

# Community Talk with: Isabel Praça

The perfect ITEA 'love' match!

Isabel Praça has been part of the ITEA Community for just over five years – it is a romance that is flourishing by the day! An electrical and computer engineer by training, Isabel gained her PhD in the field of Artificial Intelligence applied to competitive electricity markets, in particular, using multi-agent systems and machine learning. “Since the very beginning I’ve been working in academia and research, first as a researcher in the Systems and Robotics Institute of Porto, then as a professor at ISEP, the school of engineering of the Polytechnic of Porto, and as a researcher at GECAD.”

#### **Dual challenge**

“Being a professor at ISEP I was part of the team that started up the research group that is now called GECAD (Research Group on Intelligent Engineering and Computing for Advanced Innovation and Development),” Isabel explains. GECAD aims to apply Artificial Intelligence techniques to real and complex problems, always with an eye on innovation. “We are proud of the projects, tools and scientific papers our team has produced as well as the projects with industry in which we’ve shown our capabilities in solving real problems! I feel my research activities are very important for my students. Not only can I bring to classes what I learn from the challenges I confront in research projects, but I also get the opportunity to engage the students

early on, still during their Bachelor studies, in projects that are aligned with my research activities and my projects with industry.” Isabel is also R&D advisor to the ISEP Presidency. “It is very challenging and interesting work. My research background gives me the knowledge and motivation to help pave the way to keep ISEP both at the top of the research tree in Portugal and to grow our international recognition. Mind you,” she adds, “there are times when it’s not easy to manage both demanding roles – professor and researcher – but I could not give either of them up!”

#### **Business value**

Isabel’s involvement in ITEA came in 2013 when she joined the SEAS project as a researcher in



## “ITEA is the Programme that makes future a reality!”

success for all the countries involved. I would also like to mention the professionalism of all the ITEA team and Steering Group members that ensure the high quality of projects results. From all the programmes in which I’m involved, ITEA is the one I should say that makes future a reality!”

### Friends for life

Summing up “as a bit of a newbie in this Community of 20 years,” from what she has seen and experienced so far, Isabel complements the ITEA Board and Community for “always being at the edge of innovation. The number and relevance of industries that are involved guarantee that. ITEA is a community in which ISEP and GECAD have had the chance to show our knowledge and research capabilities, getting us recognised outside of Portugal, while at the same time bringing recognition of Portugal and Portuguese companies to top-level companies and academia in Europe. ITEA has certainly improved me both personally and professionally. I’m proud of my evolution, having started as *just* a researcher to becoming technical coordinator and making things happen! Having the chance to work closely together with companies like Airbus Cyber Security, Engie, Thales, etc... and the way my work has been recognised by the international Community make me feel very motivated and happy! From a personal perspective, ITEA has helped me discover people who enjoy work and life as much as I do, with whom working is a pleasure and a constant motivation, with whom the word ‘team’ takes on a very big scope! Some of them I’ll keep in my life! That is not usual in business! At the risk of stealing Philippe Letellier’s words, during the EUREKA Innovation Days in Helsinki, I can say ‘I love ITEA!’”

the area of intelligent energy systems. Since then she has become active in ITEA PO Days and Summits, and in the FUSE-IT project as the technical coordinator, also leading one of the work packages. “In FUSE-IT I was involved from the outset of the project idea. I have grown a lot with these experiences, from the technical and business point of view, and as a person. I remember how important it was to keep the focus on the business value rather than at the technical level, which is a good exercise for academic people. Since both projects received ITEA awards, I feel really happy to have been part of the team and a contributor to their success. In the case of FUSE-IT, it was an enormous pleasure to host the final review, the first one to ever take place in Porto. Not only that but it happened in a real environment – a hospital – where the staff and patients were interacting while we were doing our technical preparations and rehearsals. Quite a challenge for everyone, especially from the management and coordination point of view. I must say, I am indebted to Centro Hospitalar São João for its

availability and commitment to FUSE-IT, and for putting up with us, despite all the signs for ‘silence!’” Isabel is now working as technical coordinator and work package leader in the CyberFactory#1 project that started in late December 2018. “The challenge is once again very high,” she says, “and while we are still waiting for the National Authorities’ feedback in some countries, our motivation is very strong and I’m sure it will also be a success story.”

### Guarantee for success

Isabel feels that ITEA provides the perfect environment to take the best of the collaboration between academia and industry, and to turn it into innovations that bring new business and new jobs, contributing for a better society. “Sometimes it seems that academia and industry are working on the same topics but along ‘parallel’ roads,” Isabel suggests, “but in ITEA academia and industry work hand in hand along the same road and in the same direction! The vision of the Presidium team, to always be at the forefront of innovation, is a guarantee of