

SELECTED COUNTRIES IN THE
SPOTLIGHT:
RECENT TRENDS IN SOCIETY AND
ECONOMY

France

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1 Preface

The purpose of this study is to give persons or companies planning to penetrate into the French market an overview of the cultural aspects that have to be considered in France. The geographic, demographic and historic background is helpful to understand social and cultural life in France. However we will content ourselves with a short overview of the geographical situation and refer to literature, if more profound information is necessary. Regarding history, the presentation of the important events would fill a whole book and, in the best case, only give an implicit idea of the contemporary culture in France. Clues about the culture would most probably not be up to date anymore and not furnish a complete idea of the present situation. However the renouncing of hard-facts does not mean that the presented considerations are interpretations of our feelings and common stereotypes. The study of various writings, found in books, magazines and web pages, are the main source of this cultural overview. With the collected information, we tried to point out the aspects that are typical to the French social life. By analysing these topics, we will draw conclusions on cultural values in France. Even if some of these aspects could also be found in other countries, they are still important in the study of the French social and cultural behaviour. After that, we will turn to a more profound level of the French culture. We will present some results of recent studies revealing basic assumptions underlying the values we presented so far. France's entry in the information society is devoted a special section because it reveals the role of culture in her future development. The conclusions of our study will be presented in the last section where we will discuss the cultural challenges in business relations with France as well as the central question of our course: "What is the best strategy to enter the foreign market?"

2 France Today—a Geographic and Demographic Overview



Figure 1: Map of France

<i>Surface:</i>	551,500 km ²
<i>Population:</i>	58,317,450
<i>Density:</i>	105.74 inhabitant/km ²
<i>Foreigners:</i>	3.5 millions = 6.5%
<i>Unemployment Rate:</i>	12.3%
<i>Currency:</i>	French Franc
<i>Largest City and Capital:</i>	Paris
<i>Neighbouring countries:</i>	Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Monaco, Spain, Andorra
<i>Political division:</i>	22 regions, 96 departments, 33,733 communes

The population density of the country seems to be relatively low, however it has to be mentioned that the dispersal of the population is very heterogeneous. This implicates that, on the one hand there are places with very little population and, on the other hand, crowded towns.

The previous facts just take the metropolitan France in consideration. The overseas departments and territories (DOM/TOM) are not part of our study. The culture of these departments is completely different from the one you find in the metropolitan France.

3 Discussing Social, Political and Economic Topics for a Better Understanding of Values and Norms in the Contemporary French Society

3.1 Language

Für den Franzosen ist seine Sprache nicht nur Verständigungsmittel, sondern eine Art Weltanschauung. Er hält seine Muttersprache für die schönste, klarste, logischste und eleganteste Sprache der Welt und schenkt ihr auch im täglichen Leben mehr Beachtung als dies beispielsweise ein Durchschnittsdeutscher tut. ¹

At all times the French society endeavoured to cultivate the tradition of French and defended it against the influence of other languages. For that purpose in 1635 cardinal Richelieu founded the “Académie Française”, an institution striving for the conservation of what she considered the pure and traditional French language. The forty members of the Académie check every word making its debut in the language usage for compatibility with traditional French. If the word is not accepted according to this review, it is either canceled from official French vocabulary or is replaced by a neologism fulfilling her requirements. Nowadays the Académie is campaigning with strong commitment against ‘Franglais’, i.e. the growing influence of English on French. Some words in the language parlance of the youth as “le T-shirt” or “le walkman”, cannot be found in official French dictionaries. The equivalents created by the Académie are “la chemise en T” and “le balladeur”.

This interference in language usage often produces fussy constructions as the one we found in [YS97]. According to the authors, the official denotation of what in French engineering language is called “un oil rig” is “un appareil de forage en mer”.

Especially under the government of Francois Mitterand, Anglicisms were considered to be a threat to French language evolution, so that they were banned by law. It even was questioned whether it could be expected of French people to instruct their computers in English.

Even if the law has been withdrawn in the meantime, the Académie is still doing her work, which is approved by some ardent defenders of the language. In July the academy brought up a constitutional action against the government of Jospin to prevent the feminisation of occupational designations in the education system.

The general public is divided on the question whether these activities are ingenious or not and especially among the youth they are considered as exaggerated.

Nevertheless discussions on protecting the French are on the order of the day. In the national newspaper “Le Monde”, we found some articles, that seriously deal with the idea of a French-speaking World-Wide-Web. ²

¹[Bre98], S.21f.

²[Kah96]

We consider the way how the French deal with their language as a symbol of strong traditionalism. The language is a part of French cultural heritage and moreover it, a national asset worth to be cultivated. Speaking French as a foreign language is therefore appreciated as a tribute to French culture.

The following anecdote describes the significance of the French language from the perspective of a foreigner.

An dem Tag, an dem de Gaulle starb, wurde der englische Schriftsteller Noël Coward gefragt, ob er eine Vorstellung davon habe, was der General und Gott im Himmel wohl interessantes zu besprechen haben könnten. Noël Coward erwiderte trocken: “Das wird davon abhängen, wie gut Gottes Französisch ist”.³

3.2 Music

A Study about French Culture must deal with the presence of music in society. Music does not seem to be very important when studying the behaviour of the inhabitants of a country. However music constitutes a non-negligible symbol of the way people think and react. In France you have to distinguish between several types of music, namely: traditional music, typical French Rock & Pop music and modern (“trendy”)music.

Traditional Music

In French society traditional music still holds an important place. The phrase “traditional music” represents all sorts of typically French Music like: Chanson, operretta,... This kind of music shows how the French want to keep up their traditions and even sometimes want to develop them a bit further. To illustrate this aspect it may be useful to mention the daily television show on the second French channel, France2, “La chance aux Chansons”. There are only songs performed in French broadcasted. The main part of the songs are traditional French music, however the production already allowed formations with an exclusively younger male line-up known as boy-groups. The only request was that the lyrics of their song were in the tongue of Molière. Nevertheless, even if their already were some younger bands, this TV-show is a symbol of the French traditional and national way of thinking. Another sign the love the French still have for their “musique populaire” is the popularity of “le bal de la musette” or other traditional events.

Typical French Rock and Pop

From the beginning it has to be said that the word “typical” does not really fit to kind of music described at this point. What is meant is the music made by the “French” monsters of Rock and Pop like Johnny Halliday, Michel Sardou or Eddy Mitchell. To use the word “typical” may be wrong because the songs are, or at least were in the

³[YS97] S. 122.

past, very often simply translated from US-hits. (Even the probably best known French rocker Johnny Halliday is actually named Smets and originally comes from Belgium.)

However it must be stressed that these French near-legends are very popular, which is illustrated by the sums of sold albums or by the sum of fans attending the concerts of their idols. For instance, Johnny Halliday achieved a sell out the Stade de France three times in a row.

Modern, “trendy” Music

The kind of music described by “trendy” is the music young people listen to, that is to say the music played on MTV, represented in the charts all around the world. French youth naturally follows what happens in the charts; both the music and the trends related to music. However when you take a closer look at the happenings in France, you will realise that almost every musical trend is taken over in French society, but with a minimum delay of one month.

This could mean that French charts are similar to the US-charts one month earlier. This could be right if there were not that habit to take over international trends and to give them a certain “French touch”. This touch simply means Translating into French. For instance, as we have already mentioned before, the trend of the boy-groups was simply taken over with French lyrics. The probably most popular formation is “2 be 3”, a band with an English consonance using abbreviations for the modern aspect, and exclusively French lyrics for the national aspect. (It is interesting to mention that the name of the band is often spoken out: “To be free”. This does not only show that French are not the best speakers of English, but it is certainly no coincidence to make an allusion to the first fundamental rights).

Another trend that has been translated into French culture is Rap-music. This kind of music became very popular, especially in the “banlieues”, in that sense that rap is mostly used to point out social problems that have to be known by the people and the politics.

NTM

NTM is the name of a popular French Rap formation. They are known for their provocative lyrics and actions, as the name of the band illustrates. NTM = nique ta mère = f... your mother. The reason why this band is presented in this article is the problems they had with the Justice in Toulon in 1995. On July 14th 1995 the band had a concert in Toulon, where they performed a song containing lyrics inviting the fans to commit to behave aggressively against the police. The singers of the band got judged and condemned to three months in prison and six months job exercise prohibition. Although this judgment seems quiet comprehensive, it caused a strong reaction of the public.

The explanation is that Toulon is one of the cities with a Front National majority. Since two of the three members of the band NTM come from a North-African families, the judgement seemed to have a racist connotation. However this was not the only reason for the criticism of the judgment. The problem was that NTM was the first band

ever to be sentenced because of their lyrics. Even extremely-right oriented bands, with strongly anti-Semitism lyrics had not been sentenced until then. It is unusual to find any form of censure in music in France. This is exactly what frightened the French society. The judgment was a symbol of a cut into one of the fundamental rights, freedom; in this case expression of liberty.

3.3 Technology

French politico-economic dirigiste tradition entails a firm and direct relationship between government and industry. Here, the government provides subsidies and other forms of economic stimulation for what it has identified and targeted as leading markets.⁴

Especially in the domain of high-level technology, the French government cultivates its image as an advocacy and out-rider in technological progress. Since the eighteenth century, the government engages in a systematic promotion of what the French call “progrès”.⁵

At all times the society attached much more significance to the theoretical proficiency of engineers than to the practical workmanship. This primacy of the theory over the practice laid the foundation of the upcoming scientific academies and elite schools—still institutions with high standing to this day. At that time, and even in our days, the government is does expect an improvement of its position in the international competition as well as a gain in political power.⁶ There is a difference to the policy of promoting technological progress in other European countries e.g. Germany. Whereas in Germany the sponsorship of technological development is considered as purposive, the prime motivation in France is prestige thinking.⁷

The government consciously creates symbols of modernism and technology in order to enhance the attractiveness of the French location for the settlement of international and technological-oriented companies. Moreover, the governmental activity is supposed to revalue the image of high-level technology made in France.

