



SEQUOIA PROJECT
"Socio-Economic Impact Assessment for Research Projects"

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WP4: Dissemination and Assessment Methodology Transfer

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1. BACKGROUND

This deliverable reports, from the dissemination perspective, on the online focus group sessions held in February 2011 with the Call 1 and Call 5 projects. The findings of these online meetings relating to the self-assessment methodology and to the second questionnaire will be reported in D2.2b and in the WP3 deliverables.

2. INTRODUCTION

The focus group online meetings were organised by the SEQUOIA project to validate and finalise the self-assessment model and methodology as defined in preliminary form in D2.3. More specifically, the second questionnaire was presented to the projects' representatives and modified according to their suggestions.

In particular, the goals of these focus group sessions were as follows:

- Support the HOLA! project in creating a space for communication and information exchange among the projects working in the same field
- Reach a common understanding on the definition of socio-economic impact assessment and what to expect from an assessment exercise
- Present the SEQUOIA methodological approach
- Validate and improve the SEQUOIA variables and indicators
- Discuss some of the questions of the second questionnaire in order to make them more meaningful and relevant to the projects, before the questionnaire is circulated.

In alignment with the new plan for Months 9-14 (D.1.1b) the project decided to involve Call 1 and 5 projects' representatives in focus groups to learn more about their opinions and knowledge about socio-economic impact assessment, the exploitation of research project results, and SEQUOIA's methodological approach. In fact, the familiarity of the projects with SEQUOIA's perspective and approach is an important starting point for developing a methodology that makes sense to everyone.

Moreover, the consortium needs to learn from the projects: nobody knows better than the projects themselves what their intended impact is supposed to be. Since this knowledge is frequently tacit, the focus group sessions aimed to transform tacit and procedural knowledge into explicit and structured knowledge for everyone's benefit.

3. ORGANISATION OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

In order to organise the focus group we initially asked all the projects to let us know which public events/conferences they were going to attend during the first 6 months of 2011. The rationale was to pick the meeting with the greatest attendance from the projects and organise the focus group at the same venue. However, it soon became clear that there was little or no overlap between the projects. Due to the difficulty associated with organising a single workshop involving a high number of projects located all over Europe, we decided to rely instead on online focus group sessions, involving both Call 1 and Call 5 projects at the same time.

In order to maximise participation we decided to provide as flexible a scheduling as possible rather than pick a few dates in a top-down manner. Accordingly, we asked the projects to pick all the dates for which they were available during a 3-week period in February, with a Doodle poll. We then used their availability as the main criterion to group them into 5 different sessions. This approach had as the added benefit that we were able to form relatively small groups, which is important for online meetings and conference calls given their lower efficiency relative to in-person meetings.

The 5 focus group sessions were held between the 14th and the 23rd of February, involving 27 projects, of which 11 from Call 1 and 16 from Call 5. Table 1 shows the projects' participants for each Focus Group session.

Focus Group 1		
Mon 14, 10:15-11:30 CET		
Projects	Call	Representative
RESERVOIR	1	Eliot Salant
ACSI	5	Lior Limonad
VISION CLOUD	5	Eliot Salant
FITTEST	5	Tanja Vos
SOCIOS	5	Konstantinos Tserpes
HOLA!	5	Eva Garcia

Focus Group 2		
Wed 16, 11:15-12:30 CET		
Projects	Call	Representative
DIVA	1	Geir Horn
Q-IMPRESS	1	Petr Truman
S-CUBE	1	Andreas Metzger
OMELETTE	5	Saul Navarro
WEBINOS	5	Hans Myrhaug

Focus Group 3		
Mon 21, 15:45-17:00 CET		
Projects	Call	Representative
CHOREOS	5	Visvaldis Valtenbergs
I2WEB	5	John O' Flaherty
OPTIMIS	5	Ana Juan
REMICS	5	Parastoo Mohagheghi

Focus Group 4		
Tue 22, 11:15-12:30 CET		
Projects	Call	Representative
IRMOS	1	Klaus Satzke
OPEN	1	Fabio Paterno
PERSIST	1	Kevin Doolin
SHAPE	1	Dima