily mean a better fit between the individual and the society, and does therefore not imply that the individual has changed to become more like the society, e.g. by assimilating. Adaptation is seen as an outcome that can be both positive and negative. However, the term adaptation seems to most often refer to the positive aspect of the concept, meaning well-adapted individuals. The problem with this normative term is that there will be different expectations about behaviour in different contexts and therefore it is difficult to define what well-adapted means. Two concepts which seem to describe positive adaptation are Ward’s concepts of psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. Psychological adaptation involves mostly one’s psychological and physical well-being, whereas socio-cultural adaptation is about the ability to manage daily life in a new cultural context. Zhou et al (2008) then connects psychological adaptation with the stress and coping approach and socio-cultural adaptation with culture learning (see chapter ABC below). As we have seen with the U-curve of culture shock, psychological problems tend to increase soon after cross-cultural contact and then slowly but steadily improve over time, whereas socio-cultural adaptation tend to follow a linear improvement with time. Good psychological adaptation is connected to personal characteristics and traits, background, and social support; and socio-cultural adaptation is related to cultural knowledge, attitudes, and the degree of contact with the new culture. However, the relationship between psychological and socio-cultural adaptation is still not very clear, e.g. there are people who fit well with the new culture and new learning system (socio-culturally adapted) but still feel bad about their situation psychologically (Zhou et al, 2008).

## Critique of Berry’s acculturation theory

John W. Berry can be seen as one of the establishers of the field of acculturation psychology theory, and his four acculturation strategies have been highly cited. However, acculturation theory and Berry’s acculturation strategies in particular also receive criticism from other scholars.

Weinreich (2008) proposes the term ‘enculturation’ as more appropriate than ‘acculturation’. He claims that although the term ‘acculturation’ has been widely used in academic cross-cultural literature as a reference to an acceptance of minority cultures as well as the majority culture, it still carries a strong connotation of acculturating towards the mainstream culture, i.e. losing heritage culture to acquire aspects of the receiving culture (Weinreich, 2008: 12). Instead, the term ‘enculturate’ better describes the constant process of the migrants incorporating different cultural elements and values that are important to them from various available ethnicities, both minorities and the dominant culture. Elements of other cultures continue to be enculturated, and it happens without a conscious choice to apply one strategy or the other. Weinreich also mentions the close connection between the culture of a group and the identity of the individuals within that group. With Berry’s model, for someone to reject their heritage culture is seen as the same as rejecting the cultural aspects of their heritage identity. However, he says, this is only part of a much more complex process of development, maintenance and redefinition of identity in new cultural contexts (Weinreich, 2008: 2).

Weinreich also criticises Berry’s acculturation strategies by arguing that they firstly depend on the assumption that both the dominant and the heritage cultures are benign and open towards each other and secondly that accepting the norms of the dominant culture does not contravene the norms of the heritage culture, which would make an integration strategy difficult. Furthermore, in a dominant culture which is racist, exclusive and maybe violent towards ethnic minorities, the preferred strategy of the migrant would not be to accept and adopt the behaviour of the dominant culture as in the assimilation or integration strategy, but in fact separation might be the more beneficial strategy here (Weinreich, 2008: 2).

Despite this critique, Berry’s acculturation strategies provide a good exposition of different ways of acculturating and how individuals react differently during a cross-cultural transition. However, it is important to remember the larger picture; that it is not always possible for a migrant to choose which strategy to follow because situational, cultural, and societal factors also influence the acculturation process. The acculturation strategies will not be the main aspect of Berry’s theory which we will use in this thesis. We will focus mostly on Berry’s concepts of acculturative stress and adaptation, which are the most relevant for our research about coping with culture shock.

# Affect-Behaviour-Cognition Framework

The Affect-Behaviour-Cognition (ABC) Framework has been developed on the basis of Berry’s acculturation theory (Yue and Le, 2012), and this framework offers a more comprehensive insight into how people respond and adapt to a new culture, as it considers various ways people do this. The ABC model does not define individuals’ response to unfamiliar environments as being disadvantageous and passive, but as a process of actively managing the change in one’s life during cross-cultural encounters (Bochner, 2003). The framework combines the three concepts; culture learning, stress and coping, and social identification and these concepts focus on different aspects of cultural adaptation, namely behaviour, affect, and cognition. In other words, it emphasises how individuals behave, feel, and think when faced with an unfamiliar cultural environment.

## Culture learning

The concept of culture learning has its origins in social psychology and it focuses on the behavioural aspects of intercultural contact. The concept can be compared with what Berry refers to as ‘behavioural shifts’ and what Bochner and Furnham call ‘social skills acquisition’ (Berry, 1997). Taking into consideration, what Hannerz (1999) and Baumann (1996) write about individuals sharing and reaching across different cultures, as well as the possibility to belong to and function in many cultures, we can define the practice of culture learning as one of the processes accompanying adaptation in a host country. Culture learning theory has mostly been applied to sojourners. The theory takes its point of departure in Argyle’s social interaction theory, and sees social interaction as a mutually organised and skilled behavioural performance. Interpersonal friction arises when this performance breaks down or cannot be initiated in the first place (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Therefore, the stress that can occur with intercultural contact is due to a lack of social skills that are culture-specific to the new society (Argyle, 1969 in Zhou et al, 2008). Bochner and Furnham (1986) explain that individuals who have not mastered the social conventions of their society, either because they are unable or unwilling to, are likely to feel like strangers in their own land. Cross-cultural problems arise because the sojourner is unaware of the new social conventions and how to deal with everyday social encounters. Therefore, it is seen as a possibility to identify the difficult situations and teach the sojourner the appropriate social skills for interacting in those situations. In this way, the social skills or culture learning model leads to practical guidelines and training methods (Zhou et al, 2008). Bochner and Furnham have argued strongly for this model, and explain that with this model the most important thing for the sojourner is not to adjust to the new society but to learn its characteristics. For cross-cultural social skills training, an understanding of the differences in communication patterns is vital. Research has shown that problems arise mostly in connection with elements that regulate social encounters; and especially the non-verbal aspects of social interaction (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Therefore, it is important for a sojourner to have knowledge of the home society’s national communication patterns and rules as well as the host society’s, which includes aspects such as polite usage, non-verbal etiquette, and how to express emotions. These are some of the skills which, according to culture learning theory, are possible to teach sojourners through information-giving, preparation and organisation. If a sojourner is familiar with the appropriate non-verbal signs and acts of a society, he indirectly conveys feelings such as liking, friendliness and trust (Burgoon in Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001), which will ease interpersonal contact in the new society.

By focusing on social skills and communication deficit within intercultural communication, the culture learning theory places the interaction of culture travellers within general communication theory. An early approach which still permeates much of the current research is to regard unsuccessful social episodes as failed verbal and non-verbal communication – the sender may not be able to express the intended message, and the receiver may have trouble interpreting the message (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Research from authors such as Gudykunst, Hofstede and Argyle has focused on the cultural differences in how people communicate verbally and non-verbally (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). To describe these cultural differences, concepts such as e.g. high versus low context cultures and individualism versus collectivism have been developed. These concepts are used to describe aspects such as non-verbal communication, etiquette, forms of address and how to resolve conflicts in different cultures, which can all be seen as part of culture learning.

To sum up, the culture learning approach offer a broad framework for understanding culture shock, but focuses on the distortion of familiar environmental and social cues as being the main problem leading to culture shock for cross-cultural travellers. Bochner and Furnham have criticised Oberg (1960) for being too broad in his propositions and not specifying the nature of these environmental and social cues (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Therefore, they have argued strongly for the culture learning approach, as it offers more specific guidelines of how to gain the culturally relevant behavioural skills.

## Stress and coping

The stress and coping concept focuses on the affective aspect of intercultural contact and the psychological well-being and satisfaction of the individual going through an intercultural transition. As opposed to early medical or disease models of culture shock, which we have discussed earlier, this approach discusses intercultural contact and change in terms of coping with stress. The framework highlights the significance of the changes that happen during cross-cultural transitions, the appraisal of these changes, and the development of appropriate coping strategies to deal with them (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). The approach is theoretically based on Holmes and Rahe’s (1967) concept of life-events (Yue and Le, 2012). The life-events theory examines the relationship between stressful life-events and psychological well-being and argues that negative life-events make people ill. When applied to migration theory, it is argued that because migration involves important life-events and possibly stressful changes when migrating, the development of psychological illness or stress can be caused directly by these changes. Because of this, the sojourner or individual going through a cross-cultural transition needs to develop effective strategies to cope with this stress during the process. John W. Berry’s model of acculturation and adaptation can be seen as a more elaborate stress and coping model, where he considers the acculturation experience to be a major life event characterised by stress, and with the need to develop coping strategies to adapt (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). With the stress and coping approach, adjustment is seen as an active process where the sojourner tries to manage the stressful changes on both an individual and situational level (Zhou et al, 2008).

Individuals process change and stress-related information in different ways; some may see potential stressors as threatening whereas others may see them as challenging. Furthermore, beyond these individual differences, there are also cultural, social, and situational factors, which are likely to affect the cognitive appraisal of stress (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). These factors include e.g. the degree of life change, lengths of stay, expectations, social support and attitudes of the host society towards ethnic out-groups. One approach to culture shock which is related to stress and coping focuses on the expectations of the person migrating. With this approach, the stress comes from the expectations one has to the conditions of the new country. Most research has shown that high expectations that do not get fulfilled are related to poor adjustment and increased mental illness, and there is also some evidence that low expectations lead to better adjustment (Bochner and Furhnam, 1986). This expectations approach to culture shock is in many ways consistent with the stress and coping approach.

Expectation-experience matches attest to the psychological preparation required to cope with potentially stressful life changes, and expectation accuracy may positively affect subsequent appraisals of stressful situations, build confidence, and alleviate anxiety (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001: 76).

Another approach which is considered important within the stress and coping framework is the social support networks approach. This approach argues that the stress of moving to a new society is related to the loss of *significant others*. A reduction of social support leads, according to the theory, to an increase in mental and physical illness (Bochner and Furnham, 1986). This means that social support is an important factor in predicting psychological adjustment and physical health during cross-cultural transitions.

Other ways of coping come from Folkman and Lazarus (1985) who developed a Ways of Coping Scale by assessing eight distinct coping strategies: problem solving; wishful thinking; detachment; social support; positive thinking; self-blame; tension reduction and withdrawal responses (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Results from this study revealed that students using positive thinking were the most satisfied with their ability to cope, whereas those who used withdrawal and wishful thinking were not as satisfied with their ability to cope with their problems. The findings from research on coping with cross-cultural transitions match the general findings of the stress and coping literature. These findings have shown that action-oriented coping mechanisms work better than disengagement strategies, and that task-oriented reactions lead to better adjustment. This task- and action-oriented behaviour can be classified as primary coping strategies, whereas secondary strategies are more cognitive than behavioural and most often include a change of perception of the stressful events (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). This means in simple words that with primary strategies the individual tries to change the environment to suit the self, whereas secondary strategies involve changing the self to fit the environment. In many situations, however, an individual would not be able to change the surrounding environment or culture, in which case a cognitive coping strategy may prove more successful in reducing stress.

The stress and coping approach allows culture shock to be explained and interpreted in much the same way as other stressful experiences. It sees cross-cultural transitions as an extensive life change, where cognitive appraisal, personality and social support all influence the stress and coping throughout the cross-cultural experience.

## Social identification

While the last element of the ABC model is cognition, social identification is a cognitive component of cross-cultural interactions.

Cross-cultural contacts are a challenge for the ways, in which the individuals identify themselves and their environment. As it is hard for individuals to keep their cultural identities unchanged in a different social reality, a number of psychological processes of identification occur. It is important to mention that by writing about identification we deal with internal, rather than external or behavioural processes.

The theory on social identification, along with theories on social cognition and social identity (Deaux, 1996 in Yue & Le, 2012), help to understand how individuals identify themselves and the others. They discuss issues such as how people interact with their co-ethnic and other ethnic groups, what the natural response to prejudices is, what the reasons for leaving and joining groups are and what the connection between the group’s membership and self-esteem is (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001).

Two approaches have been used to deal with social identification (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). The first, cross-cultural approach is the acculturation and identity model, relating to research on intercultural contact and its influence on people’s social identity. The second approach, developed by Tajfel (Tajfel 1978, 1981 in Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001.) and focusing on social psychology, Social Identity Theory (SIT) is emphasising the importance of group membership in relation to one’s identity as well as how social categorisation and social comparison are connected to one’s self-esteem. Both acculturation and SIT models emphasise how individuals perceive themselves and the others as well as in- and out-groups.

### Acculturation and Identity

 Acculturation, being a result of cross-cultural contact, does not only manifest itself in the immigrant’s change of behaviours or values, but it also refers to changes in cultural identity of those immigrants.

The way individuals perceive themselves, their in- and out-groups is likely to be influenced by migratory processes, in which those individuals experience cross-cultural contact. According to Berry (1997), changes in individuals’ identities can be categorised according to the acculturation strategies they choose, as these strategies indicate whether the individuals identify themselves with their home cultures, the host culture, both or none of them. What is more, identity should also be studied in relation to other elements, such as sojourners’ personal characteristics (age, gender, education) as well as home society characteristics (motivations to travel, cultural similarity) and host society characteristics (prejudices, cultural pluralism). That is why uneducated people from culturally distant countries might choose different identity-shaping strategies than those, who are well educated and coming from culturally similar environments. Also, the bigger cultural differences between the host and home cultures are, the harder it is for the individuals to develop and categorise their identities. Acculturation and identity changes are likely to affect individuals’ self-confidence, feeling of well- being as well as the ability to acquire new social skills.

Cultural identification is affected by elements such as recognition and categorisation to an ethno-cultural group. Issues like belonging to a certain group, acceptance of the group’s traditions and values, how important it is for an individual to belong to those groups and how they evaluate those groups are regarded as parts of the individual’s identification.

### Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory studies the connection between cross-cultural diversity and the way it affects individual’s perceptions and interactions, but mostly, it is concerned with how an individual’s identity can be affected by different groups. The common strategies are intergroup bias and out-group derogation, which are results of two strategies- social categorisation and social comparison. SIT emphasises the significance of positive group distinctiveness and intergroup contact in order to enhance self-esteem and higher status for its members. As migrants are often subjects of stereotypes in the host society, they develop strategies to change their social identity in order to preserve their self- esteem. Those strategies include leaving in-groups and becoming members of different groups, redefining of the elements of social comparisons and various collective actions of the in-group to improve the status of this group.

Summing up, both acculturation and SIT models have their origin in social cognition and they study how the processes of self-perception work as well as how individuals see in- and out-groups and what factors influence those perceptions.

## Evaluation of the ABC Framework

The ABC Framework has been considered useful by e.g. Zhou et al for various reasons. Firstly, because it is more comprehensive than previous models, such as the Disease model or the Negative Life-events model, as it considers not only the affective aspect of culture shock, but also behaviour and cognition. Secondly, it describes an active process and offers active responses to culture shock, rather than just a passive reaction to an event, as previous models have suggested. Finally, it considers both the individual and the situation as opposed to previous models, which focus only on what happens within the individual. The model offers both a comprehensive theoretical formulation to predict culture shock, and a more pragmatic approach in regard to solutions and training models.

Table 1 summarises the differences in theoretical origin, conceptual structure, factors that affect

adjustment and implications for intervention of the three parts of the ABC framework.

**Table 1: Three contemporary theories of intercultural contact (Zhou et al 2008)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Theory | Theoretical origin | Conceptual framework | Theoretical premise | Factors affecting adjustment | Intervention guidelines |
| Stress and coping (Affect) | Social psychology – stress, appraisal and coping (Lazarus & Folkman 1984); Life events (Holmes & Rahe 1967) | Cross-cultural travelers need to develop coping strategies to deal with stress.  | Life changes are inherently stressful. | Adjustment factors involving both personal (e.g. life change, personality) and situational (e.g. social support) | Training people to develop stress management skills.  |
| Culture learning (Behaviour) | Social and experimental psychology – Social skills and interpersonal behaviour (Argyle 1969) | Cross-cultural travelers need to learn culturally relevant social skills to survive and thrive in their new settings.  | Social interaction is a mutually organised and skilled performance.  | Culture specific variables such as: Knowledge about new culture, language or communication competence, cultural distance | Preparation, orientation and culture learning; especially behavioural-based social skills training. |
| Social identification (Cognition) | Ethnic, cross-cultural and social psychology – self (Deaux 1996; social identity theory e.g. Phinney 1990) | Cross-cultural transition may involve changes in cultural identity and inter-group relations. | Identity is a fundamental issue for the cross-cultural travelers.  | Cognitive variables such as: knowledge of host culture, mutual attitude between hosts and sojourners, cultural similarity, cultural identity.  | Enhancing self-esteem, overcoming barriers to inter-group harmony, emphasising inter-group similarities.  |

However, the complexity of the model is also seen as a problem, since it is difficult to separate the various components and do research on their effects. Another drawback of this framework is that the research of psychology in intercultural contact situations has not been related to research on different cultural travellers, and therefore more research is still needed in this area, in order for the framework to be more coherent (Zhou et al, 2008). The table above provides a clear overview of the differences between the three components of the ABC theory, and makes it easier to distinguish them, even though they are all intertwined.

