

Community Talk with **Olivier Biot**

An internationalist in in body and soul

Born in Belgium but brought up in Brazil in his formative childhood years, Olivier Biot took a while to readjust when returning to his homeland ... and even today he still cherishes the vibrant international environment that is so dear to him. This 'internationalist' feels very much at home in the ITEA Community.

California dreaming

Olivier's fascination with engineering and technology came at an early age; it shaped his education and career path. His international background determined the context. He cites a highlight that came early on in his career after joining Siemens in the telecoms field. "I got the opportunity to go to Silicon Valley during the 'birth' of the high-tech Internet explosion. To say it opened my eyes would be an understatement. An initially week-long visit eventually turned into a two-month stay. Exciting things were happening in telecommunications and I was involved in standardisation activities in the early days of the mobile Internet (WAP/OMA, IETF), transforming market requirements into requirements specifications, and selecting and evaluating relevant technologies for future products. I also contributed to the open-source network protocol analyser 'Wireshark' where I developed and extended protocol analysis for mobile Internet standards." Today, Olivier is senior project manager

at SIRRIS (Belgium), focusing on innovation for technology in general and software & ICT in particular, providing solutions to highly specific technology-related issues and guiding companies through to the ideation, development, implementation and coaching of long-term innovation projects.

Driver for change

Specialising in identifying innovation opportunities and bottlenecks, Olivier focuses on developing (international) industry-driven research projects with a multidisciplinary and multi-technology perspective. "Innovation is the key theme that keeps me busy nowadays. I have a very broad technology interest area, but software engineering and ICT are the domains in which I am most active. Hence my connection with ITEA, which I first became familiar with during the ITEA TWINS project (2006) that developed new techniques to improve the co-design of products in which hardware and software are closely integrated. I pitched in with

contributions, you could say. From there on I became more directly involved, and in the ITEA 2 Call 2 came the ITEI project aimed at improving the innovation capabilities of European software-intensive product builders through the realisation of a cyber space for product innovation and innovative software development. I remember that the then ITEA Vice-Chairman, Philippe Letellier, was very enthusiastic about our efforts to enable the industry to manage company-specific innovation strategies better during software-intensive product development. He saw the bigger picture and, in fact, this project laid a foundation for





the software innovation track that is a prominent feature of the ITEA programme today.”

Novel paradigms

The most recent ITEA project in which Olivier has played a leading role is the recently completed BIMy project to create an open collaborative platform for sharing, storing and filtering BIM (Building Information Modelling) among different BIM owners/users, and integrating and visualising them in their built and natural environment. This open, generic and secure intermediary vehicle enables interactions between existing and new

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applications through a standardised open API platform. Recipient of the ITEA Award of Excellence 2021 for Innovation, Olivier explains that “digital transformation is fundamentally changing the way we work and live our lives. Digital technologies are paving the road for novel paradigms across industry sectors. The ITEA 3 project BIMy pushed the limits of using and exploiting Building Information Modelling (BIM) and explored novel opportunities offered by integrating BIM and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). BIMy proposed ways to overcome limitations of current tools and standards, and explored ways to query and filter BIM and GIS data to create a new digital service offering. We hope that the soon to be published ‘BIM in the City’ book will inspire others in their digital transformation.”

Open eyes and ears

Justifiably proud of this and previous projects, Olivier sees his involvement with ITEA continuing. It’s an environment that he appreciates not only from the perspective of innovation opportunities but also by the chance the ITEA Community offers to interact with like-minded souls from all over Europe and beyond. “Of course, over the past two years where we have been restricted to screen-to-screen contact; this interaction has not been as fulfilling as face-to-face, of which I am a big proponent. You get far more from the body language and coffee-machine chats, things that can help relationships develop and grow. This also affects the projects. Not that they have been any less successful in terms of achieving their goals, but the lack of the human

‘touch’, almost literally, is something we all felt. For the BIMy project, we were fortunate in being able to have a couple of plenary sessions just before the pandemic struck, after which we had to find a different modus operandi to focus on the project success and to resolve any remaining issues. But by keeping our eyes and ears open, and through regular digital contact, we still managed to deliver valuable results.”

The more you have, the more you want

Olivier has seen a number of changes at ITEA over the years, especially in the role of software. As he suggests above, there has been a shift in emphasis from software for engineering to software for innovation. He also feels that the level of ambition is much higher and more mature nowadays. With impact and success. “This is very much down to the people and the collaborative spirit,” he says. “The essence of ITEA is to create the scope and environment for people to collaborate and seek new limits. If I look at the companies and people we have helped to introduce to ITEA projects, I see that ITEA becomes ‘moreish’ for them. They are keen for further involvement. That gives me a great sense of satisfaction.” When asked whether he sees any room for improvement, Olivier says that “ITEA is always improving, always trying to be better than before. And is very successful at this. Even when situations arise that are out of ITEA’s control, for example funding or lockdown, it still tries to come up with solutions. That’s part of the happiness that makes the ITEA Community so engaging.”