

The Irish in France: Assessing Changes in the Profile of Irish Emigrants Over the Last 30 Years

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Abstract:

The “Irish in France Research Project” was set up to fill the gap in the knowledge regarding Irish people living in France. This article will compare the data from this project with the principle research study available on Irish people living in Paris carried out by Piaras MacÉinrí in the late 1980s and will evaluate the key changes in the make-up of this migrant group since this time. MacÉinrí concluded that the Irish in Paris were a community in transition and that an Irish presence would develop and grow. He posited that Irish emigration to France would become the norm rather than the exception. This article will assess just how this migration movement has evolved in the last 30 years and if these changes are indeed in line with MacÉinrí’s predictions.

Keywords: Diaspora, Diaspora strategy, Emigration, European continent, Irish in France

1. Introduction

Research studies focusing on contemporary Irish emigration to France have been very limited and this migrant movement has remained relatively invisible in the study of Ireland’s global diaspora. Irish emigration to France has always been on a vastly smaller scale to that of Irish migration to America and Britain for example. The Task Force report on Ireland and the Irish abroad, published by the Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs in August 2002, included just one paragraph on this population movement (Walter, Gray, Almeida-Dowling 2002, 93). The authors of the report noted that despite the close connections between the continent and Ireland down the centuries, emigration to European destinations for employment reasons was a relatively recent phenomenon.

The report mentioned one of the main qualitative studies available on the Irish in France, but particularly Paris, which was carried out by Piaras MacÉinrí in the late 1980s when 132 Irish people were interviewed for a 49-question survey (MacÉinrí 1989, 65). Apart from this notable exception, studies on this emigrant group have been minimal in the contemporary period.

Research on the Irish in Europe has tended to be more historical in nature ranging primarily from the medieval period up to the 19th century. Some examples would include Chambers 2018; Flechner and Meeder 2017; O'Ciosáin 2001; O'Connor and Lyons 2001 2006. Studies on Irish emigrants on the continent in the last 30 years are scarcer, Kockel 1993, MacÉinrí 1989, 1991 are just some examples. Emigration to English-speaking destination countries, such as the USA, the UK or Australia, is much more documented and researched: Miller 1985; Almeida-Dowling 1992, 2001; Harman Akenson 1993; Corcoran 1993; Ignatiev 1995; Hickman 1997; Walter 1997, 2001, 2002; Mac Laughlin 1997; MacRaild 1999; Bielenberg 2000; Kenny 2000; Delaney 2000, 2007; Gray 2002, 2004; Fitzgerald and Lambkin 2008; Malcolm and Hall 2018; O'Keeffe-Vigneron 2003, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, and many others.

Irish emigration to the European continent in the most recent period has not generated the same level of interest, perhaps because European countries have not attracted Irish emigrants in the same numbers as the English-speaking destinations but also because it is extremely difficult to obtain reliable statistics on the Irish based on the continent. There is no legal requirement for Irish people living overseas to register with their local Embassy, nor are there any formal exit procedures at Irish airports and ports which would record the number of Irish people leaving Ireland to live on mainland Europe. In addition, the Irish census does not give a detailed breakdown of the European countries where emigrants go, rather people leaving Ireland for Europe are amalgamated under an EU15 (EU countries up to enlargement in 2004 and excluding the UK) or EU28 states (the states integrated into the EU after enlargement in 2004).

Towards the end of the 1990s, Irish embassies compiled some useful statistics as to the population of Irish emigrants living on the European continent (Harvey 1999, 21). These statistics showed that the largest Irish-born populations were in France (16,000), Germany (16,000), followed by Belgium (10,000) and Spain (8,000) with smaller numbers to be found in the Netherlands and Italy (Harvey 1999, 21). Today, the Irish Embassy in Paris estimates a population of approximately 25,000 Irish people living in France but it is difficult to prove the accuracy of this number. In addition, apart from a very identifiable presence of Irish people in Paris, other Irish citizens are spread out all over France making it difficult for the researcher to establish a representative sample.

The late 1980s was a time of increased emigration from Ireland (Mac Laughlin 2000). The growing presence of an Irish population in Paris led

MacÉinrí to carry out his study on this population group. Britain was still the most popular destination of Irish emigrants in the 1980s. Some 70% of all emigrants went there, the majority of them going to London. The US and Canada accounted for just under 20% of emigrants and the European Community accounted for less than 6% (Mac Laughlin 2000, 326). European Community countries were however considered to be offering new possibilities and destinations for Irish people. The creation of the Single European Market (1993) with one of its four freedoms being the free movement of persons would make it easier for European citizens to settle and work in another member country. It was also a time when these Irish migrants were referred to as “new wave” migrants (Mac Laughlin 1997). They were considered to be generally more educated and better qualified than those who had gone before even though this was not true for all those leaving Ireland. These educated migrants would supposedly rise to the challenges of life in a foreign non-English speaking country, find employment in sectors demanding high qualifications and settle in easier than previous generations of Irish migrants.

In his research in 1989, MacÉinrí sought to assess the profile of the Irish in Paris in the context of this “new wave” migration and to establish whether this population group was in fact atypical of other Irish emigrant groups. He concluded that the Irish in Paris were a community in transition and that an Irish presence would develop and grow in the future. He posited that Irish emigration to France would become the norm rather than the exception.

This article aims to establish how right MacÉinrí was in his predictions and whether France as a country has indeed become a destination of choice, a “normal” host country for Irish emigrants. In other words, taking the example of the Irish in France, has the creation of the Single Market resulted in an opening up of the European job market where European citizens move freely to find employment and live their lives without encountering many obstacles?

Firstly, the profile of Irish emigrants in Paris in 1989 will be discussed to assess what type of Irish person was moving to France at this time (MacÉinrí 1989, 1991). Then, data from the “Irish in France Research Project” (2018) will be examined and finally comparisons will be made with MacÉinrí’s findings to evaluate what has changed but also what has remained the same over the last 30 years and to examine if France has indeed become a viable option for Irish people.

2.1 The Irish in Paris in 1989

The persistence of such strongly established patterns of migration as those demonstrated by the links between the west of Ireland and certain American cities is striking evidence of the fact that the great bulk of emigrants will opt, all else being equal, for going from the familiar to the familiar. Emigration as a wrenching process of social dislocation is mitigated for the individual by the existence of a wide variety of informal social networks, so that some emigrants, in a sense, never leave home. (MacÉinrí 1989, 58)

The above quotation is taken from MacÉinrí's article on the Irish in Paris published in 1989, 30 years ago, and refers to the persistent patterns in Irish migration towards the "familiar" destinations for Irish emigrants such as America. Indeed, chain migration has often led migrants to the same destinations as their predecessors where Irish communities are already settled and where "finding their feet" in a foreign country may not seem so daunting. In addition, emigrating to an English-speaking destination reduces one of the key obstacles to gaining employment in the host country, that of being able to speak the local language.