# About Velkomstcentre

Velkomstcentre was an EU-funded project in North Denmark that ran until ultimo January 2014. The project was aimed at companies with international employees, the international employees themselves, and their spouses. The project worked to help the companies with the practical issues of receiving and holding down international employees and to make the international employees feel welcome both at work and outside of work (Folder about the project). By working on these different levels, Velkomstcentre aimed to attract international labour to the Region North Denmark and to make it a beneficial situation for both parties. Furthermore, they offered job searching and social events for the spouses of the international employees. Some of the aims of the project were to:

* Assist companies in North Denmark with recruiting and holding down international employees
* Ensure a good level of service towards international job seekers
* Help both companies, international employees and their families with the practical issues of arriving in North Denmark
* Support the eventual integration into the local society

(Velkomstcentre)

The services and activities offered by Velkomstcentre included the development of mentoring arrangements in the region’s companies, social network activities for international employees and their families, a hotline service for companies and employees to get information about the legislation, a CV database and job bank for accompanying spouses, and courses for managers to develop a ‘best practice’ for how to deal with international employees (www.velkomstcentre.dk).

In our thesis, the main focus will be on a sub-project of Velkomstcentre, namely the Xpat Network North, which is a project offering activities to foreigners living and working in and around Aalborg. The aim of this project was to offer social networking activities to foreigners and give them the possibility to meet other migrants as well as Danes. Different kinds of activities have been held via this project, e.g. purely social events; cultural events such as guided tours and museum visits; information sessions about the tax system, housing, the health system etc; and job related events aimed mostly at spouses (Kirstine Då). The Xpat Network North continues to be active after the Velkomstcentre project is finished, via Aalborg Kommune and Facebook. The activities are directed at both families and singles, young and old, and all foreigners are welcome regardless of length of stay in Denmark (Velkomstcentre).

# How have Velkomstcentre helped those who participated in their activities?

All the individuals who come to work and live in Denmark travel away from their home countries with different experiences and different expectations. Among our interviewees, six came to Aalborg in order to study, two to work, three to accompany or reunite with their spouses and two as refugees. All our informants have different backgrounds, goals and needs; in other words, their diversity is quite big. However, there is one point that connects them all. All of them expressed a wish to feel accepted and welcome in Aalborg. Antoinette for example, declared what were the things that she found relevant and necessary in order to live in Denmark:

But of course we need (support from the Municipality), if we want to stay. We need to feel welcome (…). Because when we made the decision to come to Aalborg, there were different things we have seen. We have seen international school (…). We saw the airport. We needed the possibilities. (Antoinette, lines 164-168)

Later on, Antoinette made a remark that Denmark needs to be *attractive* for the foreigners and that they should not get an impression of being *undesirable* (Antoinette, lines 211-212). Here, Velkomstcentre, an integrating institution located in Aalborg, played an important role for the newcomers. Their main tasks were to facilitate the process of adaptation of immigrant groups in North Denmark through assisting the international citizens in building their social networks, learning about the Danish culture and dealing with the practical problems in order to function in the host society.

Ten of our informants were familiar with Velkomstcentre and eight of them participated in the activities designed for the newcomers. By looking at the problems, which those individuals encountered by coming to Aalborg, we can divide them into two categories. The first one is lack of social networks and social activities, while the second is lack of general knowledge and skills to cope with various problems.

## Problems with social networks

The majority of our informants were troubled by lack of friends and social life when they first came to Denmark and they considered friendships and bonds with other people significant to start their new lives. Very often, by leaving their home countries behind, our informants felt deprived of their social life, which was subsequently evoking the feelings of sadness or even depression:

It was that the only activities that I had was school and I went home and tried to search for jobs and I was really going into depression because there was nothing to do in your free time. (Iveta, lines 42-43)

When I did not speak Danish and I did not have that many friends as I have now. Yes, I felt lonely and abandoned. (Julia, lines 90-91)

When we spoke with Kirstine Då, a project coordinator at Velkomstcentre, she confirmed that for many of the newcomers it was hard to find a social network without speaking the Danish language, and that the idea behind the project was to help the newcomers feel at home. By looking at the Velkomstcentre’s offer, we can see that they suggested various group activities based purely on social interactions such as coffee meetings, Christmas dinners, or family gatherings. Those events were organised not only to increase the newcomers’ possibilities to meet and socialise with the other international citizens, but also with the locals. All of our informants, who attended those social activities, rated them highly. Chen, who was a member of a Chinese community, found those activities useful when it came to meeting other international citizens (Chen, lines 61-63); Helene thought they were her chance to rebuild her social and professional networks after graduating from the university and loosing contact with other international students:

In the beginning, I like this networking in a café, because I needed to find some people and I wasn’t good with Danish, so English was the easiest and I was hoping to see what kind of people came. Maybe from some international companies, or if they had their own company… To get a little more network. And then, of course it was social, to get more friends. And some other activities, like when we went to see a football match. (Helene, lines 78-82)

Although the informants enjoyed the events, where they could meet people who were similar to themselves and with whom they could speak English and share experiences, still they found creating networks with the host society more difficult than co-ethnic or international networks. Those of the informants who came to study or work at Aalborg University, seemed to share a view that the place *is very international, you always find somebody to speak, and friends* (Helene, line 35). Moreover, Iveta said that it is not hard to find circles of friends, who are *foreigners* (Iveta, lines 144-145) and Elena said that as she lived in an international dormitory, all her friends were *international* and it was *easier* to be with them (Elena, lines 182-183). Although it was natural for our informants to find international friends in Aalborg, it was peculiarly hard to strike friendships with the locals and thus finding Danish friends, especially in the beginning, proved a complicated task. We heard comments such as:

I suppose maybe the biggest surprise is how difficult it is to make friends with Danes. And I don’t know if you will see that around the world any time you are a foreigner, but I’ve also heard other people talk about it. It’s hard. (Anna, lines 31-33)

Well I do miss something because of the language. I see it in Danish and cannot read it or I have to google translate, and I miss some very interesting events, some interesting parties like that. (Chen, lines 35-36)

And very hard to integrate with Danish. At first, it was like Danish versus internationals. It was like 3 years ago (…). Danish never wanted to interact with the internationals and we were keeping to ourselves very much. (Iveta, lines 18-19)

Anna tried to explain that Danish people prefer their families and consider the newcomers as *transients* (Anna, lines 35-37) and Iveta said that the locals do not want to socialise with the international students due to a stereotype of a thief immigrant (Iveta, lines 22-28). Those examples illustrate that our informants had to struggle to win friends and increase social interactions with the Danish members of the society.

Although our informants appreciated the international meetings organised by Velkomstcentre, where they did not feel isolated and could speak English, still they could have benefited more from the events for both the international and Danish residents. The events, in which the newcomers actually had a chance to socialise with the Danish society members were Christmas Party and Expat Dinners held in the main library in Aalborg. As Kirstine Då specified, the idea behind those events was to create a possibility for the newcomers to socialise and share experiences with the locals in a cosy, informal atmosphere. Those of our informants, who attended those meetings, shared their positive opinions. Chen, who would usually spend time with his Chinese community, told us that for him Christmas Party was an opportunity to meet Danish families and feel *the atmosphere of the family* (Chen, lines 47-51). Julia found Christmas dinner a perfect possibility to help her new friend, who had just come to Aalborg and was lonely, to meet some other people and *communicate* (Julia, lines 123-125). Liisa wanted simply to socialise, try different food and enjoy her evening (Liisa, lines 108-109). Antoinette gives a short, but accurate description of those events:

For example, we have this international dinner once a year, where everybody comes with food from their own countries and it is a big sharing day and children speak in different languages. I like very much what the library makes, when they invite Danish and foreigners together. (Antoinette, lines 306-308)

As a conclusion, we can see that our informants produced a positive picture, when they spoke of Velkomstcentre’s social activities. In other words, those events gave them a possibility to build up a network, speak English if they did not master Danish, meet and share experiences with both the international and Danish members of the society, and most importantly, discard the feelings of abandonment and isolation. Furthermore, Kirstine Då told us about the future perspectives for friendships that the events brought to some of the participants. She told us that the some of the participants were likely to develop friendships, and became more independent in arranging their own activities, which she could see on the Facebook page of Velkomstcentre.

In spite of the positive reactions of our interviewees, as Kirstine Då told us, the social events were not as well attended as the other activities organised by Velkomstcentre. The international citizens might have made a decision of not participating in some of the social events, because they were mostly interested in enlarging their Danish networks and finding friends among the locals, and while some of the events seemed to be exclusively for the international citizens, they knew that they are not going to meet the natives there. Subsequently, the natives might have felt uninvited due to the international character of the meetings. In the light of those assumptions, we can see that Velkomstcentre put a lot of effort into the integration of various co-international groups, while the main interest of our interviewees was actually reverse, namely integration with the host society.

## Problems with practicalities

The lack of social contacts and networks was one of the biggest challenges for our informants. The other topics that were generally brought up were various problems due to our informants’ lack of common knowledge about how to function in the host society and solve problems. Those unexpected difficulties of a practical nature often caused frustrations, as our informants could not transfer their knowledge and skills learned in their home countries to Denmark.

Therefore, Velkomstcentre were trying to give the newcomers possibilities to learn more about the Danish health system, job marked, accommodation possibilities, taxation system and other topics and, according to Kirstine Då, those events were popular among the newcomers.

One of the most common problems of those of our informants who came to Denmark without having a job was how to learn more about the local job market and find access to the Danish working environment. When we asked Iveta if she experienced any difficulties since she came to Aalborg, the first thing she mentioned was having no job, no internship and nobody who would be able to help her (Iveta, lines 34-35). Antoinette described how active she was in her job search and how, in spite of her education and working experience, she anyway had to struggle to be invited for a single job interview (Antoinette, lines 106-108). Liisa associated those troubles with her status of a foreigner and inability to speak Danish:

And also jobs is another thing… It’s very tricky to, as a foreigner, if you don’t speak Danish, how do you find a job? I went to many job seminars actually and even though I found out, what you can, can’t do, it’s still… I am still looking, after six months. (Liisa, lines 131-133)

Velkomstcentre seemed to have understood that the newcomers found it hard to follow the job market rules and needed guidance of some sort. That is why seminars about job market and CV writing were organised in order to help all the struggling newcomers to understand what they can expect from others and what can be expected from them. Those of our informants who decided to attend those particular seminars had mixed feelings. Helene, who attended many of Velkomstcentre’s activities said that they were one of the most *interesting* ones (Helene, line 84) and Carmen considered them *helpful*, especially as she received introduction to various job portals and websites, which she had not known before and which were useful for job seekers (Carmen, lines 113-116). However, Iveta was more critical about the seminars, claiming that for her they were insignificant and that they offered only superficial assistance:

I wouldn’t say it’s very helpful. I was like to two or three of them and basically they told the same thing that everywhere on the sites. I went there and I couldn’t take anything new from there (…). I thought they will give something new, like some personal insight, not everything the same what is in all those websites… Because I can read. (Iveta, lines 74-82)

Afterwards, Iveta remembered visiting Siemens company and it seemed that this kind of unrepeatable experience was more of what she was expecting from Velkomstcentre. As she said, it had an *insight* and the participantscould see the *real opportunities* and not only receive the theoretical support (Iveta, lines 95-97).

It appears that the activities offered by Velkomstcentre were designed to provide a theoretical introduction to the Danish job market and, while the majority of our informants were grateful for it, some participants felt that the main purpose of those meetings should be directed towards practice and real life, rather than theory. We cannot say to which extend Velkomstcentre’s events helped our informants become employed, as none of the informants mentioned directly that it was thanks to Velkomstcentre’s assistance that they got a job. What we can see is that three out of four of our informants who attended job seminars are now employed or waiting for an internship.

The other seminars, which proved to be useful for our informants, were seminars about health care. Although only one of our informants has had a direct contact with the Danish health care system, all those who attended those seminars found it necessary to know more about it in case they needed it in the future. Carmen for example said that it is necessary, especially for the exchange students, to know what to do in cases of illness (Carmen, lines 116-119). Julia admitted that she wanted to use the opportunity to learn more about the health care, as the events were conducted in English, which was an additional advantage (Julia, lines 121-123). Iveta was happy to learn a few *tips* by attending the seminar (Iveta, line 84) and Liisa was interested in the seminars due to her health problems:

I found out a few things that are very useful to know. Especially, because all this information is only written in Danish. So for someone, who is a foreigner, it’s kind of hard to reach that information if you don’t know somebody local. You really need to get through the language studies… It was helpful. (Liisa, lines 115-117)

The health seminars seemed to be a successful activity, although two of our interviewees thought they could have been improved, if Velkomstcentre invited some experts to provide the presentation. If Velkomstcentre had managed to ask professionals, who work with patients on a daily basis, perhaps they could have answered all the questions that the participants had, instead of leaving some of them unanswered (Liisa, line 124-126), as Julia put it *sometimes it felt like talking to, you know, a neighbour* (Julia, line 132).

What is more, we have noticed that there is a connection between other problems that our interviewees struggled with and their preference for certain activities. Carmen, who felt confused and got lost during her first days in Denmark, found it relevant to attend a guided tour around Aalborg and she explained her choice to us: *I was extremely new, so I didn’t know how to get around the city* (Carmen, line 107). Chen, who works for Aalborg University, attended the guided tour around the main library and Iveta said that *tax seminar, that was the best, because many people don’t understand how it works* (Iveta, lines 90-91).

All those examples mentioned above demonstrate that the newcomers are aware of their lack of social networks and abilities to function perfectly in the unfamiliar environment. Velkomstcentre proved to be one of the places they turned to in search of assistance and help. Although sometimes Velkomstcentre was unable to fulfil the expectations of all of our informants, their general opinion was that institutions of integrating character are and will be useful for the newcomers. Some of the general opinions were:

You always need to learn a bit about culture and the best way to learn about the culture is by speaking about it to people. And I think it is very nice, if a structure like Welcome in Denmark or Expat Network North can help people (…). For people just arriving, it was just a fantastic opportunity. (Antoinette, lines 321-323 and 265)

I guess they (newcomers) should know a place like the Velkomstcentre, actually where you connect to other foreigners who can share their experiences. (Anna, lines 134-135)

Moreover, Antoinette felt that the service offered by Velkomstcentre was so relevant that she shared the information about upcoming events with her international colleagues and parents of children attending the international school in Aalborg (Antoinette, lines 268-271).

Our informants were generally open for various activities, which could have improved their possibilities to function in the Danish environment and Velkomstcentre was not the only structure, they turned to. Places like the library, language school, Aalborg University, various sport groups, church and volunteer projects were some of the places where our informants invested their free time. Liisa observed a significant thing about diversity of the offers for foreigners:

When you first come to Denmark, and you have this huge load of information just coming to you from every corner, and you have to relearn how to do things every single day, and some information just might go missing. It always happens. (Liisa, lines 121-123)

In the light of this comment, although the newcomers might feel overwhelmed, Aalborg presents itself as a welcoming city and Velkomstcentre with certainty made a difference for the migrants. The examples that we presented in this chapter were single problems of individuals, but for those individuals each and every one of those problems needed solving, in order to assure their well-being. We found that Velkomstcentre succeeded in predicting what kind of difficulties the newcomers in Aalborg might encounter as well as proved open to various ideas of the participants. The following chapter will present some of the additional suggestions made by our informants.

# Assessment of the Velkomstcentre activities and future recommendations

We have just seen how our informants evaluate Velkomstcentre’s activities and how Velkomstcentre has been able to help our informants deal with being in an unfamiliar culture. It was clear that Velkomstcentre arranged the right kind of activities and were able to predict the help newcomers in Aalborg need. However, we also want to investigate what further activities could be organised to help migrants in this regard, to see if there are some useful activities that Velkomstcentre did not do. We have asked our informants for suggestions for activities they would have found helpful, and in the following we will present these suggestions and recommendations for Velkomstcentre.

When asked about other possible activities, several of our informants actually mentioned activities or seminars that Velkomstcentre was already organising, such as housing (Liisa, line 129), taxes (Anna, line 114), and CV and motivational letters (Elena, line 122). Similarly, when asked what kind of activities they needed when they first came to Denmark, several of our informants mentioned getting to know the Danish culture. Antoinette says that she went to a presentation titled “the Danes are weird” which the Expat Network North was organising (Antoinette, line 323) and this seems to be what others are also seeking.

Also tips and tweaks… like I found out over time, what you can do in certain situation… Like, there is apparently here a lawyer, that you can see every Monday. I don’t know how I found about this… through someone… and this could be included in recommendations of what to do. Or maybe some sort of Danish culture class? Very light-hearted. How to interact with Danes for example. Or what they find rude and what not, and what kind of attitude to have here. Like a Danish culture evening, with some slides and some funny things, movies, music… (Liisa, lines 130-139)

This shows, as seen earlier, that culture learning and simple culture training is useful to our informants. Furthermore, all of this also proves that even though our informants said that they know Velkomstcentre, they are not familiar with all of their activities, and they are therefore missing out on the information that they need. Irena did not know of Velkomstcentre and after hearing about it, she was asked if she thinks it is interesting:

I think so, but you need to have information that something like that exists at all. When you come to Denmark as a foreigner, you have no idea what and how and where to find the information. Nobody told me anything about it. (Irena, lines 92-94)

This shows that the communication or information about the activities was not perfect. Kirstine Då also mentioned that at times they found it hard to attract people and get the information about the project out to the right people. So being able to get the right information out and creating a greater awareness of the project seems to be an important thing to bear in mind for any future events. One possibility could be to advertise the activities in the language schools or other institutions where new migrants come, as Liisa suggested:

So it is really good to advertise this kind of thing, for example at school, at this introduction day. (Liisa, line 123)

Furthermore, as we saw earlier there is a lot of information when you arrive in a new country, and some information will always be lost or forgotten. Therefore, advertising the activities at the introduction day is not enough and should be followed by regular reminders at the various institutions.