By the selective promotion of prestigious projects as the “Concorde”- and the “Airbus”-plane as well as the “Ariane”-rocket, the French achieved not only the reputation of a technology nation, but also the leadership in European aerospace industry. Especially in this branch, the influence of the state becomes obvious, considering that two of the three large-scale companies, namely “Aérospatiale” and “SNECMA”, are publicly owned.

In the context of technology promotion, the government is willing to neglect rational aspects if the projects appear strategically effective regarding “progrès” and national reputation. For instance, we may consider the “Concorde”-plane, a project that neither truly was, not ever seemed to cover the cost of development. But the government ad-

⁴[Pan95]

⁵[Fis96] S. 165.

⁶[Fis96] S. 177f.

⁷[Fis96] S. 165.

hered to the project because of its global acceptance as a demonstration of technological superlatives made in France.

In der als strategisch wichtig angesehenen Luft-und Raumfahrtindustrie erreichte Frankreich in Europa eine Führungsrolle. Sie veranschaulicht unter anderem das französische Primat der Technologie gegenüber der Wirtschaftlichkeit und repräsentiert die politisch-strategische Haltung zur Technik als Wissenschaft im Sinne von Technologie. ⁸

By the means of public initiatives a positive attitude to technology is implemented in the French society. The dangers of high-level technology are not discussed as intensely as it is done in other European countries. The construction of nuclear power plants, the planned sinking of the oil platform “Brent Spar” or the usage of genetic engineering did not cause such protest which could be observed in the neighbouring countries.

In Frankreich ist dagegen traditionell eine entgegengesetzte Ausrichtung der kollektiven Grundhaltung gegenüber dem technischen Fortschritt zu beobachten. ⁹

An interesting example of the governmental role in technology progress is the development of the French high speed train, the “Train à Grande Vitesse” (TGV). The TGV programme was launched in the late 1960s. At its early stages, the programme was considered a technological dead-end. Conventional wisdom at that time regarded the traditional rail technology as being explored and understood to its fullest. Scientists thought that it was time to move on to more innovative technologies like magnetic levitation. As a result, the project did not originally receive any governmental funding. Nevertheless, the French national railways (SNCF) decided to develop the TGV because a high speed rail system would remain compatible with the existing infrastructure. In 1972, the first prototype train set the world speed record for trains which lasted 23 years before it was beaten. Eight years later the first line was inaugurated. The TGV was incredibly successful, not only from the technological point of view. It entirely covered its cost in only one decade. Regarding the success, the French government approved of the new system and offered its financial support for the steady development of the train.

In recent days, the government suggested and planned the entry of France into the information era.¹⁰

Technology is an issue that reveals many values of the French society. Firstly we have realised that the government and also the general public are coined by a deep belief in progress and modernisation. Therefore rationalism— what is doubtless a societal value in France—is put in the background when it comes to the promotion of advanced technologies. Dangers arising from the usage of these technologies are discussed with less intensity than in other European countries. The promotion of prestigious projects in this domain is supported by strong nationalism. The national identity is closely related to the

⁸[Fis96] S. 178.

⁹[Fis96] S. 165.

¹⁰[Jos97]

image of “la Grande Nation”, which was coined by statesmen as Napoléon and de Gaulle and which is even in our days a political driving-force. We think that nationalism is still deep-rooted in the French culture. In our view the effusive ceremonies on the occasion of the world championship in football this year are best examples. Even if modernism and nationalism are two cultural forces generally acting in the same direction, they have to be delimited because they are arising from different basic assumptions, as we will see later on.

3.4 Politics

France is a republic with a president elected for 7 years. At the present this president is Jacques Chirac, who, during his term, dissolved his government and had to collaborate with the newly elected “cabinet”; unfortunately for Chirac, the new Council of ministers are part of the opposition. The fact that the president and the “Gouvernement” are from different parties is called “cohabitation”.

Jacques Chirac is a member of the RPR (Rassemblement pour la République). The prime minister, Lionel Jospin, represents the PS (Parti Socialiste). The RPR is a right-center-oriented party, while the PS is a leftist party. The notion of left and right are basing on the seats taken by the different members of the “Assemblée Nationale” in 1789. This traditional distinction is still used in discussions. The phrases used are “la gauche plurielle”, “la droite” and “le Front National”, the FN never being mentioned with the other right-oriented parties, that all want to distance themselves from the extreme nationalists.

You may wonder if the explanation of the French political life is really important to a study of the cultural aspects of a country. However, since the government of a democracy is voted to represent the opinion of the people, the happenings in politics may give a hint at some cultural and social points. As already mentioned above, the phrases used in discussions about politics show that the French are always oriented to their past, i.e. tradition-conscious and maybe nostalgic. The phrases mentioned above are not the only sign of this idea; there is also the fact that the French Revolution of 1789 as well as the “Libération” of 1945 or the doings of “Le Général de Gaulles” are frequently to be found in speeches or comparisons in newspapers.

Another relation between politics and social culture is the fact that the government is often seen as an example of well the population and the companies. In this sense there are three examples are to be mentioned: The decentralisation and the entry into the era of Information.

In France every organisation seems to be ruled and administrated from a central point; usually Paris. This was the case for the organisation of the public administration, for the railways built like a star around Paris, or the star-like construction of the highway-system. In order to be more effective and modern the government of the mid-eighties decided to reorganise the share of the power and to split up the central power between the different regions, departments or communes. This decentralisation has the problem of a high number of single communes, which results in very little power for the units. On the other hand, there is the possibility of covering several political jobs at the same

time, so that there is a possibility for one person to be present at several levels of power. This has as a result that the decentralisation is in fact not actual and therefore called “decentralisation à la française”.

The government for example wanted the companies to “think global, act local” and released several laws in that sense for state-owned companies between 1983-1985. So the television Channel France 3 split up in Central in Paris and created a unit in every region. However like the government, the companies faced some problems, the main being the fact that the “mighty managers” did not want to give up their power or to share it; e.g. SNCF.

The entry into the era of information, with the Internet, illustrates how the French people are always waiting for the “push” of the government to react. This is what Lionel Jospin pointed out as he gave a speech about how the French people and companies were “late-movers” in the use of the “new” technology of communication. To induce the French to give up their obsolete “Minitel” and to adopt the Internet, he created his own web-page¹¹. He also wanted special Internet-courses to be integrated into the school programs. In his speech he clearly invited the companies and indirectly all of the people to adopt the technology before it is too late.

Politics in France are a very regular subject of discussion. This shows how the French are involved in political life. This could be related to the fact that the French like to make use of their “liberté d’expression” (freedom of expression). One sign of that involvement is the regular celebrity polls offered by almost all the press or the newsgroups on the—until yet undeveloped—Internet. Other signs are the countless politics-oriented TV-shows, (often talk-shows with politicians as guests), or the live broadcasting of the debates of the “Assemblée Nationale”. As a cultural aspect it is very interesting to point out that the French have a strongly developed need of information and a wish to take part in the daily political process, even if only indirectly by talking with those elected thus having the feeling to influence the political decisions.

A last relation between politics and culture is the position of France towards the European Union. At the beginning, France hesitated to participate in the Union and only decided to enter it when it was seen as absolutely inevitable. That shows that the French like to be individual as a nation, but relatively collective within the nation. When France participated in the European Union, they used it as a method of benchmarking and even outlining towards the USA. The idea of the “Grande Nation” being as good as, or even better as the United States, cannot be realised alone, but with its team. This may illustrate that the “common French” like and need the comparisons and need to be part of a team, even if sometimes they would like to be the captain of the team. The “together-idea” of France in the EU quickly moved to the background when the first problem, namely the BSE-infected cows, caused the French not only to boycott English meat, but produced the “syndrome” of “Do consume French!”.

¹¹<http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr>

3.5 Education and the Elite System

The fundamental concepts of the French education system are “éducation” and “enseignement”. “Education” is supposed to lead the pupil to certain norms, values and abilities which are in accordance with the interests of either the nation or some national group. “Enseignement” means transferring knowledge from the educator to the “educatee”. Fischer describes the French educational objectives in the following way:

Education wird in Frankreich zum Instrument der Heranbildung eines Idealbürgers. Deutlich unterscheidet sich die französische Erziehung vom bloßen Unterricht. Sie formt auch die Moral des Menschen und macht aus ihm einen “wahrhaften” Franzosen.¹²

This concept does not imply a self-maturation process that is predominantly intended by the German education system.

Statt Unabhängigkeit und Selbständigkeit zu fördern, wird die französische Jugend intensiver in ein bürgerlichen, normenorientiertes Leben eingebunden als ihre deutschen Altersgenossen.¹³

Fischer declares that “éducation” and “enseignement” is not attached the same significance in both countries.

Statt detaillierten, sorgfältig vorgetragenen Fachwissens gehört in Frankreich vor allem eine geistreiche, originelle Darstellungsweise, d.h. voller esprit zu den Kerneigenschaften einer hervorragenden Ausbildung.¹⁴

Grosse and Lüger, who also compare both systems draw the following conclusion:

Thus éducation is regarded as a dual transitive process determined by society, whereas Bildung is considered to be an individual, “monadic” and intransitive developmental process leading to an individual personality, career and existence. [...] The concept of éducation is related to community-oriented, societal ideology.¹⁵

According to the authors quoted above the differences between the German and French education system can be expressed by describing the educational process as the one of “being shaped” and of “shaping oneself” respectively.