That being said, MacÉinrí noticed in his study a change in the profile of the Irish emigrant in the late 1980s as being well-educated and having a new self-confidence which previous generations had lacked. He noted that after 16 years membership of the EC, continental Europe was gaining in popularity as a possible destination for Irish people.

2.2 The survey

In the late 1980s there was an estimated 6,000 Irish people living in Paris (63). MacÉinrí carried out a survey with a team of interviewers from various nationalities. 132 Irish people were interviewed for a 49 question survey, 82 of them women and 50 men.

The survey was divided into three main sections:

- a) The background of each respondent was examined by sex, region, age, education and social background;
- b) The reasons why the respondents left Ireland (the "push" factors) and the particular reasons which led the respondents to choose France as a destination (the "pull" factors) were analysed;
- c) The respondents' experience of France, their occupation, earnings, accommodation issues, integration into French society and social life were studied. Administrative, social and legal challenges were also examined.

It should be noted that MacÉinrí outlined the difficulty of conducting a scientifically random method of selection since there was no way of establishing the total size of the Irish community in Paris. Only those who had some kind of contact, however informal, with other Irish people, could easily be located. However, the interviewers endeavoured to interview a selection of Irish people which was as representative as possible. The survey concentrated on the social occasions and places where the broadest section of Irish people were likely to come together - pubs, a traditional music concert and religious occasions (65).

2.3 *The profile of Irish emigrants in Paris in 1989*

The survey showed the presence of more women (62 per cent of respondents) than men (66). The majority of the sample were in the younger age group; 49 per cent of those surveyed were under 25 and 69 per cent were under 30 (66). Very few men were under 20 but 16 per cent of women respondents were in this age group (66). It was revealed that more women had completed French, often to a higher level, which explained in part the higher number of females in the sample. It is evidently easier to access employment if the language of the host country is spoken. However, the job opportunities in Paris at this time were of specific kinds and there was a concentration of employment in the secretarial sector and as *au pairs*.

Dublin and its surrounding area were home to 40 per cent of the respondents and 69 per cent described themselves as being from an urban background (66). A comparatively large percentage of women (12 per cent) came from the Cork area. Another interesting finding was the relative absence of men from western seaboard counties, traditionally the areas of highest emigration. It was speculated that the American connection was strong in these areas and more male emigrants were attracted to the relatively well-paid jobs in New York at that time. The overall regional breakdown was as follows: Dublin 40 per cent, rest of Leinster 13.6 per cent, Munster 24.2 per cent, Connacht 11.4 per cent, Ulster (3 counties) 4 per cent and Ulster (6 counties) 6 per cent (66).

The Irish in Paris showed non-typical characteristics in relation to education compared to other Irish migration flows: 76 per cent of those surveyed had a post-secondary education ranging from a one-year secretarial course to a university-level qualification (67). Nearly 70 per cent of men had a university-level qualification with only 51 per cent of females (67).

While these high-level type of qualifications were not typical of the traditional Irish emigrant profile, the situation had been changing in the 1980s as Irish education policy and investment was leading to higher-level qualifications for Irish people.

Teaching was a profession that was highlighted in MacÉinrí's survey. Thirty-five per cent of those surveyed had some kind of teaching qualification with two categories standing out: TEFL and post-primary teaching. TEFL is a certificate that those with no formal teaching qualifications can access quite easily and it enabled people to enter the French labour market finding teaching posts most probably in the private language schools sector.

The overwhelming majority of MacÉinrí's sample (84 per cent) had some knowledge of French before arriving in France (68). This was not surprising

as French was one of the most common languages to be taught at secondary schools. There was however a gender difference, 92 per cent of women and 72 per cent of men had some knowledge of French (68). However, the real difference was between those who had some basic knowledge of French and those who studied it to a higher level whether it be at university or a similar institution or at the *Alliance Française*. 57 per cent of women had studied French at a higher level compared to only 22 per cent of men (68).

These statistics reflected a certain bias in the Irish educational system where more girls studied languages than boys. Interestingly, slightly more than half of those interviewed were positive about how French was taught in school. It must be added though that a very small number of women had no French before coming to France whereas 22 per cent of men surveyed were in this position.

If the “push-factors” are taken first, MacÉinrí discovered that most of his sample were not forced abroad because of extreme economic necessity. Only 21 per cent said they were unemployed at the time they left Ireland (70). Those who had had jobs fell into various categories- badly paid jobs in Ireland or were in fear of redundancy. However, the sample also showed that not all jobs being done by Irish people were “dead-end” work.

Some of the sample had never worked in Ireland but had moved to France directly after completing their education, to work or continue their studies. Another group had been living in other countries such as Britain prior to moving to France.

The sample showed that the large majority of those interviewed came to France on their own. Some did come with friends and some were married couples but the profile was mostly that of a young age-group for the Irish in Paris.

So why did this sample choose France as opposed to another destination? It was discovered that the single most common reason was a prior job offer. Nearly one third of all women and a quarter of all men surveyed were in this position (70).

Other reasons:

- spoke French and thought they could find work (19 per cent)
- marriage or some other long-term relationship (12 per cent)
- because of a posting to France from some other country (7 per cent)
- or even though non-French speaking they thought they would find work (7 per cent)
- miscellaneous reasons (18 per cent). (70)

Those who answered “miscellaneous” usually gave some extra information:

- the desire to travel
- the desire to get away from Ireland

- the desire to learn another language and culture
- a long-term personal relationship (the number of men who came to France because of a long-term relationship was bigger than the number of women who came for the same reason: 20 per cent to 7 per cent). (71)

At the time of MacÉinrí's survey a clear progression in the arrival of Irish people to Paris was in progress; 39 per cent of all those surveyed had arrived less than a year before; 29 per cent came from 1-4 years previously; 23 per cent came to France from between 4 and 15 years and only 9 per cent came before that time (71). This confirmed the trend that Irish emigration in the 1980s really accelerated from 1984 onwards and the survey reflected this tendency since nearly 70 per cent of those surveyed had come during this period (71). Also the number of women arriving seemed to be increasing with 44 per cent of all women surveyed having arrived less than one year before the study was carried out (71).

MacÉinrí concluded that the knowledge that an Irish community in Paris existed provided an incentive for other Irish emigrants to choose Paris as a possible destination. He put forward the figure of a possible Irish population in Paris of 15,000-20,000 by the mid-1990s.