According to Kirstine Då, different kinds of people attended the activities and Velkomstcentre also tried to target different groups of people. Some events were aimed at young singles or couples whereas others were aimed at families. Interestingly, we have informants who suggested the target to change in either way. Antoinette said that attending the activities when you have children was really difficult and she suggests more of a family focus in the activities (Antoinette, lines 280-288). On the other hand, Elena noticed that a lot of events were for families, and therefore she did not attend them (Elena, line 116). Elena says that what people need depends on their reasons and motivations for being here. As an international student in Denmark, she would have liked to meet some like-minded people and have clever discussions:

Maybe to meet some like-minded people, to meet some special people for example those who like to read books or someone who likes to play some games and then get them together. Because I think it’s easier to make friends with someone that you have common interests with. […] Maybe showing some movies… Danish movies with English subtitles, or establishing a book club… but then you should read in English of course and discuss in English. (Elena, lines 128-133)

Carmen agrees that the activities people need differ according to what type of foreigner they are and what their plans for the future are. She said that someone who wants to stay in Denmark would find it very necessary to get a Danish network, whereas others who plan to leave the country again would need to know more about the traditions and culture which differ from their own home country, so they have something to tell those waiting at home (Carmen, lines 122-126). As we have seen earlier in this project, the type of migrant as well as the social and psychological characteristics of the individual are factors which do influence the acculturation process and therefore determine what kind of support or coping strategies each individual needs (Zheng and Berry, 1991). Both the acculturation process and experiences of culture shock are extremely individual processes which vary greatly between individuals. This naturally makes it difficult for an organisation such as Velkomstcentre to aim their activities at the right group, as the possible participants have many different needs. However, even though our informants have not been aware of all the activities, Velkomstcentre has offered a broad range of activities and tried to target different groups to make sure that as many as possible would benefit from their activities. The fact that some of our informants think there should be a greater focus on families and others think the focus should be on young singles, proves the difficult task of arranging activities for a broad group of migrants. However, Velkomstcentre has tried to balance the two targets as much as it is possible for one organisation. Alternatively, two different subgroups could be established; one organising events for families and another for singles.

It seems that our informants would like activities that they do not have the possibility of doing themselves, and they do not mind a small amount of payment for these activities. Julia gives an example of experiencing some of the finer arts of Denmark as something she would like to do:

Maybe it would be nice to have more cultural events. Different kind. Let’s say to go to Symphony Orchestra, or theater in Aalborg or…something like that. Because honestly, I have been here four years, and I haven’t been to a theater, or to an opera, or to Symphony Orchestra. I think if somebody would have introduced me to this before, maybe I would just… I am always afraid that it will cost a fortune, but maybe it could be a group offer and with Velkomstcentre… some amount of tickets… and let’s go listen to the orchestra, or hear this singer, or similar… If it was less than 100 kroner, or 100, it would be no problem… (Julia, lines 141-147)

Similarly, Antoinette suggested trips to see more of the country, e.g. Skagen or Løkken:

When people come to Denmark… Because of the prices of the cars, most of the people don’t have a car and a lot of people have no opportunity to go outside Aalborg. I told them “It will be very nice if one day you rent a bus and take people to Skagen, or to Løkken” There can always be some fee, 30 kroner, or 50 kroner to participate and you take your picnic… It’s an opportunity that people don’t have to do alone. Because people don’t know where to start. They could have done much more to be successful. (Antoinette, lines 295-299)

In the interview, Kirstine Då explained that they have always taken suggestions from participants seriously and have tried to accommodate their wishes and needs. However, she explained that trips to Skagen were not a possibility for them to do, as it was too expensive. On the other hand, it seems that our informants would not mind a small fee for more expensive activities, so these kinds of activities could be an idea to investigate further in case of any future projects. In such case there would be a risk of excluding people without funds, but it could be an idea to investigate further the needs and possibilities of the participants in this regard, and to then arrange bigger activities with a small fee if the participants are interested in these activities, as our informants are.

If we look at more specific suggestions for improvements of Velkomstcentre’s activities, our informants also have a few ideas. The first comes from Iveta who attended some of the seminars. Her opinion was that the seminars were mainly one-way communication where the participants received information about a certain subject, and she believed that a discussion about the subject afterwards where the participants can share their experiences would be more helpful (Iveta, line 86). Similarly, she also suggested getting out and experiencing the real opportunities as they did on the trip to see Siemens:

Oh, I remember once, we went to Siemens, for a company trip. That was very nice and had an insight... and maybe if they did more of this kind? Because it is nice to see the opportunities, the real opportunities, not just saying that there are *some* opportunities. (Iveta, lines 94-97)

According to Kirstine Då, both the information seminars and the outside activities, such as the city tours and the Siemens trip, were very popular among the participants. This could be because the target group of Velkomstcentre’s activities has mainly been people who recently came to Denmark to work, and as we will see later in our analysis, this group is at first concerned with the practicalities, and the need for social support comes later. Our informants suggested a mixture of these two types of activities – they suggested information seminars with a practical aspect included and more practical activities where they can also get information. However, it has also been suggested that the information should come from professionals who are able to answer all of the questions which might be asked (Julia, lines 133-135). Kirstine Då mentioned that a general criticism they have received was about the time of the events. Velkomstcentre had to arrange activities during normal working hours, but the participants would most often have preferred them to be during evenings and weekends. We can also see this point of view in our informants, e.g. Helene and Julia:

They are very interesting, especially the one with the taxes and how to get a job, but it’s always a really bad moment of the day. (Helene, lines 84-85)

The other activities was cinema in the library. I have to run from the job, not managing to reach it. (Julia, line 127)

However, this is something that Velkomstcentre has been aware of, but it has not been possible to change the time of the activities, as Velkomstcentre is a project which runs during normal business hours in the daytime. A possible solution could be a closer cooperation with the municipality or various work places, which could allow some activities to take place outside of normal work hours. Another possibility with such cooperation is that some institutions or workplaces could allow newcomers to participate in activities during the day.

# How our informants understand culture shock

As the final question in our interviews we asked the informants how they understand culture shock. We chose to wait with this question because we did not want the informants to know the subject from the beginning, as it might have influenced their answers throughout the interview. Before we begin our analysis of culture shock among our informants, we want to look at their own understandings of what culture shock is, as this provides a good basis for the rest of the analysis.

When our informants try to define culture shock, there is particularly one thing that several of them emphasise; namely that culture shock only happens when there is a large difference between the home culture and the host culture. One example of this comes from Irena from Poland who explained:

I don’t think I went through any culture shock here, because I think that there needs to be a huge difference… The first thing that comes to my mind is the cultural difference between Europe and Africa, or Europe and Asia. That it needs to be a very, very big cultural difference... and the distance, and everything, cuisine, people’s appearance, religion, clothes… (Irena, lines 230-235)

Several of our informants mention that culture shock is something they might experience if they went to China or India, but that it does not exist between European countries. Berry and Anis (1974) also propose that acculturative stress will be greater in communities where there is a greater cultural and behavioural disparity between the two groups, which supports our informants’ understanding of when culture shock occurs.

Another thing our informants mentioned about culture shock is that it occurs when the reality does not match the expectations they had beforehand. Earlier in this project, we briefly described the expectations approach to culture shock, which sees stress as an outcome of the expectations one has to the conditions of the new country, where particularly high expectations which do not get fulfilled can lead to mental illness (Bochner and Furnham, 1986). Our informants do not talk about high or low expectations in this way, but mention the surprise of something unexpected as a factor leading to culture shock:

Culture shock is when you’re really surprised by behaviour or something that you didn’t expect. […] initially you feel surprised, but then I think you often get frustrated and irritated, maybe sometimes angry depending on what the culture shock is. (Anna, lines 162-165)

Anna here describes how the surprise of something unexpected can lead to frustration, irritation and even anger, because of something you were not prepared for and do not know how to handle. Iveta from Latvia explains that she experienced a bigger culture shock in Denmark than when she was living five months in Indonesia, because in Indonesia she was prepared for all the things which would be different. However, when she came to Denmark she thought it would be similar to Latvia, which made it much more difficult for her to deal with the small cultural differences she encountered unexpectedly (Iveta, lines 132-138). This is an example of how important it can be that the expectations one had beforehand are fulfilled. Iveta might have had lower expectations for Indonesia but she knew exactly what she was expecting there, whereas her high expectations for Denmark were not fulfilled, which led to a cultural shock and made it more difficult to accept the new reality. Another interviewee describes it more as a state of confusion, where he does not know how to react to the unexpected behaviour he encounters:

Well, culture shock I think that’s when you experience some things that you didn’t expect. I got a bit confused actually… “what is that, why do you do that, why do you talk that way”, you don’t really know why they live like that, what is wrong and what is right […] like I said I was kind of confused. “What should I do now? What am I supposed to do in a situation like this”? And when you invite Danish friends for dinner, should I cook Danish food? Or Turkish or Iranian food? (Azar, lines 130-148)

What Azar describes in the quote above is supported by Pedersen (1995) who says that culture shock can manifest itself as a feeling of unknowing, where the individuals are not certain of what to expect from the others as well as what is expected of them This shows how difficult it can be when a person does not know the rules and traditions of a culture, which leads to insecurity and doubt that you are doing the right things. A more social approach to culture shock and what culture shock feels like is also defined by one informant. She mentions the lack of social support of family and friends as an important factor causing culture shock:

I think it is mainly being alone in a whole different environment than what you are used to. And having to deal with it, and not having the support of friends, family. […] And not knowing how to cope with that feeling. That’s a culture shock. Or if you are just really going somewhere, and you see that society is so much different. The people are acting very differently, their behaviour is very different to yours, and you don’t know how to adapt to that in the beginning. You don’t know the rules of how people behave. Then you can get a culture shock. (Liisa, lines 195-201)

Bochner and Furnham (1986) also describe how the lack of significant others can cause stress and mental illness, and how important social support networks can be in learning to cope with this stress. Another thing which can be seen in the quote above is that she mentions not knowing the rules of how people behave as a factor leading to culture shock. This is what can be seen in the culture learning theory, which focuses on the possibility to learn these rules of interaction in the new culture as a way to avoid culture shock.

Generally, our informants described culture shock as difficult to go through and mainly as something negative. When they, as seen above, describe culture shock as something unexpected it is clear that they refer to situations which surprise them negatively or situations which are either difficult or so different that they lead to frustrations and negative feelings. We can see that they refer to culture shock as a state which can occur either immediately or after a while in the new culture and when things start to improve, they no longer call it culture shock. This means that they do not see culture shock as a process in the same way as it is suggested in various theories, e.g. the U-curve model. If we use the U-curve model as an example, what our informants define as culture shock would be the bottom of the U-curve and what is referred to as the crisis. This could be due to the negative connotations of the word ‘shock’. Whether or not ‘culture shock’ is the right term to use in this case, will be discussed later.

# Five Stages of Culture Shock

In this chapter, we look at the ways that thirteen individuals experienced different stages of culture shock in Denmark. We analyse various situations, which our interviewees remembered and which they decided to share with us. By studying those incidents, we can see that our interviewees remembered going through certain processes of cross-cultural adaptation, as those diverse situations illustrate a certain “clash” between themselves and the host culture or the natives. To make the analysis as detailed as possible, we will categorise their stories into five stages. Those are the honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy and interdependence stages of culture shock.

## The Honeymoon Stage

Honeymoon is the first stage of culture shock, in which immigrants approach a new culture and society with a great deal of interest and excitement. At that moment, they preserve their back- home identities but do not follow the back-home rules, which is why coming to contact with the host culture seems to be a wonderful adventure (Pedersen, 1995). Accordingly, the stories of our informants, who went through the honeymoon of culture shock, were emphasising the exciting incidents and ideal pictures of the host country. Those recollections include three main categories: first contact with the environment, encounters with the Danish people and learning about the host society’s rules.

The first category includes idealised images of Denmark. Among our interviewees, Chen and Helene emphasised how clean and green the surroundings were (Chen, line 17, Helene, line 24), Liisa was positively surprised by the good quality of the biking roads and how wealthy Denmark seemed to her (Liisa, lines 21-23), whereas Anna remembered summery, warm weather the first days after arriving to Aalborg (Anna, line 24). The important thing about those impressions is that the informants did not seem to be bothered by the unfamiliarity of the environment. On the contrary, they felt stimulated by the multiplicity of new sensations:

The first impression was very good and fantastic. I liked everything very much, because it was the beginning of spring and we were bicycling a lot, and were watching first flowers in parks, and it was just great. Nikolai took me to different museums, or galleries and we saw lots of pictures. He likes art very much and he wanted to show me the Danish art. We went for example to the Museum of Modern Art, Kunsten, to private galleries. (Irena, lines 17-21)

The descriptions of the first impressions that we gathered among the interviewees include many flattering comments about the host country and seem to be a reaction to what Kalervo Oberg (1960: 143) calls “*superficial experience abroad”.* This fascination by the new environment is especially significant for two of the interviewees. Judging by their extremely positive accounts, Helene and Homaz compared their home and host countries in favour of Denmark. Helene regretted that Greece is not as open to students as Denmark, while Homaz, who is a refugee, found Denmark safe, which for him might be an attribute of real home:

(…) when I saw the university the first day. How beautiful and clean it was… and you know, you have access to everything, and there are no guards, you can come even in the middle of the night… and I didn’t have that in Greece. It’s difficult with the studies, difficult with everything, you have almost nothing, just the classrooms and… and here, everything is very open, very welcome. And I got jealous. “Oh, why wasn’t I born as a Dane?” Everything would be easier. (Helene, lines 57-61)

I just feel I arrived to a safe place, that’s a place maybe where I can live some years in safety. (Homaz, line 15)

The second category includes our informants’ observations and perceptions of the host society members. Again, the descriptions of the majority of our informants were approving and favourable. In Liisa’s opinion, the Danes were smiley and open (Liisa, lines 22-23), Chen told us how friendly they seemed to him (Chen, line 17) and Julia described how she perceived the Danish people and their attitudes the first months after moving to Aalborg:

I thought that people are very relaxed, and they looked very smiling and very happy, like… I thought all of them are doing yoga. (Julia, lines 16-18)

What is interesting, those observations are strictly subjective and seem to be superficial, as the informants made them by observing the natives, rather than interacting with them. This shows that their initial attitude towards the natives was positive and that they were not scared of further encounters with them.

Later, when those first encounters took place, our interviewees seemed to be open and prepared to interact. Chen’s experience of getting lost and searching for guidance among the native was his first cross-cultural encounter in Denmark and the positive outcome of his adventure brought him the feelings of reassurance and acceptance from the host country (Chen, lines 21- 23). Carmen from Romania described her first meeting with a Dane, which was new to her for two reasons. It was the first time she had a conversation with a Danish person and, at the same time, first conversation with a person who was not Romanian:

I was at Dan Hostel at the beginning. I had to stay there four- five weeks, until my contract… I think they were very kind- the reception… Because I had plenty of questions. How to get to town, where to go to eat and how can I change my money… Because when I came, I had no Danish kroner. I think I was bugging them. Minimum ten questions per day and usually it was the same lady, but she was extremely kind. She was always smiling. And I think my English wasn’t extremely good. It was the first time when I experienced talking English with a foreigner. It’s not the same as practicing in the class with a teacher and your fellows who speak the same language and can understand you and your accent as well… So I was talking very Eastern European English, but she was extremely kind (Carmen, lines 27-34).

In this case, Carmen shows how curious and ready she was to learn about the new environment. She is interested and euphoric as well as grateful for the helpfulness of the local. What is worth noticing, she makes an interesting shift by calling the Danish receptionist “a foreigner”. She reverses the roles and, in this particular situation, it is the receptionist, who is foreign in relation to Carmen, not opposite. This process of role shift might reflect Carmen’s ethnocentric attitude to her ethnic identity, which as Oberg writes (1960:144), places her race and nation in the centre. At the same time, this example shows how the newcomers in the honeymoon stage are detached from their new realities and unable to define what is factual and real. As one of the coping strategies, individuals might keep an illusion of not leaving their homes and thus might not realise that they are the ones, who are “foreign”. Instead, they hang on to their back-home identities- the only ones they are aware of and capable of producing at that time. In other words, during the first moments in unfamiliar environments, the newcomers are still encapsulated by their home identities and transfer those into the new culture. (Pedersen, 1995:78).