In France, the education system is centralised. This concept dating back to Napoléon, is reflected by the hierarchical organisation of the administrative structure. The Minister of Education at the top of the system is in charge of the “académies”, the regional administrative entities. All schools in this region are answerable to the “recteur” who is heading the “académie”. Lastly there is an “inspecteur dacadémie” as well as an

¹²[Fis96] S. 135.

¹³[Fis96] S. 136.

¹⁴[Fis96] S. 137

¹⁵[GL93] S. 215.

“inspecteur départemental” who are both answerable to the “recteur” and responsible for teacher evaluation, educational planning and supervision. As a result more than one million employees are under the direction of the ministry in Paris. Thus it is no surprise that the French education system may be denoted “the worlds largest centrally directed establishment.”

An important consequence of this centrally directed organisation is the existence of one single regionally indifferent academic year broken by holidays; the most important, the so-called “grandes vacances” last for eight to nine weeks. The summer vacation also interrupts also the economic life because most factories and offices close down during that time. The second implication of the centralised education system is the standardisation of all examinations and acquired qualifications throughout France.

Social disputes concerning the public funding of private schools regularly flare up. The so-called “querelle scolaire” is based on the separation of church and state. In France, a distinction between the public school system which has no religious instruction, and the private school system which is mostly catholic, can be made. The latter is highly appreciated because public opinion says that “private schools are more concerned with the discipline and performance of their pupils”.¹⁶ Unfortunately, this system implies some kind of social inequality.

Another decisive factor is the fact that the children of foreign workers are mostly excluded from attending private schools due to the high tuition, while children from middle and upper-class families more or less remain “their own kind”.¹⁷

In France private schools are publicly funded and one will always find political advocates of both school systems («laïcs» and «cathos»).¹⁷.

Rightist administrations seek to promote private schools, while leftist administrations seek to restrict them.¹⁷.

Up to now this inequality is not abolished but it still remains in the unconsciousness.

In the subsection “Technology” we mentioned the primacy of the theory over the practice which becomes obvious when considering the concept of education for craftsmanship and industry. Whereas in Germany practical instruction is on a par with vocational school, French vocational education almost exclusively takes place in school. This may be a reason for the extremely high number of unemployed young people in France.

The university system in France is determined by the outstanding reputation of the “Grandes Ecoles”. It is not exaggerated to speak of elitist universities because nearly all socially important positions in management, administration, research and military are filled with graduates of the “Grandes Ecoles”. A study of the CNRS¹⁸ in '93 found out that among the 25 largest French companies in the last twenty years

¹⁶[GL93] S. 220f.

¹⁷[GL93] S. 221.

¹⁸[Fis96] S. 142.

the majority of top-managers have received their education at a “Grande Ecole”. The French elitist universities focus on special domains as administration for instance. They are not intended to educate highly specialised students, but rather imparting them to a more general ability of problem-solving.

After being admitted, the students first learn theory and then get involved in a more practice-related, vocationally-oriented training, furthering flexibility and creativity by means of problem-solving in small groups.¹⁹

The “Grandes Ecoles” exert an enormous impact on the French society. Firstly, the system is leading to a selection process in society. The admission competition, the so-called “concours d’admission” is very tough as it is typical for every type of competition in France. Precondition for successfully passing the entrance examination is the attendance of a two-year preparation class. Even if the state-run “Grandes Ecoles” provide their students with a free education, the selection process is not an exclusively intellectual one. According to Fischer, social-disadvantaged families cannot afford the required prolongation of school attendance. Moreover he declared that a broad educational background of the family facilitates the passing of the entrance examination.

Vor allem die Entwicklungsgeschichte der “bourgeoisie” zeichnet sich durch ein hohes Bildungsniveau aus, das auf einem enzyklopädischen und literarischen Wirtschaftsideal basiert, d.h. das “enseignement général”, die Allgemeinbildung, ist kongruent mit dem von der “bourgeoisie” traditionell favorisierten Lebensinhalten. Der familiäre Hintergrund der Schüler aus höheren gesellschaftlichen Schichten bildet die Basis und den Rahmen für die Schulausbildung, wobei ein Arbeiterkind, das zuvor kaum mit Philosophie, Literaturwissenschaft und Geschichte konfrontiert wurde, zwangsläufig im Selektionsprozeß eine ungünstigere Ausgangsposition besitzt.²⁰

Even after being admitted, the selection process continues. After the final examination, the graduates of a class are ranked according to their performance and are recruited by business and administration following this ranking. Those who are successful have cleared all hurdles towards their social career.

[...] ihm öffnen sich Türen, die für andere auf ewig verschlossen bleiben.²¹

According to the study of Fischer, a graduate does not leave to legitimate his competence regularly because he has already shown his general proficiency. What one may find very surprising is the fact that high-level executives who graduated in business administration are rather rare. An interesting observation in this context is the close-meshed network in administration and business. Frequently government officials obtain leader position in the industry and the other way round. Ardagh describes this phenomena in very positive terms.

¹⁹[GL93] S. 241.

²⁰[Fis96] S. 139.

²¹[Fis96] S. 142.

Although the old-boy network of some Ecoles is encrusted with favouritism and arrogance, this has created a unified and efficient élite, frequently able to join hands across the restricting barriers of French public life, both in private industry and public service.²²

According to Fischer this instance of job rotation is exerting a certain influence on organisational culture in France.

Hieraus ergibt sich eine völlige Verflechtung der verschiedenen Sektoren mit der Konsequenz, daß ein übergreifender, administrativ-hierarchischer Geist herrscht, der von einer politisch-strategischen Zielsetzung geprägt ist. [...] Es dominiert die Sichtweise eines Ingenieurs bzw. der funktionelle esprit administratif.²³

The entanglement of business, research and administration may help us understanding how national consensus is reached in issues of public interest. The foundation of the science park “Sophia Antipolis” is not only an example of governmental operation in strategically important domains, but also of the utility of the relationships described above to realise such projects. In the context of his teaching work at the “Ecole de Mines”, one of the most important “Grandes Ecoles” for engineers in France, in the late sixtieth Pierre Lafitte developed the idea of a “quartier latin dans les champs”. He dreamed of a meeting point of intellectual people far from the stress atmosphere of Paris. As a graduate of a Parisian elitist university he could use his relationships to the highest governmental and business circle in order to realise his project. With financial support of DATAR²⁴ furthering decentralisation efforts, he could make his dream come true. Today “Sophia Antipolis” has become a reference throughout Europe for Scientific and Technological Parks and is a pilot site in advanced telecommunications. There are not only a lot of high-tech and trade schools as the “Ecole de Mines”, E.S.S.I etc. but also future-oriented companies as France Télécom, IBM, Digital, AT&T, Anderson Consulting. Sophia Antipolis is also the place where French research centers have their headquarters (CNRS and INRIA).

We have seen that political and economic decisions are made in the circle of elitists who fill all important positions in the French society. Moreover it seems that this situation of elite leadership is very stable, as it could be observed at all times, even in our days. We found two reasons why this system is so rigid. The first explanation is what Fischer designates the auto-reproduction of the elite system. He argues that the process of selecting decision takers in the society is evident for all members of the society, but for various reasons the result is not only an intellectual selection. In practice, a certain inequality in chances can be observed, i.e. pupils with a better educational and financial background are privileged. The other reason will be presented later because it is related to the basic assumption of how decisions are taken in the society (volonté générale).

²²[GL93] S. 241f.

²³[Fis96] S. 145.

²⁴The DATAR is the French regional planning authority

3.6 Work Organisation

Conception of Time

The French have the reputation to be polyvalent in the sense that they are able to and like to do several activities at the same time. For instance, it is natural that a manager makes use of his computer or writes something during a discussion with a client or a colleague, and still be attentive and participate in the debate. Unlike in other countries, this behaviour is interpreted as rudeness or as a sign of disinterest, but is fully accepted.

Another point in French conception of time is that managers seem to like to act at the very last moment. This is the expression of the famous “laissez-aller”, but also the expression that the French do their work at the best when they are under pressure. The fact to do everything at the last moment is a way to put oneself under pressure. Another way to put oneself in this situation of high effectiveness is benchmarking, or even competition against rivals. If there is no direct rival, a Frenchman will not hesitate to create a virtual competitor to raise stress. (compare: France’s medicine consume in the chapter over the French lifestyle)

Private Life

The fact that many people show a relatively high commitment to their job and that they are consequently under pressure during their work time takes the French workers and managers to the conclusion that their leisure time is sacred. This means that after work they will eventually stay a while on their work place to talk with their colleagues, but once they leave the office or the factory, they do not want to spend any single thought on their job. In this sense it is crucial for foreign managers to understand that private life and intimacy are very important to the French work force.

It seems important to experience where the boundaries of the workers’ privacy lie. It is not a good idea to think that French would accept the American management style. This is exactly the mistake the managers of Euro-Disney made at the opening of the park in Paris. These managers stepped far over the boundaries of their workers’ private zone by treating them like American workers. Feeling “raped” in their individual liberty and dignity, the French workers literally ran away from their work, influencing the national public not to visit the entertainment park. At that time it was important for the company to learn from their mistake, what seems to have been achieved in the continuation under the name of Disneyland Paris.

Decision Taking in French Companies

In France, the decisions are made by the business leader. When a decision has to be taken, the “patron”, the business leader, invites his direct co-workers to a meeting, where a brainstorming session is held. With all the information collected, the leader makes the final decision. At this point, and only then, the work starts. This process may give the impression that French workers and managers are lazy; this, however, is not true. They

just need a pushing word from their superior before they start working; they would not take any individual initiative.

