

New ITEA Office Director: Jan Jonker

Right time, right place, right person

Jan Jonker, the new ITEA Office Director, also passionate music and mountain lover, finds time to introduce himself to the 'family' through the medium of this magazine.

The new man at the helm – all of three weeks at the time of writing – was born and bred in the Dutch city of Nijmegen and went to university there where he graduated in Economic Geography in 1989. “Then it was time to get on with my career,” Jan says. “I had a variety of roles in both the public and private sector, all in the area of economic and regional development and advice, whether this was giving advice to SMEs, supporting start-ups or making economic policy recommendations. I also had plenty of international focus, for example, with international investors for the province of Utrecht. In my work at the East Netherlands Development Agency I covered a range of topics over the years, from ICT and broadband infrastructures to life sciences, health and medical technology. In my most recent role, I was team manager in the field of smart and renewable energy.”

Twin peaks – innovation and cooperation

In this wide spectrum of topics, innovation was a key component, Jan points out. As managing director of an innovation cluster known as Health Valley, a role he held for around five years before his job heading up the energy team, healthcare innovation initiatives were central. “In all these roles,” Jan explains, “innovation and cooperation with industry and SMEs featured strongly. In all the different sectors in which I have been engaged, setting up cooperation to generate innovative products and solutions was a key part of my job.” Clearly, such wide-ranging experience built on a spine of innovation and cooperation has stood Jan in good stead for his new position steering the ITEA Office.



In fact, this is the reason why Jan saw the vacancy at ITEA as offering the perfect opportunity to make use of his experience in the different sectors and deploy this on a more international stage. “I am committed to enhancing and strengthening the digital transition, something that I believe will become increasingly important in the coming years in an international playing field, where we (Europe) have to take a position.”

Taking off at the PO Days

Jan could not have got off to a better start to his ITEA career than the PO Days in Amsterdam at the beginning of September. “Right away you get to meet members of our Community. I spoke to a lot of people and what I found really gratifying was a sense I got from everyone that not only was this a meeting place for innovative initiatives but also, and just as importantly, a moment of fun. Clearly, working at ITEA has a positive vibe! It’s a really thriving Community with a sense of togetherness – a family feeling. There is so much diversity but the contact between people from such wide-ranging background and sectors – both private and public – was really good. I think this comes from the trust and open attitude towards cooperation that prevails, and indeed a condition for a Cluster to flourish.”



Office teamwork

So how have the first few weeks been at the Office itself? “It’s a great atmosphere,” Jan smiles. “I can see how dedicated and driven everyone is to achieve success for ITEA. There is a real ‘go-for-it’ attitude – when something needs to be done, everyone helps each other. Of course, each person has a particular job to do but there is a team spirit to get things done for the organisation as a whole. A bit like a football team. Each ‘player’ has a set of skills and has a job to do but the strength lies in the interaction of the players (in pursuit of the team’s objective). From my perspective as Office Director, that’s really pleasing to see. In my previous roles I also worked with similar kinds of teams so I am conscious of how much can be achieved with this kind of attitude. It underlines to me that I have certainly made the right choice in joining the ITEA team.”

Catalyst for innovation

And as Jan acclimatises to his team and vice versa, the benefits of what he brings will only further strengthen the ITEA Office. Like his experience of partnerships in the private and public sectors. Jan: “It is, of course, important for the organisation that it has been able to bring in someone with a good knowledge of the ins and outs of Public and Private Partnerships (PPPs), dealing with public as well as industrial interests, and projects that create impact in society and the market (someone who knows how that game is played). How to act as a catalyst for the kind of projects that ITEA generates, especially in crucial areas like Big Data, AI, machine learning and so on. For me that is what ITEA’s role is – to act as a catalyst for new opportunities and successful combinations, to be the lubricant to help enhance



the innovation process. I believe one of my qualities is that I can stimulate this. Connecting and motivating people, creating a trusted and independent space. At the same time I am aware of the limits and requirements on quality and financial levels. Giving people responsibility, but within clear limits, can be very stimulating and challenging to be creative and productive.”

Fit and healthy, in mind and body

When Jan’s finger is not on the pulse, it can often be found on the strings of his guitar. Not quite an obsession but a good way of letting the creativity flow through a bit of improvised jazz ... also as part of a team, or band. “Music has always been important in my life. It gives me energy and relaxation. Jazz is also about creating freedom and energy within certain defined limits. It’s – sometimes more than – a hobby that has found a good place in my life along with my wife and two children. The other thing that I like to spend my time doing is hiking in the mountains, especially in Spain, where I lost my heart to the Pyrenees and Sierra Nevada. Keeps me fit and healthy, in mind and body.” Fit and healthy for the challenges to come.