Women seemed to find work easier than men but it was restricted to a narrow range of sectors; almost 73 per cent were working as teachers, nurses, secretaries or *au-pairs* (72). Teaching was an important feature, especially for women, 29 per cent of those surveyed were teaching and two-thirds of them were women (73). Nine per cent were *au-pairs* (73). Other women were working in a range of graduate-level administrative and unskilled jobs, such as fast-food outlets. None of the women in the survey were working in sales, marketing and management, whereas an important minority of men were doing this kind of work. Men were doing a wider range of tasks, including sectors such as engineering, information technology, bar and restaurant work and accountancy.

The survey noted a broadening of the base concerning employment for the Irish in Paris with the traditional dominance of teaching and *au-pair* work giving way to a far more varied picture although women were still concentrated in specific categories.

2.4 MacÉinrí's conclusions

MacÉinrí concluded that the Paris Irish were a *community in transition*. They were no longer a small untypical group. The vast majority were doing well at an even broader range of jobs and the number of Irish people was increasing. The Paris Irish came from a more privileged background with an higher than average education but the trend was towards a broad-

ening of the base. Job opportunities largely depended on specific skills and skilled job opportunities in areas such as bilingual secretarial work, information technology, teaching, nursing, architecture, some branches of engineering, marketing and management were available. The Paris Irish appeared to integrate with remarkable rapidity into their new environment; the majority spoke French, had French-speaking friends, were familiar with French-language media and culture and in many cases intended to remain in France. French people were very well disposed towards the Irish which obviously helped.

A conscious sense of community among Irish emigrants was observed and this was one way that the Paris Irish resembled Irish emigrants in other destinations through the way they organised themselves and the informal networks which grew up and helped people to settle in.

The increased movement of Irish emigrants towards the European continent in the 1980s was seen as the beginning of a trend that would gain importance in the years that followed. The possibilities offered by the free movement of people across the European Union were expected to encourage European citizens to take advantage of employment and life opportunities in other member states. Taking the Irish in France as an example and analysing the data from “The Irish in France Research Project” (2018) the evolution since MacÉinrí’s study will now be examined.

3. Irish in France research project: methodology

“The Irish in France Research Project” was started by this author 5 years ago to fill the research gap which has existed since MacÉinrí’s study. In order to gather the necessary statistical data to create the required profile of Irish people living in France today, an internet site was created for “The Irish in France Research Project” where an on-line questionnaire could be filled in by respondents. The questionnaire was aimed at two cohorts: Irish emigrants who left prior to 1995 and those who left after.

The questionnaire contained 53 questions and was modelled to some extent on the one used by MacÉinrí and his team for the *Émigré* project, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity* (Glynn, Kelly, MacÉinrí 2013). The questions within the survey took the form of boxes to be checked. However, space was provided for respondents to elaborate on a number of central themes thus generating some qualitative data. Their comments have provided invaluable insight into life in France for Irish people.

The major obstacle of this project was finding Irish emigrants to fill in the on-line questionnaire. In addition, there was no reliable way to know where Irish people were based in France. Therefore, it was problematic to establish a representative sampling frame for this migrant group. Apart from

a very visible presence of a large Irish population in Paris, other regions in France do not stand out as much as Paris as “centres” for Irish emigrants.

With the financial assistance of the *Emigrant Support Programme* (ESP) run the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin, a logo was created and flyers and posters were printed to publicise the project. The ESP funding covered postage costs to send these flyers and posters all over France. Irish pubs were targeted and the chain of shops called *Comptoirs Irlandais*, which sells a range of Irish goods and products, were also chosen. The flyers and posters were sent to 75 Irish pubs and 44 *Comptoirs Irlandais*.

Irish people tend to get together for sporting occasions, such as the 6 Nations for example, Irish pubs can be an obvious location to watch these types of sporting events. In addition, even if an Irish person does not necessarily seek out other Irish people or is not a big fan of sport, they could be attracted by products consumed in Ireland but difficult to find in France. However, such an approach may exclude those Irish emigrants who have purposefully chosen not to associate with other Irish people or those who may not have the choice and may not live near other Irish emigrants. This strategy had limited success however and by 2017 only about 80 people had completed the survey.

The situation changed positively in 2017 with the creation of the “Irish in France Association” whose aim is to bring together the Irish in France and create a forum for exchange among Irish emigrants:

The Irish in France Association was founded on the 1st of February 2017. The aim of the association is to create a structure for the benefit of the Irish community in France, run by the Irish community in France. It will create and support community activities and initiatives that foster a vibrant sense of Irish community and identity, and allow the voices of the Irish in France to be heard within the worldwide community known as the Global Irish. (<<http://www.irishinfrance.org/>>)

Through the help of the Irish in France committee, publicity for the project was carried out via the association’s Facebook page and twitter account. The association organised the first St. Patrick’s day parade in March 2018 and flyers were distributed at this event. The Irish Embassy in Paris also played a key role in forwarding information on the project to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which promoted the research through its “Global Irish” internet site and twitter page. In addition, a specific Facebook page and twitter account for the project were created.

Consequently, information about the study was picked up and re-tweeted by various groups and organisations which significantly helped the response rate; from 80 people to 207 people.

4. Irish emigrants in France today

4.1 Background

The sample analysed here are all emigrants who left Ireland after 1995 when the Single Market was in place and at a time of rapid change in Irish society during and after the Celtic Tiger boom. Of the 207 people who answered the questionnaire, there was almost an equal number of men and women- 51.2 per cent male and 48.8 per cent female.

61 per cent of the sample came from urban areas, 26.1 per cent from a city, 18.8 per cent from a town and 16.4 per cent from a suburb (a total of 61.3 per cent) whilst 38.6 per cent came from the country or a rural village. Respondents were therefore mainly from urban areas in Ireland. Participants came from all over Ireland. The breakdown was as follows:

- Ulster: 28 respondents
- Leinster: 107 respondents (64 from Dublin)
- Munster: 48 respondents (23 from Cork)
- Connacht: 24 respondents.

The highest number of participants came from Leinster with 64 people from Dublin which is hardly surprising being the capital of Ireland¹. The province of Munster came second with 48 respondents with nearly half from Cork (23 people). The lowest numbers came from Ulster (28 respondents) with Connacht the least represented with just 24 people completing the questionnaire making France a less popular destination for Irish people from this province, emigration from Connacht being traditionally associated with emigration to America.

The sample was representative of different age groups. Nearly one-third of emigrants were in the 18-24 year old age group (31 per cent) when they had arrived in France which is not surprising as it is traditionally the younger age groups, generally without family obligations, who are free to move as they wish. The 25-29 year old category represented 22 per cent of the sample which makes a total of 53 per cent in the under 30 age group. However, 28 per cent of emigrants were in the 30-35 year old age group who are generally at a different stage in their lives where settling down and having a family might be envisaged. 19 per cent were over 35 years old. For a proportion of the respondents, France had not been their first destination. 42 per cent had lived in another country before moving to France with the majority having lived in the UK.