You may wonder why managers accept that the decisions are exclusively taken by the business leader. The explanation is the same as for the acceptance of the public of the politic decisions. Due to the brainstorming before the decision taking (or the election and the following discussions in the case of politics), the managers have the feeling that they are influencing the decision. Another argument is that if the decision turns out to be a false, the leader carries all responsibility. The compliments are also for the leader, however it is in the common use that this one shares the praise with his team.

The Process of Achieving Set Targets

When a strategic goal has been determined by the business leader, the team has a relatively high freedom of creativity and improvisation in the achievement of this aim. Job descriptions have a negative connotation because these would restrain the operative freedom that managers and workers need. These procedures are only to be handed out when no other solution is possible. If an obstacle blocks the way to the goal, it is unusual to try every possible hard break through to the goal. French companies show a high flexibility towards unexpected obstacles by simply trying to avoid these, and if this is not possible, by changing the initial aim for another that is easier to be achieved.

Hierarchical Structure

In the organisation of a company there is a strong distinction between the management, the so called “cadres”, and the workers, the “ouvriers”. It would be quite surprising to find workers and managers mixed at one table in the canteen during lunch.

3.7 Unemployment

Joblessness is a problem that affects all European countries in these days. For the past twenty years, the unemployment rate has increased steadily in France and has exceeded the 12 percent edge for several years. Therefore employment has always been the goal with the highest priority in French government policy. But despite of an economic upturn and various policies for fighting against unemployment implemented by successive governments, the results obtained were always disappointing.

France has lived with chronically high unemployment for some 20 years. In times of economic growth as well as recession, the number of jobless has continued to grow. Successive conservative as well as socialist governments have tried various cures — creating more public-sector jobs [...], stimulating economic growth through injections of public money into one stagnating industry or another, offering incentives for job creation in the private sector.²⁵

²⁵[Bre98]

The actual situation seems to be even worse, because official statistics and unofficial estimates differ tremendously. Many objective analysts suggest the actual amount of jobless to be some five million whereas the government estimates 3.2 million French people to be out of work.

The unemployment rate is alarmingly high among young people. Statistical estimates are stating some twenty five per cent in the age group of sixteen to twenty five years to be without work. If we compare this figure to the unemployment rate among young people in other European countries (e.g. around 8% in Germany), it is obvious that the problem is much more serious. Joblessness or “chômage”, as the problem is called in French, has become an everyday life experience.

Go to a French cinema today, and you could easily happen upon “Marius et Jeanette”, a drama set in the “underclass” of the southern port of Marseilles, which is a big commercial as well as critical success. Listen to French pop music, particularly the French version of U.S. rap, and “chômage and “SDF” [sans domicile fixe] are frequent themes or references. Turn on French television, and you could easily stumble upon a situation that features characters who are unemployed.²⁶

The unemployed French feel as if they were forgotten by the government that always praised the “grandeur” of the nation. Now they wonder why they cannot find a job and why the French welfare system cannot provide them with a decent standard of living.

For generations the French have generally assumed that their rich farmland and their proud industrial base would provide either the jobs or “the decent means of existence” promised by the preamble of the Constitution.²⁷

The situation is even worse in the case of the long-term unemployed. They feel “excluded” (being outside of the society) and not represented by the labour unions. With no solution in sight, they form militant groups like “A.C.!” (“Act Together Against Unemployment”) that organise protest activities in the country. In January, thousands of unemployed workers marched to welfare offices around the country demanding increases in benefits. Richard Dethyre, head of one of the national unemployed associations explained:

“People who used to be just statistics have finally raised their heads”.²⁸

It is true that the current government takes various measures to fight unemployment, but it prefers the policy of job creation to the steady increase in social contributions. so after having raised welfare benefits by eight per cent, the Socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin declared:

“I am for a society that works, not a society of assistance.”.²⁹

²⁶[Bre98]

²⁷[Whi98]

²⁸[Edi98h]

²⁹[Whi98]

He promised to create 300.000 new jobs for young people in the next two years. This plan is supposed to be realised by reducing the working week from 39 to 35 hours without a proportionate reduction in salary. The companies were not convinced at all by Jospins ideas. They believe that the gained flexibility cannot pay for the cost of new hires and changes in working schedule. Even unions opposed to the governmental plans.

There are many people in France who believe that this scheme is not the way out of the social crisis. They say that the solution to the problem can only come by a drastic shrinkage of the welfare system and social charges on the employers. At all times the French government has fulfilled the welfare debts of the society, so that France has become a state with one of the most costly welfare systems in Europe today.

The pattern of worker entitlement, protest and governmental capitulation is deep-rooted here, and has swollen the French welfare state into one of the most comprehensive and costly in Europe. But now, with French unemployment running at more than 12 percent since 1996, with a mandate to cut spending for the introduction of Europes common currency and with rowing international business competition, this pattern is near the breaking point.³⁰

3.8 Immigrants

France is already known in the world for pretending to treat every human being the same way, but a simple look in the newspapers makes one wonder if this really is the case.

How could it be that a country with “only” 3.5 million strangers who represent 6.5% of the population has so much trouble in the aspect of integration.

This could perhaps partly be explained by the law of the French nationality. In accordance to this law (last modified in 1993), you have to distinguish between those who are French and those who can become French.

Those who are French:

- Those who were born from at least one French parent. (jus sanguinis)
- Those who were born in France from unknown parents or stateless parents. (jus soli)
- Those who were born in France from parents (at least one of these) born before December 31st, 1993 in France or one of its former colonies (Senegal, Cte d’Ivoire, Congo, Benign, Central Africa, Chad, Mali, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, etc.). This is called “le double droit du sol”, literally: “The double Ground Right”. (double jus soli) The regulation gives children of parents born in Algeria before its independence the French nationality. After the date of January 1st, 1994, only those who were born from parents who were themselves in France have the French nationality, if the parent can prove a permanent residence of five years

³⁰[Whi98]

in France. Those children who were born from parents originally from one of the former colonies do not possess the French nationality.

Those who have the possibility to become French:

- Marriage with a Frenchman: on simple declaration after two years of common life.
- By declaration of will: Those who were born in France may declare themselves willing to become French, if they have lived permanently in France during a period of 5 years.
- By naturalisation: Every stranger over 18 may request the right to become French. The conditions are the following: having lived in France for at least five years, good ethics, showing the will to integrate into French community; (this means you at least have to speak French or showing you are about to learn it)

The laws about nationality may not show a direct link to the cultural aspect of a country, however it shows in the case of France that it is quite simple to become the holder of a French ID. For instance the second generation of an immigrant family may officially have the French nationality, without however giving up their cultural differences. This is part of the explanation why there is a cultural gap within the nation. This is especially obvious in the suburbs of the biggest towns, the so-called “banlieues”, where you find a critical mix of several origins, several religions, several cultures, with high rates of unemployment, low wages, cheap and social inhumanity as well as few entertainment possibilities for the youth. All these factors are the reason for high criminality rates, especially among young people, and other tensions within the suburb society.

These problems are often resumed under the phrase of difficult integration. Although it has to be said that it may be true that people from foreign cultures have difficulties in adapting to other cultures, it is also true that “actual” French do not really want to understand, or even tolerate, differences.

Foreigners have reached the French territory during four different waves in history. The first one was at the end of the 19th century. Due to the industrial revolution France needed a large work force and found it among Belgian or Italian immigrants. The second wave took place after the first World War and was composed of Polish minors. The third wave of the fifties and sixties due to the ascending economy brought many Spanish, Portuguese and North African workers to France. The last wave was the one of the refugees coming from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

Measures Taken by the Government Against Illegal Immigrants

The government tries to detect all illegal immigrants by revealing illicit work. The idea is that all immigrants have to work in order to earn their living. From the official point of view, the governmental activities are intended to prevent illegal workers from being exploited by the companies employing the immigrants in order to reduce their personnel expenditure. Another measure in this context is the law introduced by the

minister Debré who wanted every family of immigrants resident in France harbouring family members or friends from politically unstable countries to give the commune an official notice at their arrival and departure. This law is very unpopular, but seemed, from Debré's point of view to be the only solution to prevent illegal immigration into France.

Solidarity

In France the word "solidarité" is not a foreign word. There are several organisations for a better integration, such as "Touche pas mon pote" or "SOS Racisme". Social educators are sent to the crucial areas where they try the complicated mission of building up the communication between the different ethnic groups. Adolescents committing minor misdeeds like redecorating busses with their tags have the chance to clean the sprayed busses in order not to be convicted to jail. The problem is that in France there are no official youth prisons, but only adult-jails. Adolescents are only sent to prison in case of heavy misdeeds. Music is an important integration mechanism. As we have already mentioned above, Rap is very popular in some suburbs and is in this way a medium often used by the youth to point out the critical social problems or other displeasure. Because of its popularity in the different ethnic groups, Rap is often the common point used to reunite the different groups into one project and inducing them to communication and so maybe to reciprocal comprehension.

The French often tend to show some solidarity towards marginal groups. The result of this year's "Téléthon", more than 450,000,000 francs collected in 36 hours, or all the charity events helping the HIV-infected or the homeless illustrate this trend. It would be interesting to know if this charity is honest or if it is meant to calm down a bad conscience caused by the uninterested behaviour in other matters. It is however noticeable that the charity actions helping foreigners are much more popular if French are involved than those helping strangers. For instance the help to paperless Africans threatened to be expatriated to hostile countries only affected a small part of the population.