The third category mentioned by our interviewees involved the host society’s rules. Although unfamiliar with the environment as well as its customs, our informants presented a great deal of curiosity and eagerness to learn from the host culture. Azar remembered how unthoughtful he was by following biking rules from his home country. By learning that he needed to have traffic lights on his bike and wear a helmet, he made it easier and safer for himself to bike in Denmark (Azar, lines 58-61). Azar’s story illustrates how individuals sometimes forget to think of consequences of their behaviour and how they are unable to see themselves in the eyes of the locals (Pedersen 1995:78). One of the topics, which seemed to be important for several of the other informants, was the lack of social hierarchy in the society, which those informants were used to in their back- home cultures:

We were introduced to Danish attitudes, when we had our introduction week at school, and I was expecting that this is how it is here that people are very… on a “you level”. Even the… somebody important from the university was talking and he was saying that everybody says “you”… very personal, there is no hierarchy. And we were given free drinks, like beers on campus, which was also pretty interesting for me. And just kindness of people… It seemed to me that there is some kind of good, peer-to-peer system here. People are very aware of their environment and others around them. (Liisa, lines 28-33)

Often, the novelty of the situation gives the newcomers a feeling of freedom and adventure. Being exposed to a set of new rules, they are likely to break the back- home rules. It demonstrates a very open attitude and that the newcomers were not afraid of trying and learning things, which would not be customary in their home- cultures. By cycling in challenging conditions, Julia did something completely different to what she knew from her home culture:

 Cycling with miniskirt and high heels. I have never done that before. In Lithuania, bicycles are either for sports, or for leisure activities and it’s definitely not a tool to go to a job, and it’s not something that you can do with high heels… But when you want to go to party at night somewhere…Why not? (Julia, lines 57-57)

Although the majority of the comments on the environment, society and new rules were positive, we cannot say that all individuals experience it in the same way. For some of our informants, especially those, who came to Denmark in the wintertime, the first impressions were disadvantageous and they did not seem to experience honeymoon stage during their first days in Denmark. As the discomforts of changing the milieus can be overwhelming from the beginning, the feelings of loss and disorientation can appear from the first day in an unfamiliar environment and thus, disintegration, which usually follows honeymoon, can be the first stage of culture shock for some individuals. Accordingly, for a few of our informants, the first days or even hours spent in Denmark seemed to be unpleasant and confusing. Antoinette left sunny France to be welcomed by sad landscapes and cold November in Aalborg and the city itself fell far short of her expectations (Antoinette, lines 20-23). Iveta’s reaction to her first impressions was simply: *Very cold and very dark, and very expensive* (Iveta, line 18). Ondrej complained that he thought that coming to Denmark will be *something perfect*, but was unpleasantly surprised, when the university did not help him to find a convenient apartment (Ondrej, lines 21-27 and 33-38). Those examples illustrating exceptions to the rule prove that the process of adaptation is complicated and dynamic and that U-curve sequence is an imprecise scheme, which helps us understand the processes of cultural adaptation, rather than describe them accurately.

To sum up, we noticed that the majority of our informants welcomed the first contacts with the host culture and society with confidence, without the feelings of fear or distance. It complies with what Pedersen (1995: 27) writes about the beginning of the first stage of culture shock:

The first stage describes experiences where differences are intriguing and perceptions are positive. The emotions are typically excitement, stimulation, euphoria, playfulness, discovery and aventuresomeness. The behaviours are typically guided by curiosity, interest, self-assurance, and the collecting of interesting experiences or impressions.

During their honeymoon stage in Denmark, our informants’ various tourist-like encounters were enjoyed and accepted with curiosity and surprise. We divided the incidents that occurred during this first stage into three categories. Firstly, we looked at how the newcomers reacted to the unfamiliar environment and praised elements such as good weather, nature, infrastructure and cleanness of the surroundings. Secondly, we analysed how they perceived the host society, often describing the Danish people as smiling, helpful, friendly and relaxed. Thirdly, we investigated their attitude to the host society’s rules, where the interviewees discovered new things, like biking in high heels, or speaking with the authority figure as with an equal, which stimulated the feelings of adventure and exploration of the unknown. We can say that the honeymoon stage of culture shock was a liberating experience for those of our interviewees, who focused on enjoying and exploring the new environment. Finally, we realised that for a few of our interviewees the first impressions of Denmark were unfavourable, which suggests that they did not experience the honeymoon stage. Hence, we observed that the U-curve has an active, changeable structure and exceptions such as passing over a stage are possible.

## The Disintegration Stage

When the novelty of honeymoon stage of culture shock wears off, the newcomers are likely to start experiencing unexpected problems and inconveniences in their new environment. It is a sign that they enter the second stage of culture shock- disintegration (Pedersen, 1995:132). On this stage, our interviewees had to face problems connected to their first, real, cross-cultural encounters after leaving the safety of the honeymoon stage and the status of a tourist. This clash between the individual and the host culture was likely to be experienced as awkward and confusing, but sometimes also painful. On this stage, our informants started to feel the cross-cultural differences, which brought them feelings of self-blame, failure and loneliness, and resulted in tension between the individuals and the host culture. For some of our interviewees, already the first days in Denmark brought the feelings of insecurity, as soon as they faced the clash between the conveniences of home culture and inconveniences of host culture:

It was not a very good feeling. For the first, I had a job in France, a very good network, and then I left everything and came here to the city where I needed to start again from scratch and being in a not really welcoming environment was very hard. Suddenly I was only a woman at home with two children, when my husband was working. So my first months in Denmark have been quite hard. (Antoinette, lines 37-40)

“(…) and before I came here I was renting my own flat, I had a full time job, it was a normal life. And I came here and I was staying in a small cabin with six people from different countries – which is not a problem – but it was just too small. And, you know, it’s just ridiculous. (Ondrej, lines 24-26)

Because back at home, I was an active student, I was working, driving my car, and very self-supportive. While, when I came here, I was dependent on my scholarship, I was just a student, and I had no friends. I had to find everything new. It felt like a step back. (Julia, lines 65-67)

In those cases, the informants felt like moving to Denmark was a step back. Coming from different realities, where they had already established their status and convenient life, they gave it up for the uncertainty of a new life in an unknown place where their achievements had not yet been acknowledged. Moreover, Julia, who shared with us her positive observations in the previous chapter, seemed to have realised that the perceptions of an unfamiliar environment are not rigid, but can change according to circumstances.

In other incidents described by our informants, contact with the natives seemed to be a source of confusion, embarrassment or isolation. Antoinette told us, how afraid she was to insult her Danish acquaintances by following her home culture rules and visiting them unannounced (Antoinette, lines 125-130). Azar, on the other hand, was shocked to see that the family relations in Denmark could be more formal than in Iran or Turkey (Azar, lines 130-136), Elena is still afraid and shy to speak Danish, even during informal encounters with the locals (Elena, lines 100-102). For most of our informants, establishing good relations with the natives was significant, but hard to achieve. Some of the attempts to contact the natives were unsuccessful, leaving our informants alienated:

(…) in December, in the company of my husband, there was this Christmas party, where you had to make some decorations… And then all the families were invited and we went there, because we thought “Oh, it is so nice, a nice occasion to meet some of your colleagues and their families and the children”… and we spent the whole afternoon, nobody was speaking to us…That was very hard for me, because it was completely opposite of my temper. I am normally very open; I like people. But when you arrive like that, you are so unstructured that you don’t have this natural way of going to people. You are just waiting for a sign that you can. But we spent the whole day there, we were just so happy to go home- in a safe zone and, our own place. (Antoinette, lines 47-54)

Both Antoinette, her husband and two daughters felt rejected by the locals, and by using personal pronoun *we,* Antoinette emphasises, how those feelings can be shared. Such situations often make the newcomers isolate themselves in the company of people whom they find similar to themselves, such as their compatriots (Oberg, 1960:143). In Antoinette’s situation, the whole family took refuge in their home- their *safe zone*.

During those incidents, in which the host culture society was involved, individuals felt either isolated by the natives, or found it very hard to fit in and genuinely enjoy the company of Danish people. Pedersen (1995:115) writes that during disintegration, it is common to experience feelings of being alone in a crowd of people or being frightened, abandoned and helpless. The others of our informants found it hard to find Danish friends, and those difficulties were explained by the opinions that Danish people were *not welcoming* (Antoinette, line 35), *not overly friendly* (Anna, line 22) and prejudiced (Iveta, line 48).

Feeling unfit, unprepared and inadequate for the host culture was a very common topic for our interviewees too. Informal encounters and everyday activities that the natives take for granted could cause a lot of stress and feelings of imagined inadequacy among the newcomers. Irena for example felt watched by her new colleagues and afraid of making mistakes when she started in a new job (Irena, lines 203-205). The other informants had similar feelings of inadequacy, when they had to face the unfamiliar situations and troubles:

But when I started in Aarhus, I was completely… lots of my self-confidence disappeared, because I was outside of my context. I needed to make the same job, but in a completely another world, another working culture. In one way, you don’t start from scratch, but still, it is more difficult here, in Aalborg. (Antoinette, lines 103-106)

(…) and it’s just that you don’t know anything, sometimes you’re lost and you don’t know which tickets to buy and all these small things. When I went to the shop first time I was like wauw it’s so expensive and what am I going to eat here!? (Elena, lines 28-30)

In the beginning, you can be quite desperate. The first months you think: *Wow, where am I and what is my future?* (Antoinette, lines 236-237)

Those incidents explain that our informants felt a lack of control over their own lives when they first ran into difficulties. They felt vulnerable and they lacked skills, which would allow them to cope in those situations. Pedersen (1995: 79) warns that such disorientation - what the host society expects from an individual and what he or she can expect from the society- can, in extreme situations, lead to a complete disintegration of personality. The newcomers lack certain skills to cope with the various challenges and at the same time, the skills learned back-home are of no use in the new environment. In other words, the back-home identity is inadequate, while the new one has not yet been shaped. In a situation that was seemingly trivial, Azar, who wanted to feel accepted by the locals, seemed to be torn between sustaining transnational links to his home culture and expressing assimilationist preferences when he had to interact with the Danes:

What should I do now? What am I supposed to do in a situation like this? And when you invite Danish friends for dinner, should I cook Danish food? Or Turkish or Iranian food? (Azar, lines 147-149)

Disintegration is the most painful stage of culture shock and it proved so to our informants. When the newcomers are most vulnerable and helpless, the sensation of being different and isolated from the rest of the society feels permanent and very often results in depression. Azar remembered how he cried the first months after coming to Denmark due to longing for his family and feeling lonely (Azar, lines 151-153). Those emotional outbursts seem to be common and even minor problems can bring the feelings of homesickness. When Carmen got lost in Aalborg, she had a feeling of being alone in a wood, which made her burst into tears and call her mother in search of comfort (Carmen, lines 50-53). The other incidents illustrate a self-defeating, destructive attitude of the informants:

But within the second year being here, I really had a lot of missing, a lot of memories, and a small depression, I would say. (Julia, lines 72-73)

Every morning I wanted to slap my face, I had such a good life and why I had to come to this kind of stuff to try to challenge myself. That was… every single morning I was so depressed, like ‘why am I doing this to myself’. (Ondrej, lines 29-31)

Although the above-mentioned examples show how depressed individuals can become when going through the second stage, it was possible for some of our informants to overcome those feelings. Ondrej, who claimed that he felt *depressed*, showed an unusual understanding and need for action in a situation, when he was openly rejected as an *international* citizen by some of the landlords when he was searching for a better accommodation in Aalborg. Although mistreated, Ondrej with the assistance of his friends, managed to find a decent place to live in (Ondrej, lines 50-51). Liisa on the other hand, mentioned that due to her Danish appearance, she did not feel alienated, and as she said, she had not *experienced any bad xenophobic attitudes* (Liisa, lines 68-71).

Summing up, the disintegration stage of culture shock reminded waking up from a dream of the honeymoon stage, where our interviewees had to struggle with the difficulties and face various situations they were not mentally prepared to deal with. As we spoke with our informants, we learned about particular problems they encountered and those included inconveniences of moving and living in Aalborg, being alienated by the host society, feeling inadequate to cope with the new reality and being confused and depressed as results of those problems. According to Pedersen (1995:79), the processes of disintegration are results of a sharp contrast between the two realities:

“It becomes necessary to solve practical problems in the host culture and move beyond the role of a spectator. This stage involves a sense of confusion and disorientation where differences between the home and host cultures become very noticeable causing tension and frustration.”

The disintegration stage proved to be the most uncovering and vulnerable moment for the majority our informants. It could be described as reaching the bottom of the U- curve, where the sense of failure and complete disorientation become the newcomers’ new reality, until they progress to the next stage of adaptation. The interesting observation we made was that although many described themselves as *depressed*, *dependent*, *unstructured*, *lost* and *desperate*, still some of our informants managed to escape those feelings. Due to different factors, like help of their networks or belonging to a group of non-visible minorities, they found it easier to change their attitudes towards their own situation or sustain the positive image of the locals.

## The Reintegration Stage

The third stage of culture shock brings yet different emotions and behaviours to individuals. When the feelings of hostility and anger become directed towards the host culture and society, it indicates that the individuals enter the reintegration stage (Pedersen 1995:134). At the same time, this stage is a starting point of recovery from the bottom of the U-curve of culture shock, where the individuals develop a new identity by combining elements of their back-home identity with the host culture. In consequence, they “reintegrate” (Pedersen, 1995: 200). Those of our informants, who seemed to have experienced reintegration, provided us with various examples of incidents, during which, they revealed a more active disposition and certain energy to fight for their well-being if they felt threatened by the host society. At the same time, they redirected feelings of anger, frustration and blame from themselves, what they were likely to do during disintegration, towards the host culture. This move indicates recovery from the state of depression and self-pity as well as upward movement on the U-curve of adaptation.

The most obvious examples of reintegration described by our informants included incidents in which they felt anger and blame towards the host society. Those feelings were evoked in situations, in which our interviewees felt discriminated, mistreated or stereotyped due to their status as foreigners. When we asked our informants if they remembered any particular situations, in which they felt unwelcome in Denmark, many of the answers we received were explaining how the host society perceives them as *foreign* in relation to themselves and labels their behaviour as “unfit” or unsuitable. Carmen felt as if she was a part of a system in which the officials stereotype all the foreigners’ behaviour as questionable. In consequence, she felt mistreated by the system when she was expelled from her language school due to her classmates’ poor attendance (Carmen, lines 63-72). By using a metaphor *“they put us all in one big box”*, Iveta illustrated that she considers the Danish people as prejudiced towards immigrants, adding that the Danes have a perception of all immigrants as thieves (Iveta, lines 48-50). Antoinette had a similar experience, when she felt that she was a part of a discriminated minority:

And at this time, there was some elections, and there was a lot of bad articles about foreigners, how they were eating the bread of the Danish people. It was sad and annoying me. I thought it was a very short way of thinking. (Antoinette, lines 216- 218)

We have noticed that such situations often resulted in defensive attitudes. Homaz remembered arguing and fighting with his racially prejudiced neighbour who would not allow him use the common cellar (Homaz, lines 20-25). Irena’s example illustrates how such anger-evoking situations can produce both the need for protection of co-nationals and rebellion towards the host culture persons:

It was infuriating, when she (mother-in-law) was finding different articles in the newspapers, or were mentioning some opinions, or footages from TV, and she was saying: “There are Polish people, or people from Eastern Europe, who come here and steal everything and take it away to their own countries” and “All the Polish people are thieves”. It was infuriating me. I didn’t agree, but at some point she got this stereotype, she started speaking very ill of the Polish. But maybe it was due to our relations. We didn’t like each other, and we still don’t like each other. (Irena, lines 46-51)

Those examples can relate to what Pedersen (1995: 134) writes about the newcomers’ condition during reintegration: *The individual will perceive herself or himself as vulnerable or under attack and will be likely to defend herself or himself and take a self-protective position towards the host culture.*

The other incidents, frequently mentioned by our informants, were situations in which they felt isolated by the Danes due to their inability of speaking fluent Danish. Antoinette shared with us that problems with the language often seemed to cause frustrations for her. She complained about being misunderstood or not understood outside of the language school, such as in shops. During those incidents, she directed the entire blame for misunderstandings towards the host society (Antoinette, lines 89-92). Elena claimed that Danish people do not try to speak Danish with foreigners, although it helps to practice the language skills (Elena, lines 192-194) and Irena used to feel frustrated and annoyed, when she was directed to in English:

For example, as far as a conversation in Danish... If somebody finds out I am a foreigner, they observe me and ask where I am from, or switch to English, which is very annoying. Then, I don’t feel any acceptance, that they want to accept me as a Danish citizen, but they see me as a foreigner in this country. That I am here only temporarily. Or I will never be treated the same way like a Danish woman, and that they will speak to me as equals, and in Danish, because it will help me. I don’t want them to speak English to me, when I can speak Danish. (Irena, lines 136-141)

Here, Irena made a significant connection between using the Danish language and being accepted as an equal by the host society. Verbal communication appeared to be of a huge importance to our informants and if they were not allowed to speak and be directed to in Danish, they felt diminished and inferior to the rest of the society. In those and other language related examples, the interviewees were non-visible minorities and some of them only perceived themselves as discriminated when they had to communicate with the Danes, which was the moment when the host society noticed dissimilarities. In a situation described by Azar, who is Turkish-Iranian, his dissimilarity could be observed non-verbally:

So I’m standing there waiting and the bus comes and I get contact with the driver, but he doesn’t stop the bus, so that was kind of a bad experience because I was thinking “Why, why didn’t he stop? Is it because I’m darker…” (Azar, lines 118-120)

We should remember that individuals going through reintegration are likely to victimise themselves and consequently, it is possible that some of the misfortune and inadequacies they experience are imagined. Still, as they seem real for the newcomers, the most natural way to deal with them and recover from the shock is to blame the others. What is curious, often the individuals find it justifiable to direct this blame towards the whole society, instead of individuals. During our interview, Elena said: *Sometimes it feels like, I don’t like them or I don’t like Aalborg* (Elena, lines 67-68). This generalisation corresponds with what Oberg (1960: 143) writes about how the newcomers perceive the host society members: *“(…) they must be insensible and unsympathetic to you and your worries. The result, ‘I just don’t like them.’”* Those are some of the reasons, why reintegration is a stage, in which the host society persons find it hard to be around the newcomers. Those are too likely to flare into anger in various situations and openly offend and reject the host culture. Still, some of our informants succeeded to strike first friendships with the locals and this kind of help and support of the natives seems crucial in the process of gaining a more balanced perspective on both host and home cultures (Pedersen, 1995:135). Irena remembered how contact with a patient native helped her carry on despite the obstacles:

But later, I went to library Trekanten and attended language café, and it was free lessons of Danish, and I met Rikke. I thought she was just so great and so nice, and very helpful, and patient. And she asked me about lots of things, differences between Poland and Denmark… And she was interested in my feelings, how I feel. Not like other Danes. They were all the time asking if I liked it in Denmark, and when they heard “No”, they were surprised. Because you had to like it, because you came from Eastern Europe. (Irena, lines 166-171)

Although reintegration is experienced as the most volatile stage, when the individuals express the need to blame the host society for various misunderstandings and misfortune, it is said to be the first stage of progress, when the newcomers develop the ability to express their feelings about the new environment and take a position on the host culture (Pedersen, 1995). Those skills enable them to begin to adapt in the new environment by integrating their back-home identity with the elements of the new culture. Azar reflected that although it was hard, he knew how he had to adjust to the new culture:

I felt actually that it wasn’t myself but it was Denmark that was a problem, because it was the Danish culture I had to learn. I already knew who I was, but I didn’t know the Danish culture and that was difficult in the beginning. (Azar, lines 143-145)

All things considered, we observed that at least some of our interviewees experienced the third stage of culture shock. The most recognisable feelings and behaviours accompanying reintegration was anger and blame, both directed towards the members of the host society. Pedersen (1995:134) explains why those two reactions are dominant in our informants’ behaviour:

As in psychological depression, anger is frequently the fastest way out of the depressive state. Instead of taking responsibility for misunderstandings, pain and suffering in the new setting, persons in the third stage are more likely to blame others.

