

Practise what you preach

The story of a Cluster's quality system

ITEA was founded as Software Innovation Cluster in 1998, when IT and Software were becoming increasingly important for the competitive position of Europe's industry. Internet was booming in the nineties, the first internet companies and search engines went public and were considered the "promising pearls" of the New Economy, where endless welfare and exponential growth were ingredients of a very optimistic vision of the future.

Frontrunner

Even though economic growth has not continuously been sky-high after the nineties, the world has drastically changed ever since. Software is crucially important in many aspects of our lives and industry. ITEA has played a vital role in many innovative software solutions and technologies that have been developed in the last two decades. Creating impact on different aspects of our society. Besides economic growth (increased revenues and employment of industry and SMEs, emergence of spin-offs and start-ups), ITEA projects have contributed to better and more efficient healthcare, safer cities, clean and smart mobility, among others. Key to this are two very important basic values of ITEA (and ITEA projects): being a frontrunner and high quality.

ITEA has always tried to reach beyond the State-of-the-Art, touching areas and technologies that are not yet in the market and facing up to many challenges relating to technology, science as well as application possibilities, customer awareness, market acceptance and more. This is reflected in the early stage involvement of ITEA project partners in topics like Functional Mock-up Interface (FMI), Digital Twin, Simulation and AI. Recently AI has been everywhere, but in ITEA projects it has already been an important feature for several years. The latest projects and activities are "Beyond AI", touching a world in which AI is already a common feature. ITEA is keeping pace with the most early and advanced solutions and technologies.



Quality & Innovation

High quality is probably one of the most important USPs that ITEA has developed over the years. This is reflected in the fact that ITEA is one of the exceptional Cluster organisations to have received the ISO-9001 certificate for Quality Assurance. All ITEA activities and processes are regularly internally and externally audited to keep the pressure on the ITEA organisation to strive for the highest quality and to follow the guidelines of the ISO standard. This is not just paperwork. Quite the contrary, it relates to very concrete and tangible aspects of the operations within ITEA. ITEA has always believed in the saying “Practise what you preach”. It is important that you do whatever you say needs to be done. For ITEA this implies that its activities should radiate the values of Quality and Innovation. If we do not live up to these values, how can we be a plausible stimulator of high-quality innovation? The high level of quality in ITEA is safeguarded by a set of annually defined high-level improvement goals and by continuously monitoring the ITEA

processes according a set of multi-faceted KPIs. The KPI targets are annually set and quarterly measured and reported. Strong deviations of the KPI measurements from their targets forces the organisation to react in an agile way. An important aspect of achieving a high level of quality is the appreciation by our ITEA Community. Therefore, it is a common practice to issue a survey after each event, the different phases of a Call and at the end of a project. The valuable feedback we receive from our stakeholders is then used to further improve our future activities.

A crucial feature for ITEA to be able to deliver high-quality operations is an advanced IT system in which all our project information, operational activities, customer and stakeholder data and financials are integrated. This is a very important backbone of our Quality. We can pick out all kinds of KPIs and report about them, but without a solid and reliable method/system of keeping track of the information and data in these KPIs, it is impossible to maintain and guarantee the

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required quality. In addition, the conviction that ITEA has to be innovative itself goes together with having an advanced IT system.

Unique & versatile

The ITEA system is advanced and unique. The development of the current system started in 2010, as a cooperative system developed by ITEA and ARTEMIS-IA based on several small stand-alone databases used in the different teams. The system has a modular approach and CATRENE – at that time the Eureka Cluster that was active in the field Microsystems and electronics – was the first external user of the ICT system. In 2015 ITEA chose its own path and took the leading role in the continued development of the system resulted in the Eureka Clusters Information System (ECIS) that ITEA is currently using for all its operations. The system is fully web-based and has a personalised interface towards the different Communities. There are basically three different components: the Office backend, the internal Community website for project activities, and the public website. Because all information is securely stored in one integrated system, many interconnections are possible. The ITEA project portfolio on the public website is automatically generated and updated from the project database in the backend. The HTML code of the website adapts automatically to the size of the device used, which means that the website can be viewed from any device, from a smartphone to a widescreen desktop computer.

Community portal

The ITEA Community portal is the entry point for Community members, varying from project participants, members of the different ITEA bodies like the Board, Board Support Group and Steering Group as well as the Public Authorities. The role-based access control ensures a clean interface where each user has access to the relevant sections of the Community website. Project leaders can manage their project, technical contacts active for their company in one or more projects can update their own data, reviewers can download the review templates, and much more.

The ITEA PO Days are also supported by the ECIS system: users can register for the event and also start to create a project idea in the ITEA Project

“The PENTA Cluster, dedicated to micro and nano-electronics enabled systems and applications, is operated by the AENEAS industry association, using the ITEA ICT system with specific adaptations.

AENEAS has had a long-term relationship with ITEA, starting with CATRENE and now supporting the PENTA programme. Close teamwork between ITEA and AENEAS not only resulted in a very rapid implementation of the PENTA programme, but also permitted continuous improvements and developments, including the latest joint EURIPIDES²-PENTA Call.

AENEAS has a privileged role as both partner in and customer of the ITEA ICT system. We contribute to the evolution of the tool specifications, with cross-fertilisation between PENTA and ITEA leading to a status of co-ownership of the tool, each Cluster benefiting from the features designed for the other. This is a valuable demonstration of cooperation among Clusters, sharing a common tool, that sets the trend for the future Eureka Cluster Programme.”

Caroline Bedran,
AENEAS Director General
28 May 2020

idea tool (PITool). As this year’s PO Days will be an online event, new tooling has been developed to support the webinars and the workgroup sessions which will also be held online.

The ECIS system is the main source of data at the ITEA Office. Some examples of possibilities that this system facilitates:

- Linking project data and national contracts to the invoicing system
- Automatic generation and sending of (pro-forma) invoices based on the project cost, currently supporting four different invoicing systems
- Advanced project statistics, like project costs and effort in a country or overviews of costs and effort by organisation types or call size or

grouped by any other kind of variable

- All project related documents and contacts per ITEA Call
- Integrated project evaluation system
- Mailing system
- Event management

Multiplicity

The system/software has not been developed to be introduced in the market, as ITEA is not a commercial organisation, but an association that works on a not-for-profit basis. However, the software is of such character, value and quality that it can be utilised by external parties that are active in the field of innovation and collaboration projects, Cluster stimulation and networking events. In other words, which involve great amount of relations and networks of stakeholders and organisations, active in different kind of interrelated activities and/or projects.

Considering this, it might not be surprising that one of the other Clusters is also using the ECIS system or some of its features. Since 2016, the Aeneas Association and the Eureka Cluster PENTA have been using the ITEA IT system for their Call operations, with EURIPIDES² joining in 2018, and their joint Call is fully supported by the ECIS system. The modular and flexible approach of ECIS enables the support of multiple Clusters with one single code base.

The ECIS Brokerage tool module is used for the first joint Call for the Eureka Clusters on Artificial Intelligence. This Call was launched on 1 April and very recently ITEA has also been requested to service one of the Eureka Network Calls on the current COVID-19 theme that opened in mid-May.

New dawn

The Eureka Clusters are currently going through a dynamic period, as a new Eureka Cluster Programme (ECP) will be determined in mid-2020. One of the ingredients of this programme is anticipated to lead to increased cooperation between the Clusters. This relates to different activities, such as joint events and Calls. The ITEA IT system has several elements that could facilitate the Clusters and ECP. Anticipating the future situation, ITEA and CELTIC-NEXT have announced cooperation on the development of new Eureka Clusters IT system. This will be in place in 2021.