An interesting and strange illustration of the way French see the "égalité" between people is the Court decision taken by a judge in November/December 1998. It was a divorce affair and the question was to know whom of the parents would keep and educate the teenage daughter. The judge gave this responsibility to the mother with the argument that the father was an Islamic North-African and, due to his culture, unable to educate a girl in the delicate age of puberty. The idea behind the argument of the judge seems to be clear, in the sense that the Islamic culture is different of the French in matters of educating children. However if is this a satisfying reason for taken the child away from her father it is very disputable. It is certain that the judge chose the wrong words to express herself, but did she really mean it that way?

3.9 Environment

*Le courant écologique, en tant que force politique, est actuellement à mi-chemin entre une force que l'on pourrait qualifier de simplement sectorielle et une véritable force politique, désireuse d'exercer le pouvoir selon un projet de société proposé aux électeurs et approuvé par ceux-ci.*³¹

Reviewing the environmental discussion in France during the last decades, the disposability of natural, particularly energetic resources was always in the focus of public interest. As nuclear technology took the position of a key technology, the usage of nuclear energy found broad acceptance and propagation. The oil crises of 1973 and 1979 supported this point of view, because the French felt that to make use of nuclear energy was a first step towards energetic autonomy. The catastrophe of Tchernobyl could not provoke a change of attitude in the society. The loss of acceptance turned out to be smaller than in other European countries. Since 1990 public opinion polls have shown a rising environmental awareness in the French society. However the main emphasis is not on global problems like the destruction of the ozone layer but rather on problems that directly concern either French people at the present or will concern future generations. From the French point of view, environmental problems primarily threaten future generations. On the one hand they observe an alarming deterioration of the environmental conditions, but on the other hand the public opinion is divided on the question whether to accept some restrictions in the standard of living. Opinion polls show that the ecocide is considered to be the most severe problem apart from unemployment. Jacques Antoine, who has analysed the evolution of the environmental conscience in France, claims that the governmental incapability of solving the social problems is related to the change in environmental attitude.

Le thème environnemental occupe le vide laissée par l'impuissance du politique : faute de réformer la société, il apparaît possible et souhaitable d'aménager au mieux notre environnement immédiat, seul domaine dans lequel il paraît désormais possible d'agir.³¹

According to Antoine, the new environmental sensibility is caused by the initiatives of two social groups. There are those who protest because they like to participate in all kinds of social protest and those who want to rationally reveal the dangers of scientific and technological development.

Il y a d'abord la critique «savante» de catégories sociales à fort capital culturel, promptes à dénoncer les conséquences négatives du développement scientifique et technique. La seconde logique sociale à l'oeuvre concerne les couches moyennes et populaires (petits commerçants, artisans et ouvriers) et relève de «l'humeur protestaire».³¹

The author gives an explanation of the rising interest in environmental topics. Firstly personal needs like physical health and fitness are of highest importance in France. In addition to that, the feeling of solidarity with future generations is very strong, which is closely related to the significance of family-oriented values.

³¹[Ant97]

Ainsi la santé et la sécurité physique sont-elles les premières préoccupations permanentes de tous les individus. Parallèlement, la solidarité avec les générations futures est un thème très sensible—surtout lorsqu'on l'exprime en termes de «Nos enfants et petits-enfants».³²

The most convincing explanation is the loss of confidence towards the government concerning their environmental information policy. After the accident of Tchernobyl, a certain breach of confidence between French people and the state could be observed. According to the governmental version at that time, the nuclear pollution stopped right at the borders of France. But scientists proved on TV that there was contamination in certain regions of the nation.

Les déchets sont également une source de préoccupations : les déchets nucléaires, source de radiations radio-actives, sont évidemment, et surtout depuis Tchernobyl, redoutés au maximum ; [...].³²

The feeling of being lied to by the government and the request for environment protection in certain fields are connected to ignorance and insufficient information on the relevant topics.

[...] les thèmes d'environnement sur lesquels les Français déclarent le plus souvent «On ne nous dit pas la vérité» sont des thèmes très industriels et sur lesquels, d'autre part, ils déclarent qu'il faut renforcer les mesures de prévention et de sécurité [...]. Tous ces thèmes relèvent de technologies peu connues du grand public : il y a une sorte de corrélation entre ignorance, crainte et impression de sous-information.³²

Opinion polls show that French people declare themselves in favour of the stop of nuclear tests in the Pacific region, for a driving ban in the inner cities, and the abolition of the nuclear energy technology within ten years. But on the other hand they reject plans that may affect their everyday life like the slowdown in the expansion of the motorway network.

Antoine draws the conclusion that on the one hand the French show a reasonable environmental awareness, but on the other hand they are very cautious when judging planned concrete measures.

Il y a donc un certain décalage entre l'approbation générale de l'écologie et les jugements ponctuels sur certains éléments de son programme. L'écologie bénéficie d'une image globale très positive : ni réactionnaire, ni exagérément alarmiste, elle est perçue comme l'une des nécessités de nos sociétés. Mais lorsque des mesures concrètes sont envisagées, les jugements du public sont très prudents.³²

We have stated an upcoming ecological awareness in the French population. The increasing importance of environmental values is founded on the significance of the family and the sentiment of solidarity with future generations. In addition to that, insufficient governmental and industrial information in the past have made the general public perceptive for technology-induced threats to the environment. This feeling of uncertainty is

³²[Ant97]

not a contradiction to the belief in progress and modernisation mentioned above. Without any doubt, better information policy of government and industry would not only lead to the overcoming of unjustified fears but also to a firm support of new technologies. But companies interested in a successful penetration into the French market have to take the environmental awareness into consideration. The change in attitude affects not only the sales of products, but also the satisfaction of personal needs among their staff.³³

3.10 Lifestyle in France

The expression of lifestyle represents topics like sport, entertainment, holidays, advertising and *savoir-vivre*. All these activity sectors are ideal indicators of the behavioural habits of a nation.

Sports

The most popular sports in France are all types of athletic activity that is on the one hand fast and on the other hand practiced in a team. This could be interpreted as a need for dynamic collective benchmarking. This idea was already mentioned in the chapter about the position of France in the EU (see also the section “Politics”). The most practiced sports are Rugby, Soccer and Basketball. An exception to the idea of the collective fast sport is the “*pétanque*”, which is however usually considered as a game, in the sense of activity for the leisure hours where competition takes a secondary role.

Entertainment and Culture

The French put much interest in the organisation of their spare time. So they are fervent visitors of museums, theaters, movies, patrimonial buildings, circus and shows. This is important if you consider that the French are willing to invest themselves fully in their job during work time. However they consider their private time as sacred and spend it with the family, far away from any thoughts connected to their work.

Advertising

The advertising habits of a country are excellent indicators of the way it is thinking. This can be explained by the fact that the advertising experts have to analyse customers’ behaviour. Their studies do not only reveal how the French consume, they also show what the nation wants to see in the adverts. In France, successful ads have to contain implicit information. This means that a detailed explanation of the product and its purpose are considered to be insulting. French adverts do not list the advantageous hard-facts of the products, but are mostly based on soft-facts. In that sense it is absolutely crucial to create a positive atmosphere when presenting the brands. An interesting point in French advertising is that it does not contain as much eroticism as people might expect.

³³[Lib97]

As an important rule companies have to consider is that the message should not, contain words in foreign languages. The protection of the French language in publicity is regulated by laws. If you want to present your newest car that is delivered with two airbags, you can use the expression of airbag, but have to find a translation or an explanation in French as footnote. By the way the expression used for the word airbag is “coussins gonflables de sécurité”.

Savoir-vivre

The idea of savoir-vivre is a topic the French are very proud of. Nevertheless it is difficult to define what exactly is meant. The simplest explanation is the way of enjoying life as much as possible. This includes gastronomy, leisure time organisation, holidays and family-life.

Regarding gastronomy there is one thing to say. “Elder” generations want to preserve the traditional French cooking, whereas younger generation prefer to use the time normally spent cooking for other more interesting activities; bad tongues would say “sleeping”. Traditional meals are not necessarily connected to the idea of a healthier life, but rather to the idea that eating, and drinking belong to the most important pleasures in life. It seems that the “quarrels” about eating habits reveal a kind of generation clash in French society.

This generation clash is not only noticeable in gastronomy, but it is also present in the following word-couples: television vs. books, Internet vs. libraries (or Minitel); jeans and T-shirt vs. suits, or in a more exaggerated way: inline-skates vs. bicycles. In general, it seems that the younger generation still has the revolutionary spirit of 1789 or of the late-sixties, which vanishes at a certain age vanishes, leaving a conformist attitude.

A last point to be made when discussing the French lifestyle is that on the one hand they are very proud of “savoir vivre”, but on the other hand they are the biggest medicine consumers in the world. This is maybe due to the fact that they are afraid of getting ill; but the list of medicine consumed shows that on the first places you find anti-depressants and “courage-makers”.

4 Basic Assumptions Coined by Catholic Traditionalism and Cartesian Rationalism

4.1 The Cartesian Rationalism

In 1637 Descartes published the “discours de la méthode” and triggered a billow of logical thinking throughout France. Descartes is the representative of an ideal view of the world. Based upon an axiomatic system, the world has to be explored by the method of deduction that creates new knowledge. A thinking person should not believe neither in experience nor in observation but exclusively in the power of “raison”. The idea of what the French connect with “raison” differs from the semantics of the German notion “Vernunft”. Whereas “Vernunft” is acting in a more receptive and mediating way, “raison” means the search of absolute certainty.³⁴ The Enlighteners of the 18th century were driven by “raison”, so that the idea became a concept revolutionising the societal system. Fischer argues that the rational, mathematical way of thinking and acting is still predominant today.