We can see that the incidents which evoked our informants’ anger included being categorised as *immigrants* or *foreigners* by the host society as well as the host society’s discriminating perceptions of the newcomers as *bread eaters* and *thieves*. The other incidents included being isolated due to being dissimilar in relation to the host society, which was reflected in the informants’ skin colour or the inability to speak fluent Danish. Although this volatile phase is hard to cope with, we found out that still, it is possible for the newcomers to find friends among the host society members. Their help and assistance allows the newcomers to obtain a more balanced perspective on the host culture, and start to develop a preliminary understanding of it in order to move on and progress in the process of adaptation.

## The Autonomy Stage

If we sum up the first three stages of culture shock as accordingly phases of euphoria, self-blame and hostility, we can discuss the fourth stage as a phase, which is a result of experiences lived through the previous three. Autonomy illustrates the moment, in which the individuals develop a more objective perspective on both the host and home cultures, they become better functioning in the host society, regain the ability to enjoy the new culture and begin to learn and use new skills in order to cope with the difficulties of everyday life (Pedersen, 1995). Not all of our informants showed signs of autonomy, but those who did, illustrated capability to relax in the host culture, as they presented themselves as guides or experts in situations in which they shared their knowledge with those who were more unfamiliar with the host culture. Additionally, they showed a balanced view on both host and home cultures and they were able to observe advantages of living in Denmark.

While analysing our interviews, we noticed a repeated pattern - most of our informants presented themselves as specialists in at least some elements of the Danish culture to their friends, or acquaintances, who were unfamiliar with it. This particular behaviour manifested itself in situations, in which the interviewees wished to help their friends with various difficulties, assist in solving problems, or answer different questions. While speaking about those situations, our informants were mostly presenting themselves as experienced old hands. Anna for example felt that she understood the host society well enough to *warn* her new, foreign colleagues about what attitudes they can expect from the Danish society (Anna, lines 90-91). Carmen called herself *old hand* and told us how she managed to help her friends, who were new at the university and who inquired about the teachers, exams and project work. She helped both her co-national and international friends, because, as she said: *“(…) it was very easy for me to speak from my experience at the university”* (Carmen, line 87). Antoinette told us how she worked voluntarily as a mentor and *took care* of the new families coming to Aalborg (Antoinette, lines 239-244). The following example illustrates how transnational channels can be used for culture communication:

There is a friend of mine, who is from Estonia, who is living there right now, and she is thinking maybe to come here next year. And of course, she is asking me a lot of questions and I am telling her all the answers. I know also others, who are trying to come here to study… (…)How are the studies, is it worth coming there, what’s the society like, what are the people like… And I actually really think that there are not a lot of problems here, but you have to have some money to come here. (Liisa, lines 78-84)

Liisa’s story showed us how transnational connections allow sharing the knowledge on the host culture beyond the borders of the place where this culture is practiced. Although Liisa and her co-ethnic network live in different environments and Liisa’s friends had never visited Denmark, she was still able to transfer the information on elements of her host culture such as studies, life and society. Subsequently, this example shows how right Hannerz (1999) was, when he said that it is impossible to subordinate cultures to certain societies. Liisa is a link between the Danish and the Estonian culture and by functioning in both, she is ready to share it, redefine it and spread it during transnational contacts with her co-ethnic networks. In simple words, as long as cross-cultural encounters exist, we cannot define borders to cultures.

Autonomy is a stage, in which the individuals cease to focus on finding the differences between the host and home cultures and favour the latter; on the contrary, they begin to see both of them in perspective. This new skill allowed our interviewees to make balanced, objective comparisons between the host and home countries, which was reflected in our interviews. In many situations, the protective attitude towards the home culture and society, present in the previous stage, was non-existent during autonomy, and it became replaced by what seemed to be an objective criticism of the informants’ homelands. Additionally, the informants seemed to find various advantages and privileges of living in Denmark in comparison with their homelands. Iveta for example found the system of job recruitment easier and more efficient in Denmark than in Latvia (Iveta, lines 103-105). Chen on the other hand noticed how Danish people are kinder to the others, what does not happen often in China, where he found people to be busier with their own lives (Chen 25-27). Carmen told us how corrupted Romania is and how helpless people are without being a part of this corrupted system. She did not experience any situations that would indicate that Denmark is similar in this respect and subsequently she criticised the Romanian system (Carmen, lines 58-61). She added that in Romania it is necessary for people to fight for their rights and struggle with the public sector, while in Denmark she did not have to be concerned about any of those issues (Carmen, lines 129-135). Elena and Liisa compared the two cultures and societies and reflected on the differences:

Well, when you get used to it here then you don’t feel it so much, but when I go back home for holiday you can feel that it’s really different here, it’s so ordered and everything is clean and nice here… of course in the beginning it’s more contrast, the people you can really see social layers there from how people dress, and here it’s not so obvious. All the people are more or less on the same level or at least they don’t show it… so it’s nice that everything works here. (Elena, lines 80-84)

Yes. We had a lot of this kind of discussions. Like how the society is different, and they start to recognize, how good they have it here. Sort of reflecting on their own society: “Yeah, yeah, we have a very good, very safe society here”. Some people say that the taxes are too high and complaining about it, but in the end they will always say: “But it goes to a good place”. (Liisa, lines 186-189)

It is curious, how Elena’s attitude towards two different elements of the host culture varies when we compare two of her statements. In the previous chapter, we quoted her: *it feels like, I don’t like them* (Elena, line 67), while here we have just mentioned a situation in which she was ready to approve the host culture and by admitting: *it’s nice that everything works here* (Elena, line 84), she showed us the progress from the blaming attitude towards a balanced observation. This is one of many examples which illustrate how individuals are progressing during the process of cultural adaptation and how adapting to certain elements might be perceived harder than to others. As Elena used the present tense, both when she expressed dislike towards the host society and when she showed respect to the host society’s rules, we assume that she is in the process of both reintegration and autonomy at the moment. It corresponds with the complex nature of culture shock and it points out that it is not easy, perhaps unmanageable, to define or categorise the individuals’ behaviours according to one of five stages of culture shock. As their life situations are often complicated and develop with different intensity in different circumstances, the individuals might present contradictory attitudes towards two or more elements of the host culture.

 In the second example, not only Liisa but also her Danish friends weighed up the differences between Estonia and Denmark. What is more, Liisa’s stories make her peers reevaluate their own society and see it in a better light. This situation explains what Castles and Miller mean when he writes that the migratory processes influence both the migrant and the receiving society (Castles and Miller, 2008), and what Bochner (2003:6) conveyed when he wrote that *“sojourner-host member relationship is very much a reciprocal transaction, and that both parties can experience ‘culture shock’.”* In the process of knowledge exchange between the newcomer and the host society, the standards, beliefs and ideas are likely to be reassessed.

All those examples illustrate that the autonomy stage is allowing the individuals to see a broader picture of the two cultures. Our informants were not protective towards their host cultures, nor hostile towards Denmark, but developed a better awareness of two cultural contexts and began to *“establish an objective, balanced, and impartial view of the whole situation”* (Pedersen, 1995: 201), which could not be observed during the first three stages of culture shock.

Another significant behaviour indicating autonomy was manifested in situations, in which our informants were better functioning in various contexts. They could cope, although imperfectly, with a variety of challenges and problems. It resulted in a sense of control and a better ability to relax and enjoy the host culture. Antoinette’s way of regaining her self-confidence in relation to the society was in realising that Danish people are different than the French and in accepting those disparities, which helped her to *“put things in perspective”* (Antoinette, lines 185- 191). Helene’s relations with her friends got better when she understood that she could not transfer the social rules which she was used to in her home country to Denmark (Helene, lines 121-123). Additionally, she got more self-confident and proud of herself due to her increasing abilities in adapting in her work culture and coping with various interactions, like speaking on the telephone in a foreign language and helping others:

Sometimes, when our secretary has lunch break, then I have to answer her phone, and there are some old people who call, or foreigners, and they are not so good in Danish, or they don’t understand. I understand them better than a Dane, who is perfect in Danish. They say that I have more patience with them. They are not embarrassed to call me. I mean, I have people calling directly to me, from Sweden, or Norway, because they say I understand them better. And I get happy, because I am not that bad (…). I didn’t know that I had them (skills). But like you say, we learn, we try to adapt. (Helene, lines 113-119).

Moreover, we heard about the situations, in which the informants were able to laugh about the cultural differences and resultant challenges or misunderstandings. An interesting thought is that in the previous stages, those misunderstandings might have evoked the feelings of inadequacy or hostility among the newcomers. Irena for example shared with us how she tried to teach one of her colleagues a few words in Polish and how they both laughed about the differences between the Polish and Danish languages (Irena, lines 199-202). Julia’s example illustrates how the newcomers learn to adopt a more relaxed attitude towards the stereotypes:

First of all, many people thought that I am some kind of stranger drinking vodka a lot, and in Lithuania there are bears and wolves, and people walk naked in villages. I mean all kind of non-sense. I even made jokes, like… I say with serious face this kind of things to them and they look with big eyes, and they believe in it. And then, I just laugh of course, it’s just a joke. (Julia, lines 160-164)

Oberg (1960: 143) reflected that as soon as individuals regain their sense of humour and make fun of other people or even themselves, they approach recovery.

All things considered, we noticed that those of our interviewees who experience autonomy, revealed signs of an enhanced accommodation in the host culture. They were capable of guiding other newcomers less familiar with the host culture, also using their transnational connections; they could identify various advantages of living in Denmark, at the same time making the host society to reevaluate their standards; they displayed skills to deal with various challenges and demonstrated a relaxed attitude towards the host culture. Autonomy continues the upward movement on the U-curve of adaptation, when the individuals feel liberated from the components of the previous stages. As Pedersen (1995: 243) writes: *“There is little of the illusion of the first stage nor the pain of the second stage nor the anger of the third stage”.* Although regress to honeymoon, disintegration or reintegration is still possible, reaching an autonomous attitude in at least some of the everyday interactions was an important achievement for many of our informants.

## The Interdependence Stage

Interdependence is the last stage on the U-curve sequence and it illustrates the final effects of adaptation in a host culture, where the individuals feel settled in the host culture, accepted by its society and fluent in functioning in both the home and host cultures. On this stage, the individuals who are confident users of both home and host culture rules are likely to develop bicultural identities, which is the ultimate aim of cultural adaptation (Pedersen, 1995:245).

Only few of our interviewees showed signs of interdependence, as this stage is hard to reach. However, during the interviews, we noticed elements of interdependence among those of our informants, who reached equal understanding and acceptance of the home and host cultures, enjoyed true friendships with the locals, applied new accommodating skills and became satisfied and confident about living in the host culture. In all those examples, individuals accepted the differences between the two societies and began to perceive their changed life situation as a norm, rather than a temporary situation.

The first indication of interdependence manifested itself when one of our informants was able to define a common ground for both cultures, instead of finding and focusing on what separates them. In such situations, when individuals start to function customarily in both cultures, their identities expand to include elements of both home and host cultures, which shows a positive, developmental outcome of going through the process of cross-cultural adaptation:

For example, when we go to France in summer, we are often in France for four weeks, but when we come home “Oh, yes, we are home!”. It’s very surprising, because when we are in France we feel home, but when we come back here, we feel home too. (Antoinette, lines 369-371)

This example is important for us, because it demonstrates how individuals can accept two different cultures, and value the first one just as much as the latter. When Antoinette said that she feels attachment to both her home and host country, she revealed bicultural preferences, which, according to Pedersen is a final goal of interdependence (Pedersen, 1995: 245). Moreover, later Antoinette said *you can’t really judge a culture. It takes time* ( Antoinette, line 425), thus she showed certain open-mindedness that can only be learnt on the fifth stage of culture shock, when individuals realise that:

(…) no single culture is inherently better or worse than any other culture but must be experienced and judged according to its own rules (Pedersen, 1995: 246).

In cases of other informants, we could not find another as balanced and impartial view on culture. On the contrary, our informants where emphasising the feeling of being *in-between* two cultures (Iveta, lines 116-118) and very few could say that they feel belonging to both their home and host cultures. Those, who admitted feelings of attachment to Denmark, often added that it is not in *100%* (Irena, lines 134-135), or that *it becomes better* (Helene, line 142). Some claimed belonging exclusively to their home cultures (Ondrej, lines 155-160), or just the opposite- belonging only to the Danish culture (Carmen, lines 156-161).

Other stories, which signalled interdependence to us was when our informants gave us an impression of bonding with the host society members and, according to Oberg, finding local networks is the most useful strategy of dealing with culture shock (Oberg, 1960: 145). Some of our interviewees could indeed enjoy genuine friendships with the locals, and were able to establish common ground for both home and host cultures. Azar, who had no friends when he came to Denmark, described the advantages of a true friendship with a native, which illustrates a high level of acceptance from both him and the host society member:

Yes, we have a good contact or relationship… and a caring nature with each other, for example me and my friends often talk about problems we have, also personal problems. So my best friend, we often talk and he comes with some good suggestions for me and when you talk to someone like that you feel a lot lighter. (Azar, lines 114-115)

As mentioned before, interdependence is the last, perhaps most difficult stage to reach, as not every individual is ready to accept the cultural differences between societies and we do tend to prefer our home cultures. In Anna’s case, the lack of Danish friends was the reason, why her *Danish* *home* is different and perhaps inferior to her *American home* (Anna, lines 82-86). Antoinette on the other hand, seemed to reach the balance in her preference to meet with the French and the Danish. She told us how she likes spending her free time with her neighbours, whom she called her *real friends* (Antoinette, line 377). She explained that often they organise shared diners together and that her neighbours *expect* to experience a French evening in her house just as she expects Danish dinners from her neighbours. At the same time, both parts learn more about each other’s cuisine, incorporating in their everyday life what is good from both of those cultures. As she said *I take what I like from the culture, but I also keep what I like from my own culture* (Antoinette, lines 383-394). This example shows, what Baumann (1996) and Hannerz (1999) mean, when they write about how flexible cultural borders are these days and that exchange of cultural elements have become more straightforward and two-directional. In other words, it proves how both the newcomers and the locals are able, through cross-cultural encounters, to find a balance between different cultures. Subsequently, cultural identities can be reshaped and developed into bicultural preferences. In this particular example, as it is both Antoinette and her neighbours who take part in the process of sharing their *cultural repertoires* (Hannerz, 1999), the process of influence relates to both parts.

In other cases, our informant illustrated how she had incorporated elements of the host and home cultures in order to develop a new life in the host country. By not completely rejecting any of the cultures, but accommodating the differences, both our informant and her colleague showed respect and sensitivity to both cultures:

And sometimes they joke: *Yes, you are French, so that’s why you are doing things like that*. It is just a joke. But sometimes I think it is good to revindicate: *I do it that way, because I am French*. I do that sometimes with my boss. I say*: Excuse me, I will tell you straight away, because it’s my culture*. But he says: *It is fine, because I now where you are*. (Antoinette, lines 346-349)

It seemed a significant element of interdependence, when our informants and the host society cease to find the differences during cross-cultural encounters, but learn how to negotiate and respected each other’ s rules.

The last element indicating interdependence among our informants was related to the feelings of authentic satisfaction, safety and happiness due to living in the host country. A few of our interviewees concluded that they are positive about their future in the host country. At this moment, the individuals not only accepted their host culture, but also enjoyed it:

When we were In Poland, lots of things has changed. Lots of people started complaining that it’s getting worse… that it’s harder to keep a job, or that employees are horrible and don’t respect the employees’ rights, and for example that they cannot get holidays, or if they get holidays, it’s without payment, although it is illegal in Poland, and everybody is to receive payment for their holidays. And then, I was happy that I live in Denmark and I don’t have such problems. That it is nice to come back to my great boss and fantastic colleagues. I don’t have such problems and I would not like to have them. (Irena, lines 70-76)

And I’m happy to be living here in Denmark. And I don’t think I wanted to go back to Turkey, maybe to see my family and my sister, but not back to live there. I’ve started a new life here in Denmark and I’ve chosen my studies…(Azar, lines 76-78)

I feel very welcome, I feel really wonderfully. I am a foreigner. Yes, but it does not really matter. First, there were lots of foreign doctors, but people see you more as an individual, not necessary where you come from. It does not really matter. (Antoinette, lines 72-75)

For Irena, the feeling of safety and fulfilment at her workplace produced satisfaction; for Azar starting a new life and finding a purpose was crucial, and for Antoinette, the convenient life started when she accepted her status of a *foreigner* and understood that it does not mean isolation from the host society.

