Text of the interview with Michel Cosnard

This year, Inria is publishing its annual report entirely on the Web. Why?

Inria’s annual report is one of the most important means of communication the Institute has. It is absolutely crucial that it keeps up with society, which has gone digital. The Web has become the medium citizens instinctively turn to first, so it was the natural choice for us. In addition, we are one of the inventors of the digital world. Through our research and standardisation activities, we have been a pioneer of the Web. That is another reason why this decision was an obvious one for us.

You became Chairman of the Institute in 2006. What have been the big changes since you arrived?

Over the period 2006-2013, the most significant change has been the growth of the institution. We have nearly a thousand additional staff today, but if you look at the annual comings and goings, there have actually been several thousand people who have worked for the Institute at some time or another over that period, some of whom are still with us.

This has allowed us to create three new centres, in Bordeaux, Lille and Saclay, which are now high-profile institutions in their home regions, and have made the Institute a truly national organisation.

The third point that I would highlight is our presence in Europe and across the world. In Europe, we have made a remarkable contribution to the European Commission's Framework Programme and to the major programmes of the European Institute of Technology and the European Research Council. Internationally, we have seen strong steps made to structure our activities, first of all in the USA, with two major centres, one in Illinois on high-performance computing and the other in Silicon Valley. The second example of these structuring efforts is in Latin America, with the creation of our technology transfer and innovation centre in Chile: the Inria Chile foundation.

In your view, what were the most significant events of 2013 for Inria?

First of all, the fact that the Inria Awards are now awarded jointly with the Académie des sciences (French Academy of Sciences). In a way, thanks to Inria, computer science has been admitted to the club. The second major highlight was our partnerships with SMEs, above all the launch of several innovation labs and the creation of the Ambition logicielle (“Software Ambition”) programme, which aims to ensure the growth of SMEs and start-ups in the field. Finally, there was the launch of the I-Community site, which enables all researchers in the field, as well as entrepreneurs, to engage in more productive dialogue and to embark upon major joint projects together.