

## Community Talk with:

# Raúl Santos de la Cámara

The rewards of being part of a strong Community

Raúl Santos de la Cámara is R&D Project Manager for HI Iberia Ingeniería y Proyectos, a Madrid-based SME. Originally from Cádiz in southern Spain, Raúl's fascination for computers and engineering led him to move to Madrid to study for a university degree in Telecommunications Engineering at Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. He now calls Madrid home.

### A world of difference

"After a couple of years at university, where I started my PhD (*still pending, he adds!*), I was tempted by the industry and started working at Telefónica R&D on avatars and other then-novel HMIs. It was there that I learned much about EU research, participating mainly in FP6 projects. But after six years in large industry, I switched to HI Iberia looking for a new, SME focused challenge where I have remained, having broadened the scope of technologies to embedded systems, Artificial Intelligence and health applications. Telefónica was not so much a large industry, more of a whole country. The culture of the company is something that you always have to be aware of because it can really have an influence on what you do and how

you work. It can start to grind you down after a while. So eventually I wanted to go to a smaller 'world' and discovered HI Iberia, an SME whose research department had only been going for a few years. The opportunity to focus on my work I found very refreshing – instead of being a cog in the big machine, I was actually able to have an influence on the work and direction of my new company."

### Making acquaintance

"However, my first notion of ITEA came in my Telefónica years, where I participated in a few activities of an ITEA 2 project, but I was more in the technical aspects and never got to know the Community. Our real involvement started in the PO Days in September 2015. We were trying to



broaden our R&D horizons at HI Iberia and after seeing the results presented in the March 2015 ITEA/Artemis Co-Summit in Berlin, we realised that there were many similarities between what we were doing and what was happening in the ITEA Community. So when I returned to Madrid I began lobbying within the company to find out more about the way ITEA works and we decided to attend the PO Days and learn a bit more. We cautiously became involved in a proposal and, in typical fashion for us, eventually ended up coordinating it until the end of the project last year. With the extra experience in subsequent years we got involved in many more ideas, eventually growing a considerable portfolio of projects. If you attend ITEA events there is a good chance you will see me around because I'm usually the one who attends the events."

me. All in all, I think we have not suffered as an ITEA Community. Rather, we have risen above the challenges and shown what we are capable of."

#### **Perfect for SMEs**

"From an SME perspective, I think programmes like ITEA are essential for research ideas to transition from a very preliminary drawing board to near commercial products. I particularly like the general size of consortia in ITEA: not so small that they feel limited but also not that big that they become a patchwork of small groups of people working on their own. The typical 10-12 partners in an ITEA consortium need to work together, which I believe is essential in the production of results that build on each other's strengths. But with the strong Community

#### **Digital waves instead of shaking hands**

"Of course, the past year has been a very different experience for everyone. I must admit that my experience of online events before March this year had not been very positive but the way that ITEA has tackled the situation and made use of the technology we have at our disposal has changed my mind. I feel the contacts, despite the lack of a physical presence, have been very successful. That comes partly from the fact that it's created a level playing field – we all have to do it this way. In my project meetings online I have been pleasantly surprised. There has been a tremendous amount of efficiency and the meetings have been very productive. Of course, I miss the shared coffee, the informal conversations, moments that can often produce some great ideas. Personal contact is irreplaceable and I can't wait to start mingling again. Mind you, I don't miss the travel. That has been a big plus for

behind it even that 10-12 partner group feels way stronger: you rely on the community for things such as dissemination, cross-application of results and also continuation of ideas in future projects. In terms of impact on industry and society, I feel that ITEA projects contribute to our ability as an SME to transfer results into products and services. We see, for example, in projects like SoMeDi how the Smart City Madrid initiative has been able to incorporate what we have been doing to benefit the citizens."

#### **The growing world of ITEA**

The introduction of new countries in ITEA has very quickly transitioned from being an exotic add-on to a truly essential part of the Community. "In the beginning," Raúl says, "it felt unusual to have partners from South Korea or Canada in your prototypical international consortium, but over the years this collaboration has strengthened and now it is completely normal to have them. This, of course, has broadened our horizons with new ideas about markets and user needs very different to what we're used to in other programmes. I think that ITEA has been very proactive in promoting these changes and that the events organised (from the PO days to the Innovation Days) really help in building a cohesive community."

#### **Part of the bigger picture**

"HI Iberia has benefited greatly from participating in ITEA. Several key technologies for us, from Natural Language Understanding to health monitoring applications and Smart City systems, have drastically improved from what we have done in the ITEA projects SoMeDi, ESTABLISH and SCRATCh. We have built an excellent network of like-minded companies in previously unexplored markets for us, from Finland to Romania. Personally, I think many of my favourite projects in the past years have been part of ITEA and for sure my favourite events are ITEA's by quite a distance, from both the professional and personal perspectives. It is always a great feeling to go to the event and immediately start seeing familiar faces and truly feeling part of the bigger picture there. It comes down to the people, of course, and happiness comes as much from the social side of things as the success of the work. I find the mix of people really enriching."