During the analysis of the last stage of culture shock, we realised that only a few of our interviewees showed signs of interdependence. As we know, not all individuals can achieve the bicultural identity and some might continue their adaptation for a longer period of time. What we observed among our interviewees, was how they developed a feeling of belonging to both home and host cultures, without favouring any of them; how they enjoyed friendships with the natives, reaching across the cultures; how they learned new skills to accommodate the differences and how they produced the feelings of attachment and satisfaction to live in the host country. We cannot state though that they have accomplished cultural adaptation, as according to Pedersen (1995: 245):

The fifth stage is not the end point or culmination of development but a state of dynamic tension between self and culture that opens new perspectives

Thus, we can expect that our informants will continue their further development and benefit from the positive outcomes of their adaptation.

## The Beginning and the End of the U-curve

Generally speaking, this part of our project studies immigrants’ reactions to the unknown and unfamiliar environments and their progress in adapting to those milieus, which is related to learning new skills, coping with the difficulties and reidentification of themselves and the others.

Our project includes stories of the past and present-day experiences of a heterogeneous group of individuals, who being of different backgrounds, chose to cope with their cultural adaptation in various ways. By looking at numerous stories of our informants, we could see examples of different behaviours, skills and strategies aiming at cultural adaptation in the host society and we decided to analyse them according to stages of cultural development.

We should remember that it is not easy, perhaps not possible to evaluate the level of the newcomers’ adaptation and our project is only an attempt to outline what the newcomers’ attitudes towards the home culture, host culture and themselves are and how they change when they are in the process of adaptation. On the whole, many of our informants, by applying diverse copying skills in various stress situations, showed signs of more than one stage, which confirms that adaptation is not an event, but rather a process. If we look at the description of this process and compare what the theorists and our informant said about it, we will observe certain similarities:

“(…) U-curve starting at a higher stage of fascination, adventure, optimism, or excitement called a honeymoon stage. This is followed by the feelings of inadequacy, disappointment, disillusion, alienation and self-blame as the direction of progression drops from a high to the lowest point on the U-curve. Finally, there is a reorientation, or recovery stage, where the new situation is viewed in perspective, positive and negative elements are balanced, and the person’s morale is restored.” (Coffman and Harris, 84 in Pedersen, 1995: 26).

After those 4 years, I feel much, much better. I mean, in the beginning I felt great. Then, I had a phase, in which I felt not very great, but it was mainly because of the personal reasons, because of my mother-in-law… bad relations with Nikolai’s family. But now I am working as a pharmacist and I feel great. I have a great boss, great colleagues. (Irena, lines 78-81)

This general summary of the process is only an indicator of the character of cross-cultural encounters, as immigrants experiencing culture shock can progress, as well as regress into previous stages, which indicates that U-curve can be two-directional. What is more, during our analysis we have observed that being on more than one stage is also common. We have observed that although culture shock had its negative, almost harmful effect on some of our informants, the majority could also define certain skills they learned to improve their live and status since they came to Denmark. Moreover, many of the informants presented their experiences of the bottom of the U-curve as their past experiences and were hopeful to proceed further in the direction of complete recovery and even better adaptation. In this chapter, we tried to exemplify various incidents and behaviours indicating our interviewees’ progress of adaptation, the next chapter will focus on the ABC framework of culture shock, namely on the analysis of how our informants learn, cope and identify themselves in Denmark.

# How do our informants experience culture learning?

Within the culture learning approach, the shock or stress which can occur in an unfamiliar culture is seen as a reaction to the lack of new culture-specific skills that are required to engage in social interactions in the new culture. This approach therefore leads to practical guidelines for intervention and behavioural social skills training in order to acquire these skills (Zhou et al, 2008). The fact that different cultural rules exist in different countries and that knowing these rules is important for interacting with people from the host culture is something our informants have also noticed while being in Denmark. In the following quote, Azar describes his first visit to a Danish nightclub, where he realised that he needed to learn new ways of behaving in social situations:

Yes, I remember the very first time I went out to a night club in Denmark. I had been here about a month, so I didn’t know the language so well. And then in a night club it’s not the same culture, you have to pay more attention to girls… that was actually, I wouldn’t say a bad experience, but I have experienced that Danes then can be a little… not as warm as we are, more cold in a way. (Azar, lines 30-33)

From this situation, Azar learned that he needs to behave differently when interacting with Danish girls as well as with his Danish friends, who he thinks are colder than what he is used to from Turkey. He saw it as a bad experience because he did not know the social rules he needed to follow in this situation. Antoinette also recognises that different rules and codes exist. However she sees Europe countries as having the same rules and mentions China as an example of a place with completely different rules and codes.

I am European, we have the same rules, values… What will that be for me, if I was coming from China, or from somewhere else in the world? Where the culture and the codes are completely different? (Antoinette, lines 132-134)

Here Antoinette does not only speak of difference in culture and values which can be seen as something abstract, but she mentions specifically the different rules and codes of interaction , and later in the interview, Antoinette also describes how she thinks it is possible to learn a new culture by speaking about it to people (Antoinette, lines 321-322). This indicates that she, as with the culture learning approach, believes that it is possible to learn these specific rules and codes through preparation or training.

In the culture learning theory, it is often mentioned as one of the strengths of this approach that it can lead to practical guidelines and training models as mentioned above. Especially Bochner and Furnham (2003) have argued strongly for the usefulness of this. This training could include identifying the difficult situations and training people to handle these before or just after arriving in the new culture (Zhou et al, 2008). We asked our informants if they had any kind of training or culture learning before they came here and if there was anything they would have liked to know about before coming to Denmark. Most of our informants said that they did a little research about Denmark before coming to the country, but they did not go through any real cultural training or preparation. Chen explained that when he left China to come to Denmark in 2010 it was not possible to find much information about the country or Aalborg University, but now the conditions have improved so it is possible for Chinese people to learn more about Denmark and the Danish culture:

Now it’s better because in 2010 Denmark to the Chinese is as remote as the moon, but now we have this sino-danish center in china and Danish embassy in china. They are very active to offer some events for Chinese people to know more about Denmark. So now, I mean, for these new students who come here they are quite confident and quite comfortable about it. (Chen, lines 102-105)

From this example, we can see that culture learning is being used to prepare people for a new culture, and Chen says that he thinks this does make it easier for Chinese people to come to Denmark today. However, most of our informants, including Chen, said that it is nice to know a little about the country before arriving, but that the major things such as learning the language should wait until after arriving in the country. We do see that most of our interviewees have gone through some kind of culture learning after arriving in Denmark, either formally through their language course or a presentation about Danish culture, or they have learned different rules of behaviour and interaction by themselves. Antoinette went to a presentation:

I have been to a presentation “The Danes Are Weird”, have you seen that one? That’s something Expat is driving. They came once in Aalborg. It was just so funny, because it was so cliché. […]For example, one of the things I’ve learnt at work is that people don’t really like when you confront them about something. They don’t like conflict situations. You need to adjust your own way. If you have something to say more directly to your colleagues, you will still do that, but you will be more careful in the way you say things… And on the other side, people can be very rude here. You have to find out that it is just a way of speaking. It is not something you can learn in books, you need to experience it (Antoinette, lines 123-132)

The presentation Antoinette went to was after arriving in Denmark. As she says, it is difficult to only learn social interactions from a book because they need to be experienced first-hand, which could be the reason why our informants do not think it is important to learn about them before arriving in the country. At work she has learned how to handle various situations and how to interact with Danes, which is a good example of culture learning. Azar, on the other hand, has learned all the small details and rules of behaviour by observing other people and by being curious and asking a lot of questions, which is also a method for learning about new culture-specific rules.

For cross-cultural social skills training, an understanding of the differences in communication patterns is vital. Research has shown that problems arise mostly in connection with elements that regulate social encounters; especially the non-verbal aspects of social interaction (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001). Irena gives a good example of the fact that being able to communicate in the same language is not enough and that other aspects of communication are important as well, to ensure successful interaction:

I don’t remember whether he spoke English, or Danish, or half and half… And then, he said something, and I replied, and he concluded, that I don’t understand Danish sense of humour, and that I didn’t get it. It was very sad. Because Danish sense of humour is very particular, and in the beginning, it wasn’t funny for me at all. Vulgar, or barbarian maybe, and it wasn’t funny for me at all. But for them, it was funny. Maybe, I took it too personally, but he kind of… underestimated my intelligence. (Irena, lines 39-43)

Irena here talks about understanding the Danish humour, and because she did not understand it or find it funny, she felt left out of the conversation and even felt that her intelligence was being underestimated. This shows that there are many aspects of communication that a person in a new culture needs to learn. Another example comes from Helene:

This with the university, where I got invitations for parties and I am like “Oh yeah! I am coming!”, and then it says: “Bring your own drinks”. And I got very angry, because I was thinking: “Ok, do they think I am an alcoholic? What if I want to bring a cake?”. Cause we are like that in Greece. We always say who will bring the cake, who will bring potato chips, who will bring a bottle of whisky, or vodka, or…. And I like that better, because I don’t drink, I am not a drinker. So I really hated, when I got those invitations. (Helene, lines 183-187)

Helene mentions this situation as a ‘slap on the face’, and it is a good example of a situation where a simple phrase in an invitation gets misunderstood because of the cultural differences which lie behind it. Antoinette emphasised how important communicating in Danish is for interaction with Danes. As she said, all Danes speak English very well and make an effort to speak English, but in the end they only start to pay attention to you when you speak Danish (Antoinette, lines 95-96). Ondrej also said that it is easy to get by with English, but that he feels better if he is able to be polite by answering people in Danish.

Besides the verbal and non-verbal communication, several of our informants mention particularly one aspect where the Danish rules of interaction have surprised them, and which is something they have found hard to deal with. Azar, Helene and Antoinette have all learned that Danish people like it to be planned when they are meeting friends and that they do not like people to show up unannounced. Azar and Antoinette learned this information through other people, but Helene found out herself:

I know that the Danes need to know when we are going to meet. You cannot just call them and say: “Should I come to your place for a cup of coffee?”. They would get really stressed. They will have a heart attack. So I have stopped doing that. Or they will think: “Have we made an appointment and I forgot? I am so sorry!” (Helene, lines 120-123)

Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) explain that most often people are unaware of these cultural differences and rules and only become aware of those rules if they have at some point broken them. This is what we can see with Helene; she realised that her Danish friends were too stressed if she wanted to come over spontaneously, so she stopped doing it and concluded that this is one of the rules of interacting with Danes. Another thing our interviewees mentioned as difficult to learn is the informality and lack of hierarchy when it comes to workplaces. This is another aspect of social interaction where there are different rules and codes, which are good to learn in order to be successful. However, even though they find it difficult, our informants mentioned this informality as a positive thing which has made their jobs easier. Finally, they also mentioned other small things they have started to do differently since they came to Denmark. One thing that most of our informants mention is that they have started to cycle more and a couple also mentioned that they have started to sort their garbage and recycle more.

We have seen that culture learning is very useful for our informants. They are aware that different rules of interaction exist, and they try to learn these rules. Some have been to presentations and proper cultural social skills training but most learn by observing Danes and use their own experiences to discover new social rules and codes. Culture learning can be easier to deal with because it does not mean that you have to adapt your personality or values to the new culture, but it means that you need to learn and be aware of the rules for how to interact successfully with people in various situations.

# Which factors are causing stress for our informants and how do they cope with this stress?

We will here look at what triggers the feelings of stress and depression in our interviewees; what kind of situations and problems do they find most stressful and how does this stress manifest itself? We then analyse our interviews to see how our informants cope with the stress by looking at what kind of coping strategies they use.

As described earlier, Bochner and Furnham (1986) argue that particularly two explanations of culture shock are important within the stress and coping framework; the expectations approach and the social support networks approach. Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) explain that *“cognitive appraisals of stressors as well as subsequent coping strategies and adjustive outcomes may also vary due to differences in migrants’ expectations, i.e. those that match actual experiences, facilitate adjustment”* (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001: 76). They also describe the distinction between overmet and undermet expectations; the former being more positive than expected and the latter more negative than expected. As we have seen before, our informants’ understandings of culture shock also includes expectations. In the interviews we can see both overmet and undermet expectations from our interviewees. The overmet expectations are articulated by e.g. Homaz, who described Denmark as an amazing place to live (Homaz, line 60), and by Helene who was surprised by how beautiful, clean, green and polite a country Denmark was (Helene, line 24). On the other hand, Ondrej explained that the first period he spent in Denmark was more difficult than expected, because he imagined it to be perfect but in reality he experienced a lot of problems with finding accommodation. Iveta also said something interesting, namely that because she expected to experience difficulties in Indonesia it was not a bad experience for her, whereas the unexpected difficulties she experienced in Denmark were much harder to cope with.

If we look at what kind of experiences our informants described as stressful, they described various things and situations, although it is mostly practical issues such as understanding the laws and the bills (Anna, lines 46-47), finding a job or an internship and not having any contacts (Iveta, line 33), finding an apartment (Liisa, line 47) and miscommunication (Liisa, line 41). Homaz also mentioned the feeling of being treated differently as a foreigner and he is stressed about what he will do in Denmark because his education is not recognised:

Yes, I have institute of pharmacy. So they didn’t accept this. You have to go to university and you have to study more. (Homaz, lines 32-33)

Besides the more practical things, they also mention the lack of social activities in their everyday life as stressful, e.g. Iveta mentioned the lack of leisure activities for her to do in her free time as depressing. Elena said:

I think mostly it’s just like now with thesis writing, this routine that it’s so boring and I don’t have a very strong relationship with some friends, only my boyfriend. (Elena, lines 72-73)

Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) mentioned social support as an important factor in predicting both psychological adjustment and physical health, and as a major resource for coping with stress. As seen in the quote from Elena, the lack of a social network makes an impact on her general well-being. Elena also mentioned earlier in the interview that something she finds very difficult is the lack of a close circle of her family and friends, who she could always call and speak to. In the interview we asked the question “What kind of help did you need when you first came to Denmark” and here it was particularly Azar and Homaz, who both came as refugees, who mentioned social support as the most important thing:

That was very much about caring… and I did get that. And also some good friends, which I also think I have found. (Azar, lines 69-70)

Yes actually, you know, when you come to new social and you are alone so you have nobody. So it’s important thing to get contact with other people, other people from the land you are living in now. So it’s important to connect with other people. (Homaz, lines 53-55)

The other interviewees mentioned information about e.g. transportation and housing as what they needed in the beginning. This shows that social networks and support is more important for the most vulnerable people who come to Denmark, e.g. refugees, and that those who come to study or work are initially more concerned with the practicalities. However, as seen above, several of the interviewees mentioned that later in the process the lack of social support has been a source of frustration and depression. This shows that while the first stressors are the superficial practical issues, the deeper issues such as lack of social support and having to adjust to a new lifestyle become the main stressors later in the process. In the following quote, Julia describes how she felt some of these deeper issues in her new life:

Maybe lifestyle… I would say. Because back at home, I was an active student, I was working, driving my car, and very self-supportive. While, when I came here, I was dependent on my scholarship, I was just a student, and I had no friends. I had to find everything new. It felt like a step back. (Julia, lines 65-67)

As Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) mention, individuals process stress-related information and situations in a variety of ways. Some see potential stressors as threatening whereas others see them as challenging (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Our interviewees also react differently to the stressors and the difficult experiences described above. Some get frustrated (Anna, Ondrej), some get depressed (Helene, Julia) or just confused (Azar). Some turn the stress inwards and lose their self-confidence (Antoinette) or feel lonely (Julia), whereas others react more to the outside world and get angry, e.g. Elena who at times does not like the Danes, and Homaz who wanted to hit someone when he was treated unfairly. However, some are quicker than others to recover from these feelings. Ondrej, who was frustrated with his living situation in the beginning, was quick to regain his positive view on things, which allowed him to cope with potential problems. Ondrej also admits that he often tries to challenge himself, which is one reason why he chose to study abroad. Seeing the difficult experiences as a challenge to overcome can make it easier to not defeated or depressed because of problems which might occur. Carmen also proves that her approach to the problems she experiences has helped her to feel better about the stressful aspects of learning to live in an unfamiliar culture:

I always think of those things as funny events, nothing big. The weather, the problem with transportation. (Carmen, line 49)

Carmen gave an example of a situation where she was lost so she called her mom and then started to cry. Most migrants will experience several incidents similar to this one when arriving in a new country, but an attitude like the one Carmen has can make it a lot easier to cope with the difficult situations, because she does not magnify the problems. Positive thinking is a successful strategy, as we will also see later, but naturally a positive attitude is not always enough to deal with major problems. As seen above, the need for social support and practical help from other people cannot be underestimated in the difficult situation of living in an unfamiliar place. However, it is clear from Carmen’s example that a positive attitude gets her a long way in dealing with the smaller stressors and problems she experienced in the beginning.