Die messerscharfe Rationalität eines René Descartes, der Positivismus kühner Gesellschaftsplaner, der Funktionalismus der an den Grandes Ecoles ausgebildeten professionellen Elite, [...] die zentrale und administrative Kontrolle der Universitäten und der wissenschaftlichen Arbeit, die intellektuellen Methoden, die moralische Aufklärung, die Ideologisierung von Konflikten durch die Intellektuellen, dies alles sind Erscheinungsformen eines Begriffs der Rationalität, der uns in Frankreich in besonders vielgestaltiger Form begegnet.³⁵

The so-called Cartesian Rationalism is suitable for explaining some basic assumptions in the French culture. For instance we may consider the mental attitude to reality. It is obvious that rationalism leads rather to representationalism than to the construction of reality (constructivism).

4.2 “Progrès” and The Conception of Time

Visions of the future are coined by the positivistic belief in progress, proclaimed by the enlightener Condorcet. According to him, the continuous shaping of the world by means of “raison” is inevitably leading towards the evolution of a better world. Therefore “Progrès” means the systematic application of “raison” to open up and shape all domains of living, which not only means technological-scientific but also ethical-moral progress. Thus activity in the sense of “raison” is considered to be rather effective than useless.

The French belief in “raison” and the method of deduction to obtain “progrès” implicate that the past, the present, and the future are connected by linearity. A cyclical or other non-linear conceptions of time are contrary to “progrès” because the application of “raison” and deduction would lead to a stage of development already achieved in

³⁴[Fis96] S. 45.

³⁵[Fis96] S. 47.

the past. Time is considered to be divisible, computable, and allocatable—hence a polychronic conception of time (remark: Hall & Hall characterised polychronic time additionally as non-linear).

4.3 “Volonté générale, and the Conception of Human Relations and Activities

The Geneva philosopher Rousseau looked for a theoretical solution to the problem of socially organising the liberal living together of individuals. By means of rationalism, he developed the “Contrat Social” of 1762. According to this theory the sum of all individual wills (“volonté de tous”) has to be subordinated to the public will—the so-called “volonté générale”. In order to obtain a societal consensus, all members of the community have to renounce some liberty. The “Contrat Social” allows a liberal, civil life with guaranteed political, economic and social security. The “volonté générale” creates an inner unity in a well-defined territorial scope, called “la nation”. The belief in “nation” and nationwide consensus is an indicator of collectivism in the French culture. But at the same time, the concept of “volonté générale” implicates the centralised determination of the public will, represented by the societal elite in contemporary France. Regarding the concept of confidence it seems very difficult to find an answer. “Volonté générale” means confidence in the representation of the public will, and from the unity of the “nation” one might conclude that French people also confide in one another. But what about foreign people?

4.4 “Nation” and the Conception of Space

The scope of the “volonté générale” is the “nation”. The latter is a product of rationalism—a territory with rationally fixed borders and no regard for culturally grown zones. The division of France into efficient administration unit, the so-called “départements”, is an example of the rational conception of space in the French culture. “Progrès” is only possible in rationally inspected space. As the “raison”-induced truth and “progrès” have general validity, the French concept of progress is not restricted by spatial barriers. The space is also divisible, computable and allocatable.

4.5 “Réliigion” and Initiative

France is coined by catholic traditionalism. It is considered to be hindering for individual and collective activities. Individual initiative is reputed as societally not desirable.

Der katholische Glaube gilt als hemmend für die Aktivität von Individuum und Gesellschaft. [...] Die Initiative wird [...] den staatlichen Eliten überlassen, die sich aufgrund ihrer laizistischen Haltung weniger durch das traditionelle Element der Katholischen Kirche beeinflussen lassen, als vielmehr durch die “raison”.³⁶

³⁶[Fis96] S. 69.

5 The Metaphor of “Tour de France”

France: a Team Taking Offensive Only on Team Order!

5.1 Interpretation on the National Level

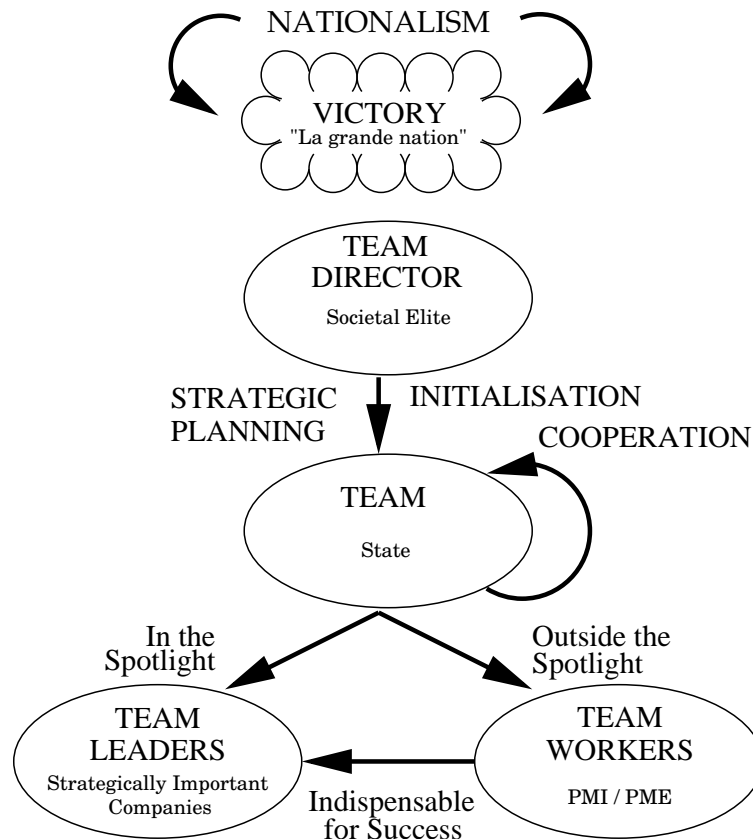


Figure 2: The actors and their relations (national level).

The first question we have to answer is why France is joining in the Tour de France, the hardest cycle race in the world. A very important motivator is the French striving for “grandeur” coined by famous cyclists as de Gaulle and Napoléon for instance. This incentive is deep-rooted in the French team culture driving the team regularly to outstanding performance. Even the hardest mountain stage up to the “Roof of Europe”, as the Alps are called in Tour de France terms, is mastered collectively.

The French team is convinced that the team interest is of highest priority and so they have absolute confidence in the team director having best overview of the race situation. He is responsible for the strategic planning of the race and the coordination of all team members. If the French team is behind the leading group, the director is preparing the strategy to catch up. In the situation in which the French team itself is sharing the top of the field with other teams, it takes offensive not before the elite

has given the team order. As personal attacks are nearly unthinkable, France is rolling with the field otherwise. This is managed with ease because the team is provided with sufficient economic and societal potential.

Every team member is attached a predefined role. On the one hand, there are the “team leaders”, namely the candidate for the tour victory and the climbing and sprinting specialists. The team direction considers them as potential carriers of success. Consequently they are furthered in various ways. On the other hand, we have to mention the “team workers” who are not considered as strategically important. The small and medium-sized companies and industries (PME and PMI) are examples of this class of cyclists. The cycling amateur knows of course that they are indispensable for the success of the whole team. They not only set the pace by reacting faster upon changes of the market, but are also preparing the attacks of large companies as suppliers. In recent times, the government has realised the significance of the “team workers”, because offensives are taken more frequently in more and more dynamic fields.

It is obvious that the performance of the team itself is not a guarantee for success. Temporary alliances with other teams are necessary to stay competitive during the race. The French team is entering into cooperations even with rivals like Germany either to prevent losing them out of sight, or to extend the common lead or rather to catch up collectively with the head of the field. This may explain the French engagement in the EU as a necessity to stay competitive with other teams and cooperations like the U.S. and Asia. Alliances with France are often unstable. When problems occur, it is possible that the French team leaves the cooperation and continues the race alone. Another problem in this context is the French cultural demarcation preventing a deep understanding of culture and strategy of competitors.

5.2 Interpretation on the Entrepreneurial Level

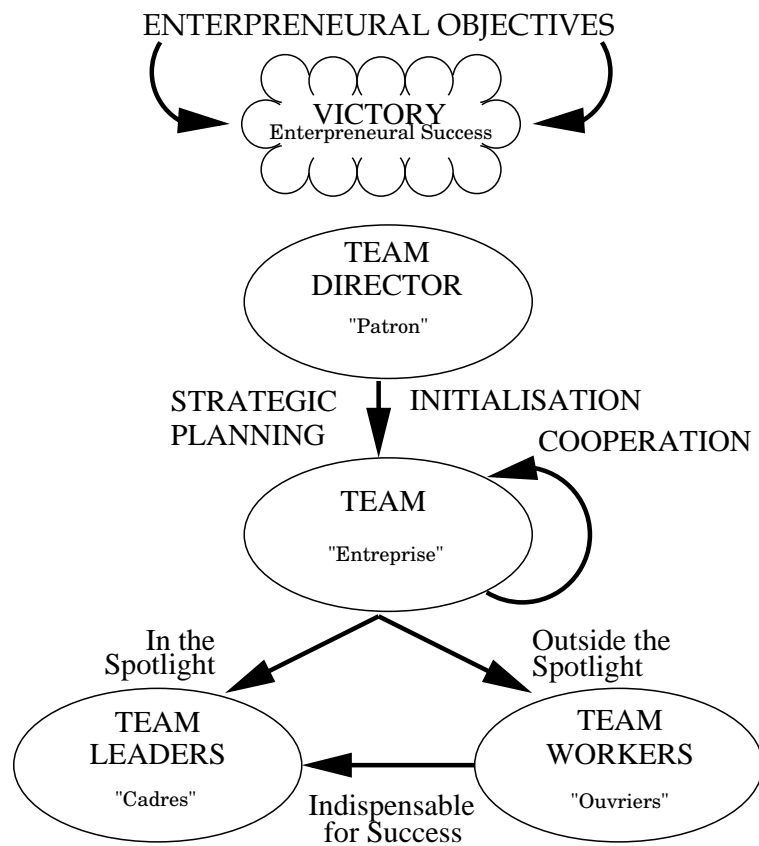


Figure 3: The actors and their relations (entrepreneurial level).

