COMMERCE & TRADE

Buying from local shops is still common practice amongst French people. 91% of French people have a positive opinion of the local shops in their town. Amongst these shops, the most popular is the bakery: 67% couldn’t live without it. Local shops have several advantages:

* Proximity: one can go there without the car
* Socialising: one can chat with the shop owner and the neighbours
* Products: one can find fresh products of a good quality

In the meantime, supermarkets have grown rapidly since the 1960s, especially on the outskirts of towns. They appeal to customers because they have the advantage of grouping products together and offer prices which are often better than small shops. Small shops suffer from the development of supermarkets. That is why some laws are in place to limit the expansion of hypermarkets. Besides, minimarkets are growing fast in towns. They provide food but also every day goods (cleaning products, beauty products…)

TRANSPORT

Car sharing is a solution to save energy by reducing the number of vehicles on the road. Several people agree to share the cost of the trip. It is a form of public transport with private cars. Some manufacturers build hybrid cars, which work partly on electricity partly on fuel. Bikes, scooters, rollerblades and skateboards are non-polluting means of transports.

Long live the bike! After the 1950s, cars took over the roads and bikes almost disappeared as a means of transport in town and even in the countryside. But since the 1990s, bikes have been coming back. To encourage more ecological transport, a lot of towns have forbidden access for cars to parts of the city centre and have built cycle paths.

Self-service bikes: The weather is fine – Nabil took the underground to go to work in Paris but he wants to go on a bike ride to relax or go to a meeting. No problem, he signed up on the Velib’ website. One can also buy a day or week ticket in one of the station. At the end of his ride, Nabil will leave his bike at another station. It’s a public service. In Lille it’s called Ch’ti Vélo, in Besançon Vélo-Cité… 80% of towns of over 500 000 inhabitants have this self-service facility.

ENERGY

Human activity produces waste. In cities waste must be collected and recycled to ensure the well-being and health of the inhabitants. For the past few years, the focus has been on the recycling of household waste. We separate recyclable from what isn’t. Fruit and vegetable peelings, for example, are organic waste which can produce biogas. This is a natural process and we are developing techniques to speed up the process and produce energy. Biogaz is used as fuel for busses for example. Solar and wind energy are also called green energies.

IMMIGRATION

France is one of the European countries which has the highest number of people from foreign origin, making it a multicultural nation. From 1830 onwards, there was a first wave of immigration with the arrival of European political refugees (Poles, Italians, Spaniards, and Germans). Then a new phase began, linked to economic needs. From 1914 to 1944, the country needed work force and called upon Poles, Italians and Czechs. France was also the main hosting land for political refugees. From 1945 to 1975, a new immigration wave started, triggered by decolonisation. Since 1975, only foreigners entitled to family grouping or with asylum status have been allowed to settle in France. They come essentially from: Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal), Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia), and Africa (Senegal, Ivory Coast, Mali).

WORLD OF WORK

Nowadays, to cope with competition and globalisation, companies need to be as efficient as possible in order to increase their profit. To be competitive, they must be innovative and offer new quality products. In France, like elsewhere, the ways of working have evolved. “Open Space” is a new way of working coming from the US. Everybody works in the same office. Work relations are different and communication between colleagues is easier. But there are also some disadvantages: more noise and less privacy. New technologies have changed not only daily life but also the world of work. With the internet one can work from home or even a café.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

“HLM” - 3 letters for an accommodation: reduced-rent housing. In France, 10 million people live in council houses.

A bit of history: In the 1960s, there was a housing crisis. The State decided to create estates which needed to be developed as a priority. Big blocks were built on the outskirts of cities. There were the first HLM blocks. These accommodations were initially intended for people or families with low income. The State funds part of these accommodations to help people pay an affordable rent. Nowadays, the population in these council houses is quite varied professionally:

* Factory workers
* Primary and Secondary school teachers, nurses, policemen
* Unemployed people

On these estates, there are also retired people, families, housewives, single-parent families, single people and lodgers of foreign nationality.