¹ About 1.2 million people live in Co. Dublin today. <<http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/dublin-population/>> (05/2019).

4.2 Leaving and settling

During the worst of the economic recession in Ireland (between 2006 and 2012), 37 per cent of respondents had arrived in France but interestingly 31 per cent had moved to France during the Celtic Tiger boom. This signifies that Irish people are not only influenced by a poor economic climate in Ireland in their decision to leave (their motivations will be discussed below). Since the onset of recovery in Ireland, the numbers arriving have fallen off, only 13 per cent of respondents arrived in France since 2012, Australia and the UK being the principle destinations for Irish emigrants at this time (Central Statistics Office, 28/08/2018).

120 participants or 58 per cent lived in Paris and its surrounding region (*Ile de France*). The rest of the sample (42 per cent) was spread out all over France which allows an analysis of Irish people who are not solely based in Paris as were those in MacÉinrí's project in the 1980s. The "pull" factors of employment and lifestyle opportunities in a large city such as Paris make it a highly attractive location for Irish emigrants. The region of *Nouvelle Aquitaine* and *Pays de la Loire* came second and third with 8 per cent of the sample respectively. *Bretagne* and *Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes* came fourth (6 per cent) and fifth (5 per cent). The west of France is well represented, the regions *Bretagne* (Brittany with its Celtic heritage, language and cultural links with Ireland makes it a region that attracts Irish people), *Pays-de-la-Loire* and *Nouvelle-Aquitaine* making up 22 per cent of the sample².

However, it should be taken into account that information about the project may not have reached Irish people to the same extent in some regions as in others, *Normandie*, *Grand Ouest* and *Bourgogne-Franche-Comté* being less represented.

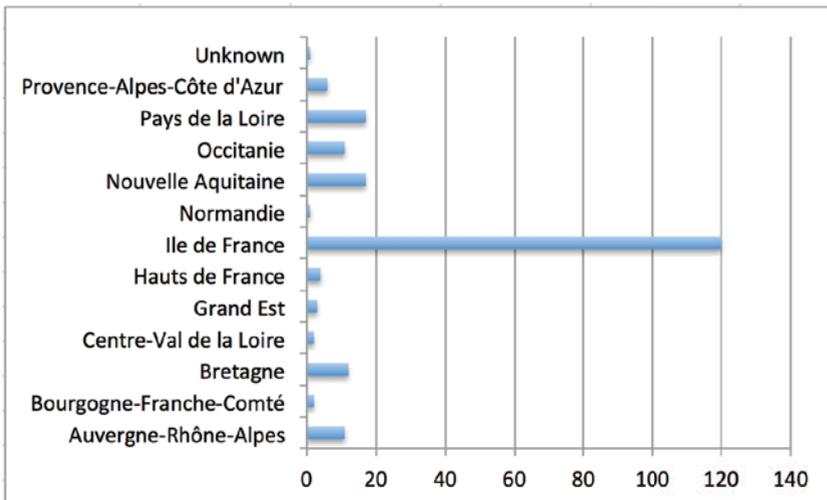


Fig. 1 – Number of respondents and region of settlement

² 1 per cent unknown.

When evoking their reasons for leaving Ireland, nearly 40 per cent of respondents ticked the box to “find employment” or to “gain work experience” and were influenced to some extent by events in Ireland and the situation of the Irish economy in their decision to leave. However, the economic situation in Ireland was not the only influence on the emigrant’s decision. 41.1 per cent stated that this had had no influence (“Not at all”). 16.4 per cent stated that it had “Not a lot” of influence. This makes a total of 57.5 per cent of Irish emigrants to France who were not that influenced by the economic situation in Ireland. Shuttleworth and Kockel (1990) have described this type of voluntary migration as “walkabout” emigration which leaves space for other rationale in the emigrant’s decision to leave by not simply equating migration with economic necessity (for example, 16 per cent of the sample moved to France to “discover another culture”, 4.3 per cent to “study”, 3.8 per cent to “improve life” and 2.8 per cent to “travel”).

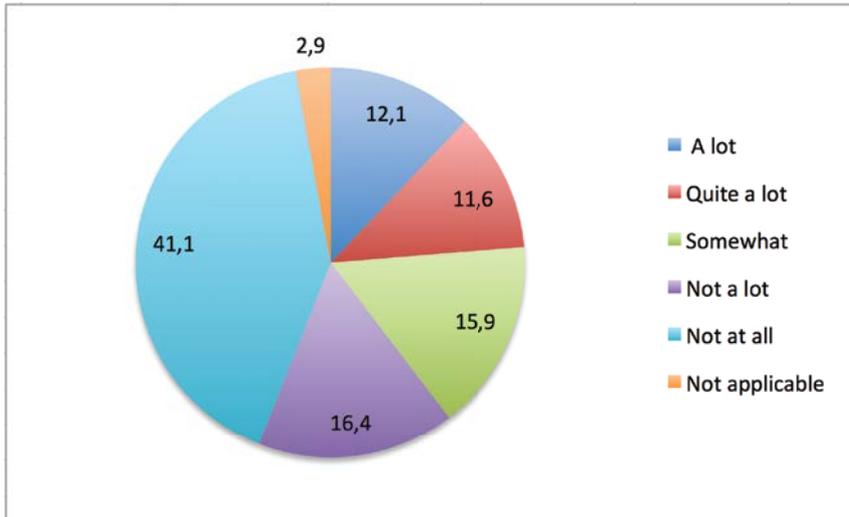


Fig. 2 – Influence of economic situation in Ireland on decision to leave

A relatively high percentage of Irish people (17 per cent) who settled in France for “love” shows a certain *entente* between Irish and French people. King (2002, 99) has called this “love migration” and holds that the libidinal factor in migration should not be under-estimated. The increased expansion of linguistic competence for young people (8.3 per cent of this sample went to France to “improve language skills”), mass travel, study abroad (Erasmus encounters) and tourism have greatly increased this “transnational intimacy” and perhaps as far as migration factors are concerned “love conquers all” (King 2002, 99).

The majority of the sample (64.7 per cent) moved to France alone but a significant minority (23.7 per cent) left with a partner or spouse. Others left with- a partner or spouse and children; friends; or family (parents, brothers, sisters ... etc.). Only 37.7 per cent of the sample did not know anyone before arriving. A large majority (62.3 per cent) were therefore not moving into the unknown alone. Being accompanied, especially if an emigrant is settling down with a national of the host country, can facilitate the whole emigration process and makes the administrative procedures involved in a move to a foreign country (especially France!) easier.