We leave it to the reader to interpret the metaphor on the entrepreneurial level using the observations from section three.

6 The French Culture—an Overview

6.1 Artefacts, Values and Basic Assumptions

The following figure is supposed to summarise and combine the results of our study so far. By analysing societal topics we have extracted values reflected by cultural artefacts. After that we endeavoured to confirm this values by studying basic assumptions in France. In this context, the book of Fischer³⁷ provided us with an interesting starting point—the Cartesian rationalism and catholic traditionalism.

U N E M P L O Y M E N T	LANGUAGE		MUSIC	LIFESTYLE		E N V I R O N M E N T	
	M O D E R N I S M	INDIVIDUAL COLLECTIVISM		ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS			C E N T R A L I S M
		TIME Linear in Progress Polychronic in Activities		SPACE Rational Subdivision			
	N A T I O N A L I S M	RISK MENTALITY Risk Aversion		REALITY Representationalism			P A T R O N A L I S M
IDENTITY Collectivism		ACTIVITY Effectivity	CON-FIDENCE Among "La nation"		S A V O I R V I V R E		
C I V I L I S A T I O N	ACCEPTANCE OF HIERARCHY		TRADITIONALISM				
I M M I G R A N T S	POLITICS	WORK ORGANISATION		EDUCATION		T E C H N O L O G Y	

Figure 4: The different layers of French culture: from outside inwards: domains of analysed artefacts, values and basic assumptions

³⁷[Fis96]

6.2 Explaining Apparent Cultural Inconsistencies and Compensation Strategies



Figure 5: Apparent Cultural Inconsistencies and their explanation

We have seen that the French are acting collectively on the national level. For instance political and economic decisions are collectively measured although they are taken by an intellectual elite. A strong national spirit and sentiment of national solidarity are further indicators for this observation. If we leave the national level and turn to cooperation of European or global reach, the situation is completely different. France is always putting emphasis on their individuality and outstanding position in the cooperation. The French engagement in the EU is a good example of this behaviour. If we remember the governmental course in the BSE-scandal, individual acting has determined the French policy. This behaviour is often called “individual collectivism”.

In France, we found a broad acceptance of hierarchical structures. The education systems produces an intellectual elite, the graduates of the “Grandes Ecoles”. They fill nearly all leading positions in administration, research and business. The elitists are considered as the representatives of the “volonté générale”, so that the societal selection process is judged compatible to the spirit of “liberté”. “Liberté means the need for free expression of opinion and becomes obvious in the broad popularity of political and societal discussions and demonstrations. It may be considered as a certain counterbalance to the elitist leadership.

Language and music are domains in which the protection of national culture becomes obvious. Culture is not only considered as a heritage worth to preserve, but also as a

national asset. Therefore cultivating tradition plays an important role in the society. The strong belief in progress and the broad acceptance of technology are not in contradiction to tradition-oriented values. The concept of “progrès, which we have discussed above, may be the link between both attitudes.

On the entrepreneurial as well as on the governmental level, we have observed a need for direct leadership. In companies strategic planning is exclusively done by the PDG or the patron. They take the necessary decisions and initiate activities to reach defined goals. This form of leadership is called “patronalism”. After being initialized, co-workers are displaying creativity and talent for improvisation. In this stage, direct leadership is not any longer necessary.

Now we turn to some actual inconsistencies in the French cultural image. On the one hand the French show a deep sentiment of solidarity to future generations (environmental protection) as well as to jobless and homeless people. Apart from this, France is a country with one of the most costly welfare systems in Europe. But on the other hand she is known for xenophobia, in particular for the governmental measures against immigration. This inconsistency may be explained by the strong feeling of national unity excluding people who are not part of “la nation”.

We have mentioned above that a rising awareness for environmental problems may be observed in France acting against the usage of dangerous or not fully explored technologies. Industry and government must change their information policy concerning dangers of new technologies if they want to conserve the general support of technological progress.

7 The Information Society—a Challenge to French Culture and a Need for Changes in Social and Political Structures

*France faces a cultural identity crisis as her desperate bureaucrats and restless population struggle for cultural integrity and economic stability in a changing world that threatens to disrupt her social, political and cultural traditions.*³⁸

7.1 The Entry into the Information Society Is Indispensable

In August 1997 the prime minister declared the preparing of France's entry into the information society. Jospin had to admit that apparently France was falling behind in information technology. Figures such as the small number of computer-equipped households and French Internet users, the low level of computer literacy, the insufficient and low-quality information services in the new networks as well as the lack of innovative companies in this domain, confirm his observation. The political vision was that of a collective effort to catch up in the area of information technology. The French prime minister put emphasis on the significance of information technology for collective wealth, international competitiveness and the fight against unemployment. "[...] the next century will largely become a battle of intelligence."³⁹

But these sweeping changes introduced by information technology go well beyond the economic stakes: the rise of the new information and communications networks hold out social, cultural and, ultimately, political promises.³⁹

So he concludes:

I am convinced that we are today at a crossroads: we have every means propelling France to the forefront of the information society. [...] France and French culture must occupy their rightful place in the global information society.³⁹

³⁸[Pan95]

³⁹[Jos97]

7.2 French Culture—Barrier or Stepping-Stone to the Entry into the Information Society

*It is no surprise, then, that the Internet has emerged as a formidable social and cultural institution of global proportions, challenging traditional societal institutions spanning from individual liberty, the role of the authority, the concepts of ownership, community and rights. It forces redefinitions in social interactions by questioning social boundaries, relations and identity. It is here that the France is caught, struggling to overcome fears that rest in the unknown.*⁴⁰

Nationalism is, as we have seen above, the most obvious driving force towards France's activity in information technology. It is imperative to France is joining the information society because "la grandeur" calls for being part of the decision-making process on the global scale. The fear of the American domination in cyberspace might produce a collective feat providing the nation with a leading position in the information age. The example of the aerospace industry mentioned above should recall the collective power of the French society. The current governmental program "Preparing France's Entry into the Information Society" reveals impressive efforts to regain lost time and ground. On the other hand, strong nationalism is perhaps the main obstacle preventing her from catching up with the leaders in the information technology domain. At all times the French put emphasis on their independence in particular when it comes to American influence. It seems to be a bit paranoid when the French speak of "La pollution américaine" that "overwhelm a people with a long history and reputation of an unabating nationalism, intellectualism and independent thought".⁴⁰

The French are notorious for their anti-American sentiments throughout history and France has always been the most vocal nation against the culture, politics and economic policies of the United States".⁴⁰

But U.S. computer companies are dominating the soft-/hardware market and are outriders in the domain of Internet technology. As the number of national Internet providers is still very small, the easiest and most affordable access to the Internet is offered by American companies like AOL and CompuServe. So successfully catching up in international competition is strongly related to the dispelling of "Americanophobia", and giving up the paranoid pursuit of independence in favour of cooperating with foreign investors. The latter bring economic stability, employment and the enhancement of domestic competition to France.

Cooperative endeavours, such as France Télécom's proposed alliance with Germany's Deutsche Telekom's and the U.S.' Sprint Corporation, may expand France's knowledge and technology base, and similarly improve her resources and relations with the U.S.A..⁴⁰

⁴⁰[Pan95]

The fear of American hegemony is primary observable on the political and economic level. In particular among the youth, affinity to American products and culture cannot be ignored.

Americanophilia is becoming more widespread, albeit among the younger sector of the population, the largest consumer group of U.S products and pop-culture.⁴¹

The government is building an artificial cultural barrier that would otherwise not exist.

It is disconnecting that both governments [The French and the U.S.], instead of acting as diplomatic forces to ease tensions between two potentially antagonistic populations, are contributing to tensions that might otherwise not exist.⁴¹

Another problem for global interaction are the anti-immigrant sentiment and the xenophobia that are both no symbols of inter-cultural competence which is doubtlessly very important in a information society with global reach.

A related obstacle is the radical focus on preserving tradition. The efforts of the French government to safeguard what is truly and purely French may prevent France from being successful in the information age. English is the dominant language in information services and the language of information technology. This may cause conflicts with governmental policies to protect the French language from Anglicistic influences.

Even on a more basic level, common computer terms [...] are American, as is the popular [...] metaphor of “the information superhighway” [...]. That’s not great news for a country whose Minister of Culture battled so long and hard to smite all anglicisms from the French language.⁴¹

Traditionalism and nationalism are coupled with a strong belief in centralised leadership and an acceptance of hierarchical structures in society. The government provides subsidies and other forms of economic stimulation for what it has identified and targeted as leading markets. But guessing where technology and consumer interest lie is an extremely difficult task, especially in the information market, where time is crucial.⁴¹ The direct and firm relationship between government and industry may be very helpful in keeping up with the pace of technological change. The example of Sophia Antipolis shows that the elite network established by the “Grandes Ecoles” facilitates sharing visions and resources among government, industry and research institutes. The confidence in central leadership implies the government’s duty to be always updated on the progress of technology in order to enhance public awareness of information technology and to clean psychological hurdles on the way to the information society. Moving towards an information-driven population therefore requires political and economic reorganisations and for this strong leadership in both domains. The entanglement of business and government facilitates taking the necessary steps to build the framework required for

⁴¹[Pan95]

successful national appearance in the information society. In France, a growing number of on-line providers dedicated phone lines, a stimulation of the telecommunication market as well as the deregulation and the support of small and medium-sized companies are indispensable to evoke public interest and awareness on the one hand and to develop the new technologies on the other hand.