We have now described some of the factors and situations causing stress and depression for our interviewees. We have seen that the stressors often change with time and according to which stage of acculturation the person is in. In the beginning, our interviewees mostly stress about the practical issues of how to survive in an unknown culture. Our interviewees here try to adapt to the small changes they experience, which are often rather easily solved through culture learning. However, later in the process the problems become more serious and are more likely to lead to stress and depression. Here it becomes important to develop coping strategies to deal with these stressors, and in the following we will therefore look at what kind of coping strategies our informants use when they experience more serious difficulties.

## Coping strategies

Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) mention what they call primary and secondary coping strategies. As described before, the primary strategies are task-oriented whereas secondary strategies involve changing the perception and appraisal of stressful situations (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001). In this way, the two types of strategies can be compared to what Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have called problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Primary coping strategies involve trying to change the problem or the environment whereas the secondary strategy involves changing the self. In our interviews we can mostly see examples of the secondary strategy, where our informants try to adjust their own behaviour, attitudes and feelings to fit with their new society. Azar for example explained how he had to learn to be more distant and reserved towards other people to avoid problems when interacting with Danes, and Carmen also had to change her attitude and behaviour:

Everywhere [in Romania] you have to struggle for people to notice you, because you… they don’t notice you, you are nothing. And when I came here, I think in the beginning I was kind of like that and it was in vain, because nobody appreciates that kind of people, so I adapted very fast, because I like being more relaxed and talking slowly and everything (Carmen, lines 132-135)

Antoinette also explained that as a new person in a different culture, you need to change your attitude towards other people and be proactive in order to be successful:

And then, you need to be yourself, open. One of the things I learned by experience is don’t expect people to come to you, it’s you who have to make the effort. It’s also the same if you move from where you are born to other city, or area. You are the new person. It is you, who has to make an effort and you have to take responsibility and initiative, because you cannot expect the system to cover everything for you. (Antoinette, lines 313-316)

From the situations our informants described in the interviews, we cannot see many examples where they have changed the environment to suit their own ways, using primary coping strategies. This might be because it is difficult and involves a great deal of courage and determination for someone new to come and change the way things are in an unfamiliar society. Only Iveta mentioned a situation where she was tired of the Danes in her class because they did not want to interact with the international students, and so she got everyone to go outside and have a debate about why this was the case, and they tried to work it out. This is a good example of a situation where Iveta tried to change the bad atmosphere in her class. Chen also in a way tried to ensure that the new environment fits him by having strong transnational ties and being involved in the Chinese community in Aalborg. While not having changed their environment, some of our informants did mention some situations where they wanted the environment or the Danish people to change and might have wished to be able to change it. One example is Azar who says that he thinks Danish people should start to be more respectful towards refugees and look at them differently (Azar, line 124). Antoinette also explains how angry she was when the politicians decided to close the international kindergarten in Aalborg and how she and her family tried to fight against the decision but it was not possible for them to make a difference (Antoinette, lines 203-207).

As mentioned earlier, Folkman and Lazarus (1985) also developed a scale assessing eight distinct coping strategies: problem solving; wishful thinking; detachment; social support; positive thinking; self-blame; tension reduction and withdrawal responses (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001). Most of our informants use the problem solving strategy. One example of this is the example with Iveta and her classmates mentioned above. In this case, instead of losing her confidence or being sad about the bad atmosphere in her class, she took matters into her own hands and tried to solve the problem which existed. Another example is Ondrej, who experienced a lot of problems with finding an apartment by himself, but he also found a way to solve that problem:

I just gathered some people from my class, like 3 or 4 of us and we started looking for that all of us together, and that’s why I think we found a place for a good price and a good location which is in the city center. And everything was fine then. (Ondrej, lines 52-54)

Ondrej realised that finding an apartment would be easier if he was not alone, so he found other people who were in the same situation and they succeeded in getting a good apartment together. Theorists within the stress and coping literature, e.g. Folkman and Lazarus (1985) and Carver et al (1989) have highlighted the functional aspects of the direct, action-oriented strategies such as the problem-solving strategy. However, this does not mean that this specific coping strategy is uniformly effective (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Another strategy which according to Lazarus and Folkman is very successful is positive thinking. We have seen earlier how important the attitude towards potential stressors is, and as we saw from the examples we also have informants who are good at thinking positively e.g. Carmen who likes to think of the difficulties as *funny events* instead. Ondrej also emphasised his open-minded and positive personality as a reason for his well-being in Denmark now. Carmen who herself uses positive thinking did however mention that she has friends who “*locked themselves out of the system, because maybe they do not like it that well*” (Carmen, line 192). This shows that there are also people who end up following a withdrawal or detachment strategy. We can also see small signs of these strategies in some of our informants, e.g. Elena who chooses to remove herself from the potentially difficult situations where she has to interact with Danes, instead of facing them and trying to solve the problems. It is important to remember, however, that the people we have interviewed are those who wanted to be interviewed, which means that they are likely to be people who have been more or less successful through their acculturation process. It is possible that the people who ended up with a withdrawal or detachment strategy are not represented in our interviews because they did not wish to participate.

Regardless of which strategy our informants follow individually and how they cope with their problems, they all mentioned social support as being important. People who have helped them cope with the stress are e.g. friends (Anna, line 71), teachers (Antoinette, line 183-184), co-ethnic groups (Carmen, line 45; Chen, line 43), boyfriends (Elena, line 56; Irena, line 53) and a foster family (Azar, line 55-56). This shows that our interviewees find support from different types of people in their lives and that some kind of social support is necessary regardless of who it comes from. Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) also describe how important social networks are and that the size and nature of the social network is not so important:

The network of supportive relationships that facilitates intercultural adaptation need not be large but may be diverse as both co-ethnics and host nationals can assist immigrants with their emotional and informational needs (Berry, 1997; Neto, 1995). In addition, spousal support is important and exerts a strong influence on migrant satisfaction and well-being (Ataca, 1996; Naidoo, 1985). (In Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001: 204)

Finally, we have one informant who gave an interesting answer to how he manages to cope with the stress of being in a new culture. Ondrej said:

Yes, maybe this is a strange answer but I always have to do sports. I also always if I deal with some problems or some stuff I have to go for a run or play football or something. This really helps me because, you know, endorphins in my body will start flowing around and maybe this makes me a bit of happy, and I can just relieve the stress. That’s what I have to do, sports. (Ondrej, lines 93-96)

To sum up, mostly practical things and new rules are what caused stress to our informants in the beginning. However, later the small cultural differences, changing life-styles and the loss of a social network become issues for our informants and for some it has led to feelings of anger or depression. They are all highly focused on their own behaviour and attitudes and many have changed in these aspects in an attempt to adjust to the new society and cope with the differences they experience. However, many also have a very practical approach to their own coping strategies and actively try to solve the problems which occur. One thing which has proven to be very important for all of our interviewees is some kind of social support and help from people they meet, who can help them cope with the various stressful experiences and situations they encounter in an unfamiliar culture.

# What are the strategies of our informants’ social identification?

Cultural adaptation in an unfamiliar environment is typically connected to changes in social identification. As it is hard to resist being influenced by the new culture and its society, it is common for the individuals to experience changes in the ways they identify themselves and others. In this chapter, we will discuss how belonging to various groups can influence individuals’ identity and which groups our informants considered most suitable in the process of identity adjustment.

Many of our informants spoke about their relations to different groups and the majority considered friendships and various networks as generally valuable. Although most of our informants expressed a wish to find friends among the locals, they had to admit it used to be or still is a challenging task (Anna, lines 31-33; Irena, line 164; Ondrej, lines 168-172; etc.). On the other hand, it proved to be easier for most of them to find networks among people, who were in a comparable life situation and thus international communities were popular among our informants. Aalborg University, as a place of cross-cultural contact among international students and staff, played an important role for our informants:

(…) I wouldn’t say I put too much effort to finding Danish friends. It’s not that I have something against them, but I think it’s easier to go with internationals also because I lived in international dormitory so all my friends are international, and if you’re okay with that then you don’t think that you should go and try to make friends with Danish.(Elena, lines 181-184)

Because Aalborg University is very international, you always find somebody to speak, and friends. (Helene, lines 35-36)

This availability of particular groups was significant in the process of network building for the informants who studied or worked at Aalborg University. Carmen even called the university her *home* to underline what the role of the place was (Carmen, line 76). The majority of our interviewees were able to establish international social networks and benefit from them in various ways. Elena, who admitted having no strong friendships in Denmark, spoke about the significance of belonging to a stable social group:

Well for me maybe what changed was that I found a boyfriend so that’s different… I think it’s different than if you are alone and foreign. But also the people are changing all the time… that’s the thing I don’t really like here, because you just make friends but they are mostly students and then they leave and then the new ones come and then you have to make friends again. And sometimes that’s demotivating. (Elena, lines 37-40)

Belonging to various groups might indicate the ways in which the newcomers identify themselves, and by choosing certain strategies of acculturation, the individuals might experience identity shifts (Ward, Bochner, Furnham, 2001). Some of our informants showed signs of assimilation with the host society, where they clearly identified themselves with the Danish culture rather with their home cultures. In case of some of our informants, they gave up contacts with their co-ethnic networks and switched their interest towards the Danish society members. For Iveta for example, keeping her Latvian network seemed without any value (Iveta, line 58), while for Carmen, who declared genuine willingness to belong in the Danish society, the contact with co-national friends stopped as soon as she made friends with the Danish members of the host society:

I really feel that I am a part of the society and I play after the rules, and I can understand the rules and I can apply them and everybody accepts me, because I do learn.(…) Yes, especially at the beginning, Romanians, but after that, I think we have moved apart. After that, I got help from friends at the university, which of course were Danes and other nationalities as well. Especially, I think they were Danes. Most of them. (Carmen, lines 76-78 and 80-83)

According to Tajfel, those strategies of leaving minority groups and joining the majority are common and might be a result of individuals’ need to raise their self-esteem. By identifying with the majority, the migrants might avoid negative stereotyping, and restore their sense of well-being among the host society members (Tajfel in Ward, Bochner, Furnham, 2001). By saying later that some of her Romanian acquaintances *had locked themselves out* (lines 191-192), Carmen suggested that she did not identify herself with her co-nationals.

Actually, the contradictory strategies of identification might also be used in order to improve individuals’ status in the host society. A few of our informants signalled a separationist model of acculturation by identifying themselves with a narrow, co-national group and they did not show any interest in being a part of the host society. Chen for example found it obvious and reassuring to sustain his transnational relations with the community that reminded him of his origin and so, he joined the Chinese network. In his statement, Chen found it natural to maintain connection with his co-ethnic friends and by saying that he considers himself a Chinese, he showed us how he identifies himself with other Chinese:

(…) because as a Chinese, we have a quite big Chinese community in Denmark and also in Aalborg, so if I got some problems I will first tell them to the Chinese community to ask some help, because these people have experienced the same things. So they can offer me some suggestions(…). I do things like I eat Chinese food, I drink Chinese tea so… so with these things I consider myself as a Chinese.(Chen, lines 43-45 and 88-89)

Chen’s cultural identification is influenced by being recognised and accepted by his co-ethnic network. In other words, by identifying himself with this group, Chen receives reassurance and maintains his cultural heritage. This deliberate choice influences his self-esteem. As Bochner, Ward and Furnham (2001: 104) suggest:

(…) a relationship between ethnic or cultural identity and self-esteem only occurs in cases when an individual consciously perceives ethnicity or culture as a central, salient feature of identity.

Although their acculturative strategies are different, both Carmen and Chen show signs of intergroup bias. They seemed to be proud of belonging to their groups and presenting them as helpful aims at improving their status as members of those groups. According to Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) apart from affecting individuals’ well-being in an unfamiliar environment, such strategies can influence their ability to learn some new social skills.

Another interesting observation we made was the extent to which our informants identified themselves with the Danish members of the host culture. Although only a few of our informants said that they are happy to enjoy strong friendships with the Danes (Azar, line 126; Antoinette, line 377), almost all of them were able to define some similarities between Denmark and their home societies. Liisa observed how similar Estonia is to Denmark, where both societies are *“not loud, not too persistent, not very assertive”* (Liisa, lines 166-169). Julia noticed that both the Lithuanians and Danish are not as emotional as the Spanish (Julia, lines 176-179) and Chen made a remark about how similar Danish and Chinese attitudes towards work and free time are (Chen, lines 91-92).

Moreover, in the process of our analysis we realised that there is a connection between our informants’ willingness to identify themselves with the host society members and their motivations to stay in Denmark. Some of our informants, who knew that they would stay in Denmark, might have been more willing to socialise with the Danish members of the society and it might be one of their coping strategies. In most of the cases, those of our informants who planned to stay in Denmark permanently, felt that they belong in the host society, or at least felt that they will eventually belong in it (Iveta, line 115). Those, on the other hand, who were positive that they will sooner or later leave the country or were unsure of their plans, in most cases did not experience this particular feeling (Chen, line 88; Elena, lines 163-164). As we found out, also individuals’ initial motivations to come and live in Denmark helped to develop the feeling of belonging. Azar, who had various reasons to come and stay in Denmark shared with us that he does not want to come back to his homeland, as he began a new life (Azar, lines 76-78). Carmen, who came to Denmark with an aim to finish her education, illustrated how becoming a member of the society was brought into effect thanks to her initial approach:

I belong here, because all of my relevant friends and closest friends, whom I really know the past two and a half years, when I did the main transition in my life, are here. And also my fiancé and our entire life was formed and based here. And I feel like I am a part of the society, I am a part of the system, so I really think that I belong here. (…) I think I really wanted to be a part of it, and that’s why it was a pleasant experience. I was desperate to be a part of it, maybe that’s why.(Carmen, lines 156-159 and 198-199)

This strong declaration shows how Carmen’s initial motivations helped her pursue her aim. However, those of our informants who did not have any plans of staying in Denmark found it hard or even unnecessary to identify themselves with the host society. For Ondrej, who came to Denmark with a single purpose to study and gain international experience, it was not crucial to identify himself with the host society. As he said, he belonged to Slovakia, which is the place where he was born, where his memories are and where he finds people he loves ( Ondrej, lines 155-160). Elena, who did not come to Denmark with the purpose of staying, did not feel attached either. When asked if she feels a sense of belonging in Denmark she answered:

No… I don’t know. In some ways partially yes, but no I think if I should move somewhere from Denmark it wouldn’t make a big difference for me. It’s not that I would leave something very important here.(Elena, lines 163-164)

All things considered, we can see that cross-cultural contact influenced the ways in which our informants identified themselves. An important element of self- identification was choosing a group or a network, where our informants perceived themselves as safe from prejudice and where they could keep or even improve their status. Very often, international communities proved to be environments where our informants felt that they belong to, perhaps due to the fact that all the members shared the status of being foreign. Some of our informants applied various strategies in order to identify themselves with other groups. Here, assimilation with the host culture and separation from it were two most distinctive strategies.

All the informants perceived their own groups as valuable, and belonging to different communities was considered significant for their well-being. We could see that our informants used different acculturation strategies to adapt in the host society and finding both transnational, international and Danish networks was used as a part of their coping strategies in their process of adaptation. Although only a few of our informants managed to find Danish friends, all of them were able to define characteristics their home societies shared with the Danish society, which did not suggest separation from the host culture. On the contrary, as we explained in the chapter about Velkomstcentre’s activities, we can see that our informants appreciated contact with the natives. Moreover, their motivations to stay in Denmark or leave the country had an impact on how easy or hard it was to develop a feeling of belonging to the host society.

# Culture shock for our informants

Throughout the analysis, we have now described how our informants understand culture shock, how they go through the five stages of culture shock, what stressors they encounter and how they cope with them. We have seen that culture shock is a complex phenomenon and process, and that all of our informants have experienced some aspects of culture shock on various stages since they came to Denmark. In the following, we will look at their experiences of culture shock and their own idea of whether they have experienced it or not. Because we waited until the end of the interview to reveal the subject ‘culture shock’, it will be interesting to see how their understandings of what culture shock is match with what they described throughout the interview before they knew the subject. We will discuss whether the term culture shock is the right term to use for our informants, and we will look at how well our informants fit with the U-curve model described earlier in the thesis.

## Experiences of culture shock in Aalborg

As mentioned earlier, we strived to find informants who attended Velkomstcentre’s activities as well as informants who did not. We believed it could provide us with an interesting image of how their experiences of culture shock differ. However, with our informants we have not been able to find any clear relation between whether or not they attended the activities and their experiences of culture shock. When asked, only five of our informants say that they experienced culture shock at some point after coming to Denmark. The informants who say that they experienced culture shock are from the US, Iran, China, Greece and Latvia. Some of them, as seen earlier, described their experience with culture shock as being confused and not knowing what to do or what to expect from others. They mostly mentioned the practical things as being part of their culture shock, such as not knowing the different holidays, and not knowing the traffic rules or how to cycle. Iveta from Latvia described how she was first shocked about the prices in the shops and found it difficult to see how she was going to live here with those prices. She said that it made her very depressed the first days she was here (Iveta, lines 140-144). Another thing that made the transition difficult for our informants was the personality of the Danes they met. Anna described that people in Aalborg are friendly but not open and helpful in the same way as Americans are. Azar also mentioned that it took him some time to learn to keep the right distance with Danes, because they are not as close and open with each other as people are in Turkey.

