NETVA 2015 – A week of intense immersion in San Francisco

From last October 19th to the 23rd, the Office for Science and Technology at the Consulate General of France in San Francisco welcomed 5 innovative French start-ups, candidates from the Netva Program’s 6th edition, for a week of immersion in the Bay Area. The list of these candidates for San Francisco, Boston, Washington D.C. and Toronto was announced last June. The startups were represented in San Francisco by Alexandru Plesco, CEO and founder of XtremLogic, François Huber and Mohamed Taggougui, CEO and CTO of Ionwatt, Anaïs Barut and David Siret, CEO and CTO of DAMAE Medical, Benoît and Mélanie Jonniaux, co-founders of Bloomizon, and Virginie Gretz and Sylvain Rousseau, CEO and CTO of VProject.

The program started with 2 intense days of training followed by a dozen workshops on themes deemed indispensable for implantation in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The first day started with a session addressing in depth the cultural differences to be taken into account and at the root of the unique entrepreneurial character of Silicon Valley, this was done prior to tackling the question of each start-up’s capability of presenting their project in an impactful, clear and concise manner, regardless of the audience or context. We then addressed more economic themes considering the fundamental question of financing of the start up in the Bay Area, as well as macroeconomic considerations that could impact the development of the companies and their respective markets. Finally the last session allowed the candidates to have an exchange with French aid organizations for international development (Business France, French Tech Hub) as well as lawyers from the sponsoring law firm of the program, Morgan Lewis.

The second day took place on the Stanford campus where two experienced professors from the university - Jack Fuchs and Mike Lyons - co-founders from the Technology Venture Formation and Stanford Technology
Ventures Program, expressed to the candidates their vision of the necessary steps to take, the methodology to follow and the means needed to obtain major success in markets with a strong scientific or technological component. The afternoon allowed entrepreneurs participating in the program to discover the theory and practical implementation of Design Thinking directly with the Stanford d.school. Back in San Francisco, the day ended with 2 more workshops: an account of the experience of a French entrepreneur that was successful in implanting himself, by using Y Combinator and raising significant capital (Nicolas Dessaigne, founder of Algolia), and an experienced consultant in public relations (Chikodi Chima) who shared his experience about the importance of managing external communication for start-ups that are developing rapidly.

Once these training sessions were completed, the entrepreneurial candidates were able to test this information and advice in the real Silicon Valley through a series of individual meetings (approximately fifteen per company over a period of three days). These meetings were organized according to the needs of each startup, its level of development and the nature of its projects in California. Researchers, entrepreneurs, large companies, consultants, investors, potential industrial partners, the broad selection of meetings constituting this personalized accompaniment allowed each company to explore its opportunities, to understand more in depth the characteristics of their market in the United States in order to prepare, in an informed and strategic manner, their future international expansion.

Among these encounters, we can cite companies such as Google, Apple, 23andMe or Facebook, numerous startups with different strategic interests for the different candidates, but also researchers from Stanford, UCSF, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, and also investors of all types, capital risk, investment groups, or business angels.

There was also the opportunity during the week to host various events encouraging encounters and networking possibilities: an opening cocktail was organized on Monday October 19 in the offices of Morgan Lewis, mixing the candidates with the local French-American community, organizers and sponsors. Thursday morning was reserved for the organization of a breakfast at the Residence of France, allowing the candidates to meet Pauline Carmona, our Consul General in San Francisco, surrounded by a dozen successful French entrepreneurs of the Bay Area. Finally, Thursday evening a dinner was organized with a special guest, Thomas Goetz, entrepreneur and journalist, who was the director of the magazine WIRED for 12 years and who was able to share his long experience in the Silicon Valley with each of the startups participating in the program.

Let us mention that this edition was also marked by a very important collaboration between the different regional offices for Science and Technology of the French Embassy. Various candidates were offered an additional accompaniment to other destinations of the Scientific Office's network (such as Houston and Boston).

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