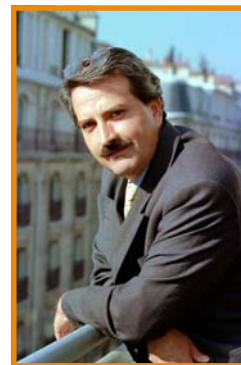




Interview with François Hurel, APCE general delegate

No, the grass is not always greener elsewhere!

But what do the French over there really think about the France over here? The APCE (Agency for creation of enterprises) and Provence Promotion are jointly making an enquiry with our expatriates to find out what they think about their homeland. An opportunity to meet François Hurel, General delegate of the agency and a man of conviction with a very broad overview who denounces a number of accepted ideas and denounces the typically French problem of schizophrenia...



François Hurel, APCE
general delegate

> How did you get to know Provence Promotion?

François Hurel: the APCE forms the jury for a competition organised by the Presse & Vous agency that searches for and rewards the best projects and the best communications in the enterprise creation sector. APCE participated in this competition this year, and awarded a prize to Provence Promotion.

This gave me an opportunity to meet the very dynamic management team at Provence Promotion and I thought this was a very relevant idea. Therefore I immediately suggested a partnership and therefore a study, to expand on the idea developed by Provence Promotion, that the grass is not greener elsewhere!

> A reward for the Home sweet home and Start in Provence programs?

François Hurel : Yes! And for everything done by this development agency. The programs designed by Provence Promotion are very relevant and accurate. I consider it natural and positive that a particular project bringer should live and learn in other countries, but it is just as rewarding to return to France. This excellent analysis brings out the quality of Provence Promotion's approach.

The objective is not to prevent expatriation, but rather to attract expatriates back to France by emphasizing all the opportunities in our country. Furthermore, these programs help to move valuable foreign employees and companies to France who might not have thought of it themselves. Home Sweet Home and Start in Provence are a win-win game that I support.

> What is the purpose of the study that you are going to carry out with Provence Promotion?

François Hurel: The important thing in the Provence Promotion program is that project bringers who have moved back to France are in a much stronger position to control globalization. If they had stayed in France, they would no doubt have been afraid. But those who have known elsewhere and have returned are obviously more capable of turning this globalization to their advantage.

This is the thrust of the study that we are carrying out. It is a precise qualitative and quantitative enquiry with expatriate French to find out what they feel about their homeland's economy and opportunities. We will have to accept criticisms to make improvements, and pass on praise when it is deserved.

> Would other countries have more advantages?

François Hurel: There is no definitive answer. No country is an Eldorado guaranteed to satisfy all the needs of a company.

One of many examples: it is well known that it is very easy to set up a company in the United Kingdom ... and yet the most dynamic country in the world in terms of company creation (as a proportion of its active population) is Spain, although it is extraordinarily long and complex to set up a company in Spain!

> Do you believe in the brain drain?

François Hurel: I do not believe in the brain drain as the media sometimes present it, but rather in a logical questioning by our citizens. In a world in which communications and travel are very easy, people are wondering what things are like outside France.

Like the medieval Tour de France for chartered craftsmen, there is now the World Tour of entrepreneurs inaccurately referred to as the brain drain, and loss of know how. It is a question of scale. Highlighting tax advantages or higher salaries here and there is a misleading process, since most expatriates do not leave for this type of reason (although there are always some exceptions that prove the rule). They leave to see what things are like elsewhere.

What is the role of the APCE?

The APCE is an organisation working with the Minister of Small and Medium sized companies with the objective of promoting entrepreneurship to encourage the company spirit, to provide information about good practice for company creation in France and finally to propose ideas for reform to public authorities to support the creation of companies.

The key words of the APCE are promotion of entrepreneurship, information, advice, communication and observation. The Agency also acts in favor of creation and development of support networks for creators, persons taking over and selling companies, locally, regionally, nationally and across Europe.

The Agency also produces proposals that could contribute to improving the creator's environment through its own missions and the National Company Creation Council's missions.

Although the APCE is not the entrepreneur's direct contact in the creation process, it remains a permanent source of information for the entrepreneur. It provides orientations and information necessary for project bringers through its publications and particularly its multimedia tools, including its Internet site www.apce.com.

Finally, the APCE has created an observatory that provides a relevant snapshot of the existing entrepreneurship situation in France at any time and proposes evaluations and prospects on company creation support systems. On this basis, the APCE provides public authorities with all data they need and an analysis to guide local, regional and national policies to support company creation.



PROVENCE PROMOTION

François Hurel, délégué général de l'APCE, en interview

> How do you see our future?

François Hurel: Public authorities have become aware of the importance of supporting very small, small and medium sized enterprises (PME) and industries (PMI). They have increased credits awarded to Oséo ANVAR and Oséo BDPME (PME Development bank) to finance different subsidies for creation and innovation (loans, support funds, loan guarantees, etc.).

Many systems need to be promoted in other countries to encourage our expatriate citizens to come back and help them create an enterprise in France. France's innovation capabilities should be mobilised around research transformed into products ready for industrialization.

> A winning France then?

François Hurel: France has opportunities and advantages. Its largest handicap is its schizophrenia: it tells the rest of the world how to behave, it indulges in self-pity for its problems and settles comfortably in pessimism.

And if we denigrate ourselves enough, everyone will finish by believing us! France has advantages and it must make them known. Provence Promotion is an asset in this approach that should be better known.

> Do you also support specialty clusters?

François Hurel: In the same way as we support all forms of entrepreneurship – but we also encourage all types of good practice for setting up – everything that acts as a company nursery, specialty and skill clusters, etc., are obviously steps in the right direction and should be supported. But this concerns a certain activity sector.

We attempt to organize other more traditional sectors for which these infrastructures are not applicable, into a network. We are searching for diversification and activity renewal solutions for some manufacturing activities strongly affected by international competition.

> Will some sectors be condemned?

François Hurel: We need to realize that we will never be able to compete with Asian countries on equal terms. I am convinced that there is no place for a defensive attitude in the world of enterprise.

Allow me to repeat a comment made by a computer manufacturer talking about the future of his industry. He says for a 1 000 dollar computer, Microsoft receives \$400 on which they realize 80% of added value, Intel receives \$400 (85%) and \$200 goes to China (3%) ...

At the moment, the added value to be found is innovative rather than industrial and everyone will always look for the least expensive labour. France will be no exception to this rule, so we should concentrate on research, innovation and promotion of our new work and activity models!