One thing I didn’t expect at all when I came to Denmark, and I actually got a bit shocked, that was that it is difficult to keep a close and intimate contact with a Danish friend, so I was actually shocked and I talked to my family and my Danish mother told me that she had called her daughter and asked if they could come over for a cup of coffee. I thought that was too much with your own daughter to have to ask if you can come for coffee… you can call to ask if she’s home, but not have to ask if it was okay to come… I was really shocked about that, but that is sometimes the Danish culture. (Azar, lines 131-136)

In situations like this, it seems to be more difficult for our informants to understand and accept the differences as this is a basic difference in the nature of the people and it contradicts the way some of the informants were brought up in their home culture. As described above, the practical things are what they mention as difficult or surprising during the interview, but with these things, as most of our informants say, it is possible to ask people and learn the new ways to act. However, we do have several informants who mention that the people they have met in Denmark are a little cold, distanced and not very welcoming or open to new cultures, and it is clear that this is something many have found very difficult to deal with.

As we have described earlier, several of our informants have mentioned China as a place where they would experience culture shock, due to the large cultural difference between Europe and Asia. This of course makes it interesting to see how our Chinese informant has experienced coming to Denmark. When asked at the end of the interview if he experienced any culture shock, Chen said that he did during the first month or two. However, when we look through the rest of the interview, this is not reflected in his answers. He says that his first impression of Denmark was good and that nothing has changed since then. He has always been very positive about Denmark and says that he has not experienced any difficulties besides the language. Another thing he mentioned, though, is the large Chinese community in Aalborg which has helped him with adapting in Denmark. He admits that he still eats Chinese food most of the time, drinks Chinese tea, and very much identifies himself as Chinese. This suggests that the transition could have been easier for Chen because many elements of the Chinese culture he knows and his old lifestyle are still available to him in Denmark, which means that he is not forced to face the Danish culture constantly. As we have seen earlier, co-ethnic ties can be an important way of improving the self-esteem of someone who finds ethnicity to be a central feature of identity. Chen is a good example of how transnational and co-ethnic social ties can be important for someone living in an unfamiliar culture. However, Chen, as well as other of our informants, explained that his personality is the reason why he has found the cultural transition easy and not experienced stress throughout the process. Berry and Zheng (1991) also list personal and psychological characteristics of the individual as one of the important factors moderating the relationship between acculturation and stress, which means that e.g. the personality and attitudes of the individual can play a big role in helping the individual not to experience cultural stress or shock in an unfamiliar culture.

The remaining eight informants say that they did not experience culture shock. Most of them give the reason of European countries being too similar, but some also explain it with having a very open and positive personality. When we look through the interviews, in four of them we can only see very little evidence of culture shock, and it seems like these people have come to live in Denmark without experiencing any major difficulties. It is possible that they have still not reached the crisis stage and that it will come in the future, but from what they said in the interviews the cultural transition has so far been rather easy for them.

Finally, in the last four interviews the informants described feelings, reactions and situations which indicate that they did experience culture shock, even though they did not believe so themselves. Oberg (1960) describes the second stage of culture shock as characterised by hostility and anger due to the difficult adjustment process:

There is maid trouble, school trouble, language trouble, shopping trouble, and the fact that people in the host country are largely indifferent to all these troubles. They help but they just don’t understand your great concern over these difficulties. Therefore, they must be insensible and unsympathetic to you and your worries. The result, “I don’t like them”. (Oberg, 1960: 143)

Similarly, Berry describes acculturative stress as feelings such as anxiety, depression, marginality or alienation, and identity confusion. If we look at the interviews, our informants describe several of these things, even though they did not think they experienced any culture shock. Elena from Lithuania described how afraid of contact with Danish people she was in the beginning, because she did not know how to answer them if they would ask her something. This made her avoid certain things she would normally do. She said that even today, after two years in Denmark, she still only uses the self-service line in Føtex because she is afraid of misunderstandings or awkward situations if she has to communicate in Danish (Elena, lines 100-104). When asked if anything has changed with time and if she feels better today, Elena answers:

I don’t know… it depends on the day, I mean. Sometimes it feels like, I don’t like them or I don’t like Aalborg, I want to leave from here because I don’t have my real friends here and so on… but that doesn’t mean I want to go back to Lithuania. I realize that this stage is problematic […]. (Elena, lines 66-69)

Elena here mentions that she often reacts the way Oberg has predicted above; that the difficulties she experiences make her not like the Danish people or the city of Aalborg, because it seems easy to blame the new culture. Several of the informants who say they did not go through culture shock, do admit to feeling depressed during their first period of time in Denmark. They mentioned how big a step back it has been to start over in a new country, because they had to give up their life back home and come to a place they did not know. E.g. Julia described her active life back home, and how she suddenly felt dependent on other people and not able to do the things she wanted when she arrived in Denmark. She saw this as a big step back, which made her doubt her decision to move. Ondrej had a similar experience during his first period in Denmark:

Every morning I wanted to slap my face, I had such a good life and why I had to come to this kind of stuff to try to challenge myself. That was… every single morning I was so depressed, like ‘why am I doing this to myself’. But then maybe at the end of the day it was alright. (Ondrej, lines 28-31)

 In this quote, Ondrej describes feelings of frustration, anger and depression, which all indicate some degree of culture shock. However, Ondrej does not blame Denmark or the Danish people but himself for the difficulties he is experiencing, which shows that he is taking culture shock in a different way than Elena.

## Is culture shock the wrong term?

Despite the descriptions above, Elena, Julia and Ondrej all said that they have not experienced any culture shock in Denmark, which makes us think that culture shock may not be the right term to use with our informants. Looking back to how our informants understand culture shock, some of them understand it as something much bigger, e.g. Antoinette said that as a French person in Denmark she would not speak of culture shock, but that there are *a lot of small culture* shocks here. So even though she mentions ‘small culture shocks’ she clearly thinks of the term culture shock as something major, which she has not experienced. Irena has a similar understanding:

If a Pole comes to Denmark, I think that it is not culture shock, maybe a little bit, but not a huge “boom”, that you cannot find yourself in this society. (Irena, lines 234-235)

These examples suggest that our informants understand the term culture shock as something big, and that they would not define smaller difficult experiences as culture shock. Homaz, who does not have a good level of English, struggled to understand the term culture shock. When it was explained to him, he said that he did experience many difficult and different things when arriving in Denmark, but it was not something that *shocked* him because he saw it as being mostly positive things. This corresponds with Berry’s criticism of the term culture shock, as Homaz also saw it as a negative term only, whereas the term ‘stress’ can have both negative and positive aspects. This shows that our informants associate the word ‘shock’ with something negative. This means that we might have received other answers and understandings if we had used the term acculturative stress during our interviews, as it seems to be a term which is more in accordance with our informants’ understandings.

## The process of culture shock

Now we will briefly look at how our informants’ descriptions and experiences of culture shock fit with the popular U-curve model described earlier in the thesis. Most of our informants do fit with the U-curve model, at least the first stages. They describe how they felt very good in the beginning and were excited to be in Denmark, but then started to experience problems, miss people and things back home and started to feel depressed. Most of them also showed signs of recovery. It varies how long the first stage lasted for our informants; for some it was a few days and for others longer. Anna explained that because American and Danish culture seemed so similar to her, it took her about a year before the differences and difficulties started to gradually reach her. For Helene from Greece it was a more sudden shift from the first stage to the next:

It’s like in the beginning, you see everything like: “Wow, it’s great here!”, and everybody friendly, everybody helps you. And then, it’s like a slap on your face, suddenly, you think “Why did they do that?”, or “Why did they say that? Are they mean or stupid? Don’t they understand?” Helene (lines, 164-167)

We can also see that some of our informants were at the bottom of the U-curve from the very beginning and then have started to go up with time as they have started to adjust to their new life, whereas others are still as exited and positive as in the beginning and have never entered the crisis stage. This means that even though we can see that most of our informants to some degree follow this pattern of culture shock and adjustment, the process of acculturation varies greatly between individuals and not everyone goes through all stages. Another thing we can see with our informants is that the stages are much more blurred. This applies both to those who generally follow the pattern and those who deviate from it. An example is Ondrej, who explained in a quote used earlier that in the beginning he felt depressed and angry with himself every morning, but then in the evening he felt better and more comfortable with his new life. Here he is going back and forth between two different stages and it can be difficult to place him within a certain stage. Another example is Helene, who after describing the difficulties she experienced was asked if she felt better now about being in Denmark. Her answer was:

It goes up and down. With me… I have periods, when I am really happy and everything goes well in Denmark, and periods when I am not so happy, maybe depressed. I don’t know what I am going to do, or how to make choices in my life. (Helene, lines 178-180)

Other informants describe similar situations. This shows that people rarely experience a crisis and hit the bottom, and then afterwards slowly and steadily improve until they reach the top again, as it is suggested with the U-curve model. People going through a cultural transition will often make progress and then regress again or make progress in some aspects of their life and still experience a crisis in regard to other aspects. This proves that the U-curve may be two-directional, meaning that people can regress as well and progress within the curve. It is also possible to have U-curves within U-curves, so that having achieved a level of understanding in one area raises new problems and forces the individual to ‘start over’ in other areas (Pedersen, 1995). As Pedersen describes it:

The most serious weakness of a U-curve or a W-curve design is the implication of a smooth linear adaptive process, which is quite different from reality (Pedersen, 1995: 4)

As describes earlier, Pedersen later suggests that a backward J-curve might be a more authentic image, as a person rarely will achieve as high a level of functioning in the host culture as in the previous home culture (Pedersen, 995: 26). However, the U-curve model is still useful for giving a general outline of the process acculturating individuals can go though, even though it is simplified.

# Conclusion

In the following, we will answer the research questions we have proposed earlier, in order to finally answer our problem statement.

If we look at culture shock, the research that we made among the group of migrants who came to Denmark taught us that this problem is far more complex than we thought, based on our initial assumptions. Our informants understand this phenomenon as a major crisis and generally see culture shock as a negative experience. Several of our informants claim that culture shock only occurs when there are large differences between societies, and that culture shock does not occur within European countries. Generally, they seem to find the term ‘shock’ to be too strong to be describing their experiences and therefore we have argued that Berry’s term ‘acculturative stress’ might be more appropriate according to how our informants understand the concept. Also, having spoken to thirteen individuals from different countries, with various life experiences and backgrounds, we realised that people are diverse in many respects, and subsequently, the way they experience their realities vary and cannot be labelled or visualised by a scheme with 100% accuracy.

Velkomstcentre, as a project aiming at assisting the newcomers in adaptation in Denmark, was generally perceived as supportive among our interviewees. We have learned that the project organised various social and informative events, which were to improve the individuals’ chances of solving problems like finding social networks or dealing with practical difficulties. Those of our interviewees who attended the activities, generally shared with us positive impressions. When it comes to the social events, we found out that our informants got a chance to meet new people and create networks of friends with whom they could share their experiences. Although Velkomstcentre presented this opportunity to all the newcomers, still, we heard complaints from some of our informants about the lack of Danish networks, and thus we assume that perhaps more social events organised by Velkomstcentre could have been better attended if all the meetings were open both to the international and Danish citizens. The other activities were seminars of a more practical dimension. There, our interviewees learned how to search for jobs in Denmark, find accommodation, pay taxes, understand the health care system, etc. Our informants appreciated those informative events, as they were not able to apply their skills of problem solving in Denmark and that is why they found it relevant to attend the seminars. All of our interviewees expressed the need for an initiative like Velkomstcentre; however, a few meant it could be even more effective for the newcomers if the seminars had a more practical dimension and gave insight into working culture rather than theoretical help. Generally speaking, our informants’ opinions on the project were positive and they found it relevant to share the information about various activities with other newcomers. Last but not least, the project proved to be successful in predicting what kind of activities would be needed as well as being open for suggestions from the participants.

However, there are also things which could improve, e.g. *outreach* or *information* about the project. It is suggested for Velkomstcentre to have a closer contact with the institutions where the new migrants are, to ensure that they frequently hear about the activities and possibilities of the project. Another suggestion is regarding the *time of day* of the activities. Velkomstcentre has had to arrange activities during normal business hours even though it was inconvenient for most of the participants. However, for any future projects, a recommendation could be to have a closer cooperation with various institutions and work places as well as the municipality in order to ensure more flexibility. This could make it possible to sometimes have events outside of normal work hours, and it could also be a possibility for the newcomers to sometimes participate in events during the day. According to our informants, it could also be recommended to do some activities which are more expensive for Velkomstcentre, but then include a small *fee* from the participants. This could be activities such as going to the theatre or symphony orchestra, or arranging bus trips around the country. An important thing for future events is also to be clear about who the *target group* is, to make sure that no one feels excluded if they constantly see activities directed at another group. It is suggested to research the possibility of having smaller groups organising activities directed at different targets, such as families, singles, students etc.

The five stages of culture shock and the U- curve sequence were our guidelines, which we used to see if the experiences our interviewees shared with us could be classified by any theoretical approaches. According to our interviewees, their cross-cultural interactions with the host culture and society were multifaceted and complex. Firstly, we have heard of the fascination with the host country and idealised opinions, which can be associated with the honeymoon stage of culture shock. The stories told by our informants depict a superficial picture of Denmark, where the host society is helpful, kind and smiling, where the landscapes and views of the country are perceived as clean and beautiful, and where the new rules are learned with the sense of adventure. Secondly, the fact that our informants started experiencing practical difficulties made us think of the disintegration stage of culture shock. Here, the stories of our informants deal with feelings of depression, embarrassment and inadequacy in situations like comparing the host and home cultures, alienation from the host society members, lack of control in everyday situations, and longing for home, family and friends. Thirdly, when we have heard of hostility and defensiveness, in situations in which our interviewees felt unaccepted, threatened, or misunderstood by the host society members, we linked it with the reintegration stage of culture shock. On the other hand, when our informants shared stories showing a more balanced opinion on both home and host countries as well as a relaxed attitude and increased abilities to deal with various problems, we related those stories to the autonomy stage of culture shock. The fewest of our informants showed examples of biculturalism, which we link with the interdependence stage of culture shock. However we met a few individuals, who were able to accept both the home and host cultures as equals, enjoy genuine friendships with the natives, or start to function among the host society with self-confidence similar to the one showed among the home society members.

Although we could visualise the five stages of culture shock in the form of the U-curve, we cannot say that all of our informants follow the pattern from the euphoria, through the crisis towards the adaptation. On the contrary, our informants were very likely not to experience all of the above-mentioned stages, regress to previous stages, or even experience more stages at the same time, with regard to different life situations. It taught us that culture shock is a complex phenomenon and both the five stages of culture shock and the U-curve pattern can be used as indicators of cross-cultural adaptation, which help to understand the process, rather than describe it with complete accuracy. We also learned that “culture” is not a rigid concept; on the contrary, it is possible to share and redefine it, and this project proved that it is possible to reach across cultures as well as belong to and be identified by more than just home culture.

The affect- behaviour-cognition framework served as a tool to understand our informants’ culture learning processes, their ways to cope with stress and to identify themselves in Denmark. Culture learning was very useful for our informants. They were aware that different rules of interaction exist, and trying to learn these rules made it easier for our informants to deal with the challenges and the change they experienced in a foreign culture. Some of our informants have had a culture learning presentation during their language class or through Velkomstcentre, and others mentioned that more of this would have been useful for them. Others are not as aware of the concept of culture learning, but they used it unknowingly by asking questions and observing their surroundings. Culture learning has proved a useful technique particularly in dealing with practical issues and the small changes which Berry refers to as behavioural shifts.

Additionally, our informants experienced various stressors in connection with migrating and living in an unfamiliar culture. We can see that the type of stressors our informants mentioned and the kind of help they sought is related to what type of migrant they are. Those who have migrated to study or work in Denmark are mostly concerned with the practical issues of living in a new culture, such as transportation, finding accommodation, and finding work. On the other hand, those who have come as refugees are more concerned with getting social networks and emotional support. However, from our informants we can also see that the lack of a social network becomes one of the main stressors once the initial practical issues have been overcome. When it comes to coping strategies, most of our informants use a problem solving strategy and are quite practical when it comes to dealing with their problems. However, they mostly use secondary coping strategies, meaning that they are adjusting their own behaviour and attitudes to fit with the environment instead of trying to change the environment to fit their own needs. Positive thinking has also proved to be a successful strategy for our informants. As we have seen, a positive attitude and open-minded personality helps our informants to better cope with the smaller difficulties they experience. However, it is clear that what helps our informants most in coping with stress in a new culture is support from other people. Whether it comes from teachers, friends, spouses, neighbours, co-ethnic groups or Danes, most of our informants mentioned someone who has supported them and helped them deal with the difficulties they faced.

Finally, we found out that the immigrant self-identification is affected by cross-cultural interactions. By speaking to our informants, we realised that individuals are likely to identify themselves with different ethno-cultural groups, as well as that those groups can be joined and left in order to raise their self- esteem or provide protection from the prejudices. For our informants, it seems significant to receive acceptance and support of the groups they join and identify themselves with. Among different strategies of identification our informants use, is joining international networks, where our informants can share the status of *foreigners*, assimilation with the locals, where the individuals cease to be a part of their co-ethnic groups and join the group of the natives instead as well as separation from the host society members and joining other available groups. All those processes of development of individuals’ self-perception are strategies of coping with the cross-cultural experience and aim at producing a valuable image of those individuals as members of certain groups, which give them the support and reassurance they need.

Generally speaking, our project examined migrants’ reactions to the unknown and unfamiliar environments and processes related to adapting to Danish culture, and as we have described, this is related to learning new skills, coping with the difficulties, and reidentification of themselves and the others. For some of our informants, culture shock proved to be a difficult experience but all of them seemed to have learned certain skills to adapt in Denmark and Velkomstcentre’s assistance to deal with everyday problems was valuable for them.

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