Nearly 43 per cent of respondents were married, 7.2 per cent in a civil union and nearly 22 per cent were in a relationship. Only 23.2 per cent were single and had never been married. The remaining 5.4 per cent were divorced, separated or widowed. This data is worthy of note and would suggest a more settled migrant group where issues around security of employment, housing, and bringing up children are likely to be dominant themes.

Indeed, over half of the sample had children and were thus bringing up families in France. Many people were raising their children in a predominantly bi-cultural environment, only 7.7 per cent were married to an Irish person. Nearly 33 per cent were married to a French citizen with the rest of the sample married to various nationalities. Those cited the most were English, Welsh, German, Italian, Dutch, Tunisian, Venezuelan, Danish, Chinese, Canadian, Australian and American. Therefore the large majority of Irish people who were married had chosen non-Irish partners.

4.3 Education and employment

The education level of these Irish migrants reveals a highly qualified emigrant group. 38.6 per cent held a Bachelor's degree, 28 per cent had qualified with a Master's degree and 8.7 per cent with a postgraduate diploma. This makes a total of 36.7 per cent with a postgraduate qualification (or 75.3 per cent having completed a university education). This reflects the increased access to third-level studies for Irish young people but also reveals that France as a destination country still attracts those with high level qualifications.

The level of employment of Irish emigrants was very positive. Over 77 per cent of Irish people were in full-time employment in France and only 5.3 per cent were unemployed. Over half of the sample (57 per cent) were employed with a permanent contract with 9.7 per cent with a fixed term contract. This shows a certain stability of employment for over half the sample. Some people were freelancers, auto-entrepreneurs or did not have a work contract without specifying why this was so.

Research on skilled and professional Irish migrants has been carried out since the 1980s (Shuttleworth 1991; Hanlon 1992; Mac Laughlin 2000) and the migrant flows of highly skilled individuals would not be considered as

“new” today. According to King (2002, 98), the movement of skilled people was at the centre of attempts to integrate Europe through the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the EU. The predominantly highly-qualified profile of these Irish emigrants in France appears to validate King’s hypothesis as the less educated and less skilled Irish migrants are not represented in any significant way.

For instance, in the “Current Irish Emigration and Return” (Émigré) project (2013), 17 per cent of Irish emigrants in this study had worked in the construction sector before leaving Ireland (Glynn, Tomás, MacÉinrí 2013, 39). It would seem that France as a destination country does not attract the lower qualified emigrants in this important employment sector for Irish people. France does not seem to offer the same job openings in the construction sector as other host countries. However, it must also be taken into account that Irish people looking for employment in this area would be in competition with other migrant groups traditionally found in this type of employment in France such as Portuguese, Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian workers (Martini, 2006).

The Irish in France were principally employed in:

- Business and Management: (25 per cent)³
- Teaching: (13.2 per cent)
- Information Technology: (9.04 per cent)
- Communications and Marketing: (6.3 per cent)
- Hospitality Industry (6.3 per cent) (Irish people are often employed as barmen and barwomen in the many Irish pubs all around France).

Sector of employment	Number of respondents
Accountancy	1
Advertising/Media	2
Archaeology	1
Architecture	6
Arts (writer, musician, artist, photographer)	5
Banking	2
Bar/food industry	12
Business and management	47
Civil service	4

³ The percentage of those working.

Communications and Marketing	12
Documentation	1
Education (other than teaching)	5
Engineering	5
Events Management	1
Financial sector	1
Cabin crew	1
Childminding (au pair/nanny)	2
Hotel Industry (b+b..)	1
Information Technology	17
Journalism	6
Nursing	3
PA/secretarial work	5
Psychology	1
Retail	1
Teaching	25
Telecommunications	2
Tourism	4
Translating	5
Waitering	1
Wine sector	1
Miscellaneous	8

Table 1 – Sector of employment

There are very few health care professionals in the sample as compared to the medical migration of Irish people to the UK, Australia, the USA, New Zealand or Canada. Approximately 3798 doctors migrated from Ireland to these five key destination countries between 2008 and 2014. Those doctors who have trained or practised in Ireland are native or fluent English speakers, which makes them more sought after as migrants to English-speaking destination countries (Humphries, Crowe, McDermott 2017). Emigration to non-English speaking countries can be more problematic and may explain why the medical profession is under-represented among Irish emigrants in France. The procedure for the recognition of Irish qualifications or the work or pay conditions in France may also discourage future Irish emigrants.

English-language teaching and teaching in general was a popular profession for Irish people. However, those who wish to teach in schools in permanent employment as civil servants in France would have to complete and pass the very demanding French “*concours*” or competitive exam (the *CAPES* or *Agrégation*). However, those wishing to teach in the private sector, in language schools for instance, would have easier access to this profession through on-site training or TEFL qualifications.

A large majority of the Irish people working, 85.5 per cent, agreed that the work they were doing corresponded with their qualifications and skills. Respondents were globally very satisfied that their qualifications were being put to good use in the job market and that they were not being “under-employed” for the level of their studies or training. This satisfaction can avoid the emigrant feeling that they are being exploited or not reaching their full potential in their respective professions in the foreign country they have decided to settle in. The respondents who were in employment were asked whether they were satisfied or not with the salary they were earning in France. Nearly 58 per cent of the were satisfied with their salary and only 21.7 per cent expressed dissatisfaction. The remaining 20.3 per cent did not give their opinion.

Irish membership of the EU and the mutual recognition of qualifications within the EU⁴ has undoubtedly helped Irish people find work in their professions even though obstacles can still be encountered in some areas⁵. Nevertheless, 73.9 per cent of participants estimated that their qualifications had been recognised in the job market in France.

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the least satisfied and 10 being the most satisfied), respondents were asked to assess their level of satisfaction with their work in France. There was a high level of job satisfaction with nearly 55 per cent of the sample ticking from 8-10 with only 14.5 per cent ticking from 1-5 the lowest levels. Emigrants appear to be generally happier with the jobs they are doing in their host country than if they had remained in Ireland. Working in a job that is in line with a person’s qualifications, for a salary that they are satisfied with, makes people feel more positive about their working life.

⁴ The French introduced the “Licence-Master-Doctorat” reform in 2007 to align French qualifications with European norms.

⁵ Some job sectors can encounter problems on this level: “The Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC) aimed to clarify, simplify and modernise the existing directives, and to bring together the regulated professions of doctors, dentists, nurses, veterinary surgeons, midwives, pharmacists and architects in one legislative text. This directive specifies, among many other things, how the “host” Member States should recognise professional qualifications obtained in another (“home”) Member State” (<<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/42/the-mutual-recognition-of-diplomas>>, 05/2019).