It is important to set the basic groundwork to bring the community, the nation along the right path. Building the infrastructure for a new electronically-linked society could be simplified with the utilization of the concentrated effort of a collection of well informed on-line elite, composed of representatives from the various sectors of the community [...].⁴²

Pauletta Pan is even denoting it as the “elite’s moral duty to the masses”. As we have explained above, the French elite system is not only very conscious of its duty in promoting progress, but also very powerful in taking the required steps. Priority one and four of the governmental actions, called “the battle of intelligence in the schools” and “business working in the information and communications” indicate that the intellectual elite is creating first efforts to bring France onto the right path. It is obvious that the entrance into the information society requires strong leadership and selective promotion of technologies. But we are not sure that the latter will be a successful policy in the future. Innovation in new technologies is more and more driven by individual ideas coming from small companies. The time left to the government to decide whether these ideas should be furthered or not is very short and their number is increasing with the affinity to information technology. Consequently, a change in the government’s promoting policy is necessary:

Entrepreneurs need not be led by the strong hand of the government, but be provided with a conducive environment for trying their best.⁴²

The most crucial question in this context is whether the vision of the information society is compatible with the hierarchically organised French society. First, we will review Pans picture of the social structure induced by information orientation. She argues that there will be a hierarchy based on information riches, or to be more precise, on the relative access to and the maneuverability within the information resources. The society will be split in people who are information rich and those who are information poor. Provided that the government secures that everyone is equipped with adequate resources and education, the social position is not a question of having or not having, but rather of personal interest and curiosity.

People have the power to change their positions within this hierarchy by taking initiatives to better educate themselves. This is something that is easily accomplished with a few mouse-clicks, as long as one is equipped with adequate resources and curiosity. [...] Before too long, access will no longer be a question of money and resources, but a question of desire.⁴²

⁴²[Pan95]

We think that this vision is in a way opposed to the French thinking of meritocracy. The French elite system is the result of an intently intellectual selection. From the society's point of view, competition in this process is very tough but with equal chances for everyone. Therefore those who succeed in the selection deserve an outstanding position in France's society. So far, French thinking seems to be compatible with the one in the information society. But now we turn to the differences. After being graduated by one of the "Grandes Ecoles", you have cleared nearly all hurdles in your occupational career. In the information society the selection process is based on intellect and curiosity and the actors compete permanently. Resting on oneself's laurels means social descent. A similarity can be found if we examine the existence of social protocols. The one in the networked information market is the so-called "nettiquette" comprising some rules of etiquette, customs and taboos that users and providers of Internet services should consider. Authors like Fischer and Breuer observed a similar sort of etiquette in the French society, especially in the business culture. They argue that ignoring these rules and taboos may wreck business relations.

Coming from basic assumptions the striving after security is an important value in French culture. Joblessness is the prime preoccupation in France today. For many years the unemployment rate could not be reduced by changing governments. The promoting of information technology is not generally considered to be the solution to the problem. Many people look upon computers with a fearful eye. They are afraid of being replaced by a machine because job creation in information technology affects in particular upper-level tasks, whereas low-skilled labour is always in danger of being redundant. The governmental challenge is to provide pupils, students and the national work force with the required skills so that the entry in the information society will bring employment instead of growing joblessness.

We have just mentioned the significance of education to prevent unemployment in the information age. Being educated is highly appreciated in France, but the education ideal is different from the one that is required in the information society. Today computer literacy is unpardonably neglected in the French education system, even if there are well-known research institutes in computer science.

This will require a change in employment requirements, calling for a better educated, somewhat computer-literate employee pool where levels of required computer knowledge will vary according to the position.⁴³

Information technology skills will be the competitive factor of every member of the society as well as France's success in the information age. Therefore "the battle of intelligence in the schools" is the first priority of the governmental information society strategy. The centralised direction of the education system will doubtlessly enforce the stimulation of education, exploration and training in the new media. So provided that education is generally accessible, we may assume it to be a value that is promoting the formation of the educational background suitable of coping with the challenges in the information era. We have mentioned that *éducation* does not mean self-education which might be an

⁴³[Pan95]

obstacle towards an adequate qualification of the work force in the information society, where self-education and curiosity are competences of highest significance.

7.3 Tradition versus Modernisation—from “the Museum of National Culture” to the “Cross-Cultural Chat-Room”

*The threat of hegemony only exists if one chooses to avoid peaceful confrontation. France is embracing the medium, but it remains to be seen if her leaders and her people will make the choices needed to reconstruct the artificial lines of cultural segregation into nurturing forms of global competition and cooperation not founded on cross-cultural tensions.*⁴⁴

France is preparing her entry into the information society. The ultimate objective of this activity is given from strong nationalism. France is supposed to become a major player in the information society.

France and French culture must occupy their rightful place in the global information society.⁴⁵

It is true that intense strategic analysis is done by the government. Assets and core competences are identified and will be applied to move into the desired direction. But there is a tremendous cultural barrier arising from nationalism that has to be surmounted first. The potential pitfall of the governmental plans is the one-sided view that moving towards the information society may cause damage to French cultural heritage. On the one hand, the Internet is considered as an adequate medium to preserve this heritage and to extend French culture across the globe, but on the other hand as a thread to cultural identity.⁴⁵

We need an ambitious policy of digitalisation of our cultural heritage. [...] Such initiatives are indispensable to the international cultural presence of France and the French language. [...] Our heritage is a national asset. We should cultivate it. [...] An active presence should of course be accompanied by strict vigilance so that culture on the Internet does not become just another commodity. We will also have to defend the “cultural exception” with the same determination that we have brought in the past to the audiovisual domain.⁴⁵

What is overseen by the government is the possibility that cultural contact may lead to cultural evolution and enrichment. Access to information means access to culture and in turn access to culture is required to get access to information. The latter relation is apparently underestimated by the French government. France is a country of great history and culture which is worth to preserve, but influences of foreign cultures cannot be fought any longer. The entry into the information society requires the awareness

⁴⁴[Pan95]

⁴⁵[Jos97]

that cultural influence is not only inevitable but also helpful to first find and then to make use of the desired information. Therefore, fears of losing cultural identity will prevent France from catching up with the leaders in the information society. From a more pessimistic view, it seems even possible that she will fall behind them. In order to obtain a leading position in the information society France has to manage the transition from the “museum of French culture” towards a “cross-cultural chat-room”. The current struggle results from the interaction of two cultural forces that are considered to be opposed. The deep belief in modernisation and progress might accelerate the movement towards the information society, but the strong and paranoid traditionalism is a counteracting force, bringing every transition to a standstill. So it is necessary to understand that both objectives are not mutually exclusive, as we have explained above.

8 Cultural challenges in business relations with France

Now we will turn to the question, which might be the best strategy when entering the French market. Authors like Fischer⁴⁶ and Breuer⁴⁷ put emphasis on the cultural differences to Germany e.g. and therefore strongly recommend a process of adaptation. In this way, they refer to the originalities, that are deep-rooted in the French society or in the business culture respectively. Every company planning to penetrate the French market has to do some home work.

They have to consider the French infrastructure, in particular locations of industry, as well as research and education institutes, that are pooled in some centres of France. However governmental efforts towards decentralisation lead to financial, in particular tax incentives promoting the settlement far from the popular nodes of the French infrastructure.

In business relations with France, there is a certain etiquette, as described in the book of Fischer⁴⁶. These rules and taboos concern the way negotiations are entered and conducted. The position of the French “patron” plays a key role in the decision process. Breuer⁴⁷ as well as Fischer⁴⁶ put out that a certain form of politeness and civility is necessary to successfully conclude a deal with the French partner.

Apart from cooperations with French companies the role of the “patron” is important to implement entrepreneurial objectives. We have emphasised the French belief in strong centralised leadership which is necessary to initiate an autonomous working process. We think that this is the crucial point when starting entrepreneurial activities in France. American management principals promoting self-initiative are foredoomed when employing French co-operators.

An interesting aspect of the French economic infrastructure is the lack of small and medium-sized companies (PME/PMI). Especially in very dynamic branches like the one of telecommunications and information technology, low competition and slow reaction times can be observed. When we consider the French affinity to technology, it seems that these are markets that can be successfully worked by means of small or medium-sized foreign companies. The absence of self-initiative may be compensated by doing research and development in a more appropriate country.

It is a mistake to believe that French nationalism and traditionalism may prevent foreign companies from being successful in France. The French admire products of extraordinary functionality, quality or design. Breuer⁴⁷ refers for instance to examples like Daimler-Benz, BMW, Villeroy-et-Boch and Bosch.

A company also has to consider the kind of advertising that is successful in France. The main focus does not lie on information but rather on the transmission of emotions. A restrictive aspect in advertising are the laws protecting French language which of course cannot be ignored.

France may be an interesting target for companies extending their activities to foreign countries. We have observed some cultural and societal originalities that are restrictive

⁴⁶[Fis96]

⁴⁷[Bre98]

on the one hand, but from a closer point of view they appear as challenges and chances. A company that masters the balancing act between the acceptance of French tradition and culture and the introduction of modernism and technological competence will be doubtlessly successful in France.

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