

20 years of ITEA

The changing of the guard in the ITEA Steering Group

Double interview with Ronald Begeer and Maria de Álvaro Torán

Ronald Begeer (ESI - TNO) and Maria de Álvaro Torán (Indra) are at the end and beginning of their ITEA Steering Group membership, the former having been ever-present since the early days and the latter having joined just recently. A perfect opportunity for a retrospective from an experienced campaigner and a first impression from a fresh face to ITEA.



Ronald Begeer



Maria de Álvaro Torán

Ronald is no stranger to new challenges. In fact, he embraces them. But because of this, he has had to bid farewell to his ITEA Steering Group colleagues. Ronald will be familiar to many as the face of Philips in the ITEA Steering Group, but recently his lust for new challenges has taken him out of the industry field and into the research domain of High Tech Systems at ESI (TNO). Given this, and the fact that ITEA is an industry-driven Cluster, it became time for him to step down.

Great opportunity

When interviewed for the ITEA magazine's Community Talk column back in 2016, Ronald was Programme Manager at Philips Research and responsible for the Philips activities in both ITEA and ECSEL. To briefly recap what he said at the time, it was during the transformation period as ITEA 1 became ITEA 2 that Ronald was asked to become the Philips representative in the Steering Group. Ronald had already been involved in CANDELA, an ITEA project that ran between 2003 and 2005, seeing this participation as a good

opportunity to network and gain knowledge at the same time. "I saw the potential not only for short-term business impact but also for the development of long-term competences. It was a way to fill in your roadmap. So, in that sense, it was not extra work but an enhancement of the work I was already doing. When later on Jan Bomhof, the Philips member of the Steering Group at that time, decided to stop, I did not hesitate to step into his shoes because I really saw the benefits of becoming a community insider, as it were."

Three main activities

The Steering Group is, of course, charged with the responsibility of steering the ITEA programme. Ronald explains how it works in practice. "Well, we start by evaluating the Project Outlines and Full Project Proposals and then provide feedback, which gives you the chance to really influence the quality, innovation and marketing of these projects. Through pinpointing these practical aspects, an idea can be turned into a project with impactful results. That's one part of the job.

The other is tracking and monitoring the project via reviews and progress reports that help shape the content. It begins from a more informative perspective and gradually becomes increasingly a steering activity as the project progresses." These are the two formal activities, but Ronald explains that the contribution goes beyond the project focus. "There is an important third activity in which I have been involved, and that is helping to formulate the Living roadmap and evaluating the State-of-the-Art (SotA) documents that are components of the Living roadmap. So, in brief that sums up the task of the Steering Group members."

Same core values in a 'smart' new world

Over the years, Ronald has witnessed a lot of projects at first hand, "and they have taught me a lot, too! I have been able to enhance my own knowledge across a very diverse range of domains. From engineering and automotive to security and healthcare. And I have seen a lot of changes, especially in the world in which ITEA operates, from economic crisis to the

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emergence of a ‘smart’ new world and while the organisation is still relatively compact, it now has a much broader geographical reach than when I first started. But the values have changed very little. Collaboration and trust, constructiveness and commitment, informality and collegiality are still very much at the core of relationships within the ITEA ‘family.’”

Family

“ITEA calls itself a family, and being part of it, there is certainly a feeling of being in a family. Work hard, play hard, and most of all, enjoy the company of the people around you. That, for me, is the main highlight. The people you get to know. People from completely different backgrounds, whether educational, professional, cultural. I have discovered how Scandinavians survive their winters and how Spaniards can still get their work done even though they take out a big chunk of the day with a siesta! I remember that my first Italian food experience came through ITEA when we had a Steering Group meeting in Milan. I like technical innovation, people and travel. It always makes me proud when ITEA project results have impact on the market. With such a broad international canopy, ITEA allows me to feast on my interests!”

Continuity link

Ronald joined ITEA at more or less the same time as Rudolf Hagenmüller became Chairman. “But what most people probably don’t know is that when I joined, Rudolf’s successor and current Chairwoman, Zeynep, was head of a company that was part of a project for which I was Programme Manager within Philips. And if I remember rightly, she and her team also won a prize. That would have been in 2006. So we knew each other well before she rose to the lofty heights within ITEA,” Ronald smiles. “Back then she already demonstrated her leadership qualities. Besides her technical contributions, she organised the project’s social gatherings too. So I guess that it was inevitable that Zeynep would eventually head this family in which happiness, according to Rudolf, is such a strength.”

Inquisitive

But now, as already mentioned, Ronald has had to withdraw from his role in the Steering

Group, and in many ways that is down to one of the factors that made it so special to him: curiosity. “I have always been very inquisitive,” he says. “It stood me in good stead as a Steering Group member but it is also the underlying reason why I stepped down. My curiosity to discover new things led me to look for new challenges. And when I happened to get into a conversation with a former colleague of mine on a train travelling from Brussels, I became intrigued by the work he was doing at ESI, a department of TNO, the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research. To cut a long story short, an opening appeared and I took full advantage of it. Since May this year I have been Senior Project Manager at ESI in Eindhoven supporting the Dutch High Tech Systems industry with methodologies for improved system development, and, given the nature of the beast, my job was not commensurate with my role as an ITEA Steering Group member. As ESI is also involved in ITEA as an RTO, I will continue being part of the ITEA family and be involved in future projects too. So while my inquisitive nature meant having to step outside the Steering Group as an active member, curiosity is a characteristic that every Steering Group member should have. And for all the newcomers to this role, I would say: enjoy discovery on all kinds of levels, from new innovative technology to travel, culture and, at the very top of the list, people!”

It is this kind of knowledge and experience that Ronald and his more seasoned colleagues are passing on that is becoming a legacy for the process of renewal, and which is always a vital component of progress. Taking that legacy further is María de Álvaro Torán, a very recent ‘acquisition’ as a reviewer in the Steering Group activities.

In the middle of everything

María works as a Programme Coordinator at Indra, one of Spain’s leading global technology and consulting companies and the technological partner for key business operations of its customers worldwide in specific market segments from transport to defence and from healthcare to information and digital technologies. “We have a high-value focus and a strong innovation component,” María explains. “Just to give