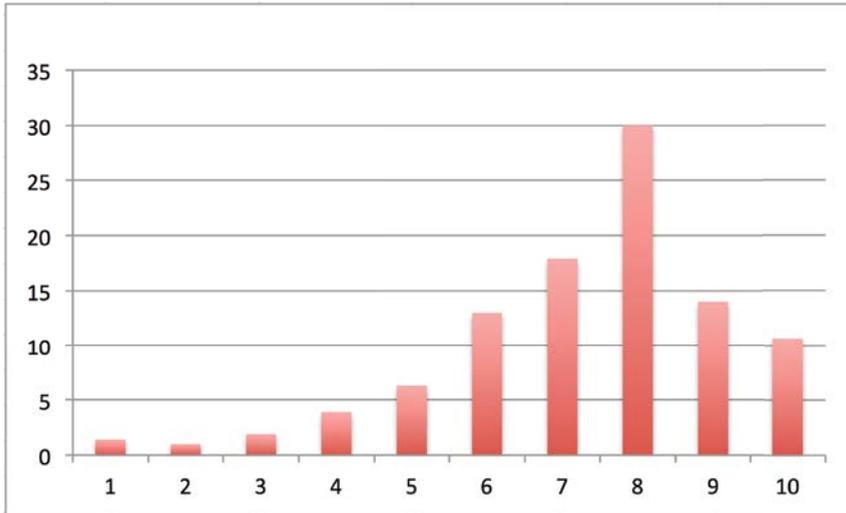


Fig. 3 – Job satisfaction from 1-10 in %

4.4 Language

Irish people moving to France are in a less comfortable position than those emigrants moving to English-speaking destinations. Nearly 77 per cent of the sample had learnt French prior to departure⁶. In 2016, nearly 26,000 students or 45 per cent of Leaving Certificate students took the French leaving certificate exam out of a total of nearly 57,000 students (*ibidem*).

42.5 per cent of the sample described their French as “fluent” (14.5 per cent) or a “good level” (28 per cent). 18.4 per cent stated their French level was “average” and 30 per cent stated it was “quite weak”. Therefore, 48.4 per cent would not consider their French as being extremely good. The mastery of the host country’s language facilitates the integration of an emigrant and on the contrary, difficulties with this language can render life problematic and pose obstacles on a professional and personal level.

Some Irish people left comments following this question and their remarks were quite revealing. Emigrants having an inadequate level in written or spoken French can encounter barriers to advancement at work, “Not having adequate French writing skills has totally limited any possibility for progression in my job in terms of administration tasks and also lim-

⁶ *Irish Examiner*, 17 August 2016, <<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/leaving-cert-results-take-up-of-honours-irish-rises-in-2016-416211.html>> (05/2019) German-7,627; Spanish-6,500; Italian-512.

its the possibility of doing any other work except English language based work” (female, 50); “Not having the spoken language to a high level has been a disadvantage in terms of credibility. Not having the language to a high level on a written basis has been a barrier to promotion and progression” (female, 50).

Not completely mastering a language can also be difficult during moments of pressure at work or in a stressful situation for example when it is important for a person to make themselves understood quickly, “Every day is a school day. In moments of pressure, communicating in a second language is a challenge one can do without” (male, 42). “In certain situations, I still feel limited in my ability to get my point across (differences of opinion in stressful situations). I would like to sound more French” (male, 32). Even though Irish people in Britain, America or Australia cannot hide the fact that they are Irish when they speak, they will still be able to make themselves understood as they are living and working in their native language. By not reaching a high level in a foreign language that allows a migrant to compete on the same level as host country nationals, emigrants can be prevented from reaching their full potential in their professional lives and from being awarded promotions in certain cases.

4.5 Integration

The Irish people in this study had a high level of integration in French society, for example, 76.3 per cent of the sample had close French friends. Nearly 80 per cent considered that they had successfully integrated in France but a substantial minority (20.8 per cent) did not feel this way.

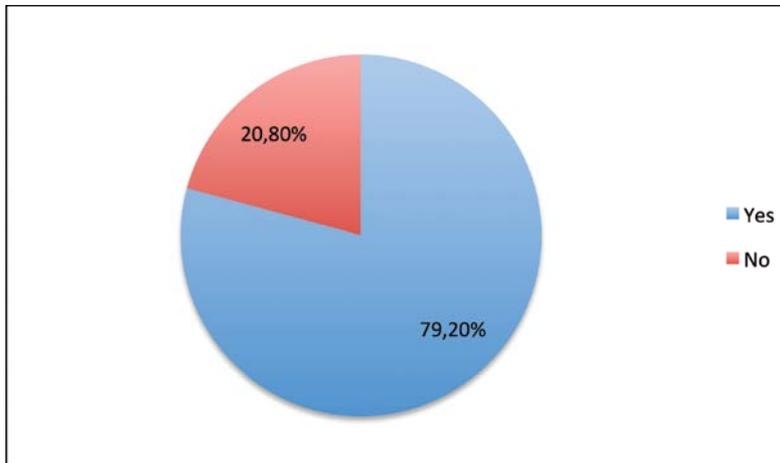


Fig. 4 – Integration

The respondents were asked whether they felt they “belonged” in France. At the beginning the question on the questionnaire was formulated as follows, “Do you feel you “belong” in France?”. After several comments made by Irish people⁷ who had filled in the questionnaire, the author added the qualifying remark, “belong- *in the sense that you are in the right place for you*”. 63.3 per cent agreed that France was the right place for them but nearly 28 per cent replied “No” and 9.2 per cent did not know.

Some of those who had spent a long period in France felt that they did not belong in Ireland anymore, they had become part of a community abroad, were comfortable and settled: “Almost 20 years since I arrived here, that’s half of my life, I don’t feel I belong in Ireland anymore, everything I know and have is here” (male, 43); “I feel I am part of the community here, I can not see myself returning to Ireland at all” (female, 57); “It’s not a sense of “belonging” as in I feel French...I belong to the Irish community and that will never change... It’s more like a feeling that I’ve found a place where I feel settled, comfortable... just part of the puzzle but it took a while to reach this point” (female, 35).

Bringing up children in France, having a French partner and close French friends can help people find their place and integrate better into French society, “I have developed some very close French friends, since making the move. My partner is French, I have a French social security number” (male 31); “We are very happy with our move to France. Our son was born in France and this is where we see our future. We have made some French friends but our work schedule and language limitations hold us back a little from making very good or close French friends. Our son is starting pre-school in September and we are hopeful that this will help us to integrate further” (female, 46); Another person said, “I belong here only in as much as my children were born here and I have many dear friends who I would never have met if I hadn’t moved here. But whether I am likely to spend the rest of my life here - that I doubt. Still it is as good a base as any and certainly I would feel more at home here in many ways than I would in Ireland” (male, 51); “I have become a fluent French speaker, I have a French family, I deal with French clients every day, I love French politics, my home is here!” (male, 49).

However, other people found themselves caught between Ireland and France, neither belonging here nor there, one person described this as a sort of cultural limbo: “After 13 years in Paris, I have lost some of my connection with Ireland, while still remaining a foreigner here, although successfully integrated into French life. A kind of cultural limbo...” (male, 31); Another person said, “I feel like I neither belong in Ireland nor in France. However, I have integrated well here, thanks to my own efforts to do so” (female, 28).

⁷ The word “belong” was not specific enough for some participants.

Nevertheless, several respondents were not very positive about French people who did not allow them to feel particularly welcome and had a negative opinion of the French “*façon d’être*”:

Not to be a smart ass but does anyone belong anywhere? And especially in France. Let’s be honest here, the French are not the friendliest of people. They do not integrate or take the time to get to know people especially foreign ones with bad accents. I’ve made a few French friends but not many. I have a French boyfriend, that’s enough. Having said that, I’m now in my 40’s, I don’t feel a need to completely ‘belong’ here. I have good friends, a job and a life. I think I’m doing well. However, compared to NY, this is a totally different experience. (Female, 49)

Another person was, “Having a hard time with French behaviour but I enjoy living in this beautiful country surrounded by my family and friends” (male, 49); One woman was highly critical of French people, “Beautiful country inhabited by self-centered, over-assisted, moaning citizens who have little concept of solidarity. They are overly rude and lack general good manners, politeness and general hospitality whether it be on the roads, in the park or in a restaurant...” (female, 50).

Despite the negative aspects of evoked by some migrants, Irish people expressed a high level of satisfaction with their lives in France. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest level and 10 being the highest), 84.6 per cent expressed great satisfaction (7-10 on the scale) with only 15.4 per cent ticking the boxes from 1-6.

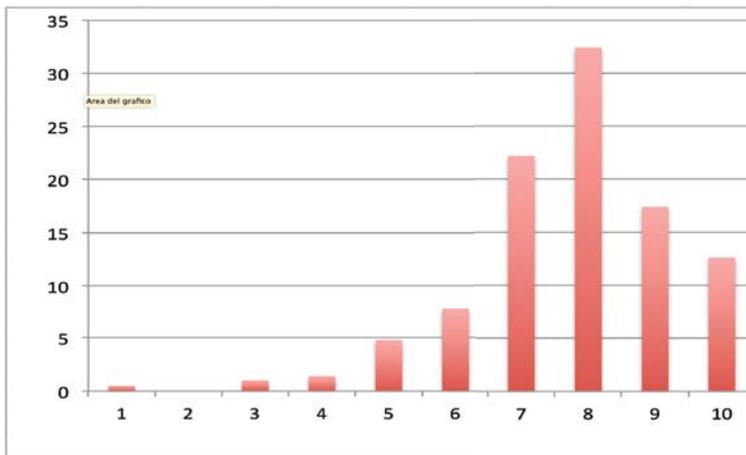


Fig. 5 – Satisfaction with life in France

A high proportion were also satisfied with the standard of living they had. Over 68 per cent rated their standard of living above 8 which is a high rate of overall satisfaction with only 4.3 per cent (from 1-5) expressing some dissatisfaction.

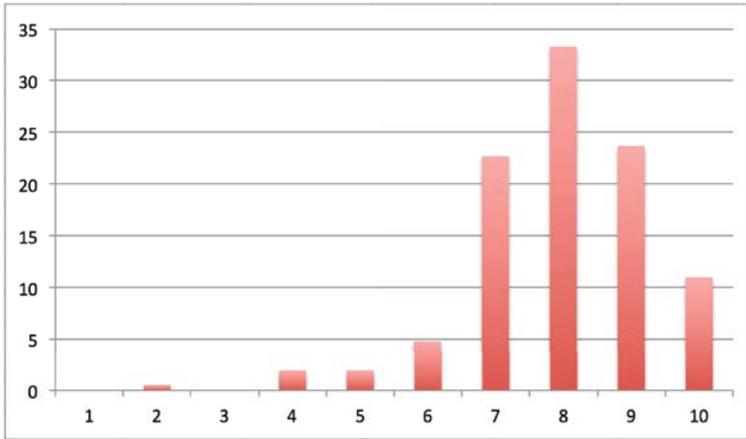


Fig. 6 – Standard of living in France

When asked how they thought French people saw Irish people, whether being Irish was something “positive” or “negative”, 100 per cent of the sample ticked the “positive” box. There is therefore unanimous agreement that possessing an Irish identity in France is not something to hide but is seen as being very positive. It is reasonable to say that it would be extremely difficult to obtain the same result for Irish emigrants in other Irish emigrant destinations where anti-Irish sentiment has often been expressed (Hickman, Walter 1997; Calnan 2017). This positive view of Ireland and Irish people gives emigrants a head start in their lives in France. Being considered in a positive way by the host country greatly facilitates the integration process on every level.

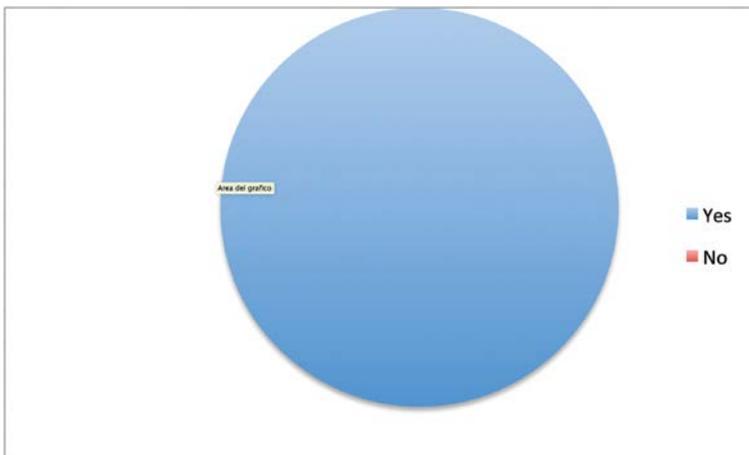


Fig. 7 – Is being Irish seen as something positive or negative by French people?

5. Comparisons

While making direct comparisons between MacÉinrí's study and the findings of the "Irish in France Research Project" are problematic – MacÉinrí concentrated his research on the Irish in Paris, the sample size is not the same, similar questions were asked but others were different – a comparison of both studies can still give an idea of the evolution of the profile of the Irish in France in the last 30 years. There are many similarities but also differences between the findings of both studies.

The emigrants in MacÉinrí's project were of a younger profile (69 per cent were under 30). In the more recent study, if the year of arrival is compared with the emigrants' age in 2018, 30 per cent of the participants are in their 30s today and nearly 40 per cent in their 40s. This makes up 70 per cent of the sample. This would suggest that a large majority of the sample has been living in France for a number of years as opposed to being recent arrivals. This calls into question the attractiveness of this destination for Irish migrants. The traditional English-speaking Irish emigrant destinations have not lost their appeal.

In both samples, emigrants were primarily from urban backgrounds, 69 per cent in 1989 and 61 per cent in 2018, with 40 and 30 per cent respectively from Dublin. The province of Connacht was the least represented in each study.

Throughout the years, Irish people have generally left alone and for many different reasons. Finding employment, while important for a many Irish people, was not the primary reason for them having made the move to France and responses were as varied as the people themselves.

France can offer another cultural context to that of other English-speaking countries and can enable people to improve language skills or even start a new language. Both studies showed that a large majority had some knowledge of French at various levels prior to leaving (84 per cent in 1989 and 77 per cent in 2018). The French language is taught widely in Ireland so it is not surprising that Irish people would have had some contact in the Irish education system with this language before emigrating.

Indeed, Irish people in France were and are a highly educated group. Third-level qualifications predominate and in general the work sectors where Irish people can be found demand high-level qualifications. In 1989, there was a concentration of people, mainly women, who were working as secretaries, nurses, *au-pairs* and teachers (35 per cent had some sort of teaching qualification). Men were to be found in a more broad range of occupations: engineering, IT, bar and restaurant work and accountancy. Thirty years later, there is a wider range of occupations, for example a high representation of professions in business and management with 22 per cent of the sample. Teaching is still a popular choice but *au-pair* work is much less present than 30 years ago. The medical profession is poorly represented in the most re-

cent study and more manual employment like in the building or construction industry are generally absent from both studies. While there has been a certain “broadening of the base” in the job sectors occupied by Irish people as MacÉinrí predicted, this has mostly been in the more qualified job areas. There is still an under-representation of the more manual, unskilled jobs for Irish people based in France.

On the whole, Irish people integrate into French society with relative ease. Their knowledge of French is likely to help this even though some people had difficulties working in French. Nevertheless, the positive view of Ireland and its people in France and the personal relationships formed with French people have no doubt greatly contributed to this integration and feeling of “*bien être*”. Indeed, Irish emigrants in France have a high level of job and life satisfaction in France.

At the time of MacÉinrí’s research, it was thought that Irish migration to the European continent would evolve and increase with the development of the EC (and after the EU) and the increasing employment opportunities open to its members through the Single Market. However, migration to European member states for Irish emigrants has not come to rival the traditional destinations such as Britain or America.

King (2002) has noted that, “The shrinking of a borderless Europe is the privilege of a relatively small section of European society” and it would seem from the results of both studies of Irish emigrants in France in the last 30 years that indeed France is still largely a destination of the more privileged.

6. Conclusion

Researching Irish emigrants on the European continent today as compared to 30 years ago is much easier with the advent of the Internet and social media such as Twitter and Facebook. While more Irish people can be reached in this way, it is still difficult to establish a representative sample though and to generalise findings to all Irish emigrants in the country under study. Nevertheless, the paucity of information is such that any quantitative data which can be collected is much needed to give some idea of the profile of these emigrants and their lives in their host country.

While generally the feedback from those surveyed in the last few years paints a very optimistic picture of life in France, there was however a proportion of Irish people who were not so positive about their experiences in France. While statistics can give a certain amount of information, qualitative data, through interviews, can really complete the picture and allow the researcher to delve into the meaning behind the numbers.

Irish pubs along with associations and organisations promoting Irish culture or sport have existed for many years in France, for example, the *Association Irlandaise* of Paris for Irish music and dance was inaugurated in 1984

and the *Fédération de Football Gaélique* was created in 2004. More recently, in 2010, *NetworkIrlande* was set up to promote business and trade links between Irish people in France and with Ireland. However, it was not until 2017 that the “Irish in France” association came into being with the aim of bringing people together and creating a platform for giving advice and exchanging experience and ideas between Irish people. This association aims at fostering a sense of *community* between Irish emigrants based in France which perhaps was lacking in the past.

Irish emigrants in other locations have had access to these type of organisations for years (and actual buildings) where volunteers try and bring Irish people together (the New York Irish Centre or the London Irish Centre for instance) but such centres do not exist in France. The Irish Embassy in Paris has taken on an outreach role to some extent by trying to connect with Irish people and support initiatives between Irish emigrants themselves or by creating links with Ireland.

Ireland’s biggest trading partner post-Brexit will soon no longer be a member of the EU and Ireland will inevitably seek a *rapprochement* with other EU members. France is the nearest EU country geographically speaking and the Irish government has already started thinking about its future relationship with this country in regard to trade and business but also in tourism, culture and the arts (Marlow 2017). A series of road shows in various cities in France were organised by the Irish Embassy in Paris in late 2018 (Lyon, Nice, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Rennes, Paris) under its “Review of relations between Ireland and France” strategy to reach out and meet its diaspora on the ground to exchange ideas and experiences with Irish people (Irish Embassy, France, website).

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney, on a visit to the Irish Embassy in Paris in 2017, was quoted as saying, “As our friends and closest neighbours see through the decision they have made to leave the European Union, much to our regret and disappointment, the relationship between Ireland and France will become even stronger and more strategic than in the past” (Marlowe 2017). The Irish government is preparing for a new configuration in the post-Brexit EU.

Indeed, in 2018 Ireland became a member of the club of French-speaking countries (International Organisation of Francophonie (OIF)) as an observer. Ireland’s European Affairs Minister, Helen McEntee, told the OIF that Ireland, “was looking beyond Brexit and developing new relationships within Europe and further afield”. “With Brexit, given we’ll be the only native English-speaking country in the EU, we need to place greater emphasis on languages,” McEntee said, admitting that she herself did “not speak it as well as I should”. She said that joining the OIF was also a way to “boost ties with France” (The Local 2018).

The relationship between Ireland and France is one that is going to take on much greater importance in the years to come. The positioning of its Irish

people “on the ground” with their experience and expertise has not gone unnoticed by an Irish government keen to ensure future markets, consolidate business links for Ireland and develop the “soft power” provided for by its diaspora in France. Looking at the profile of Irish emigrants in France today, the Irish government may just find what it is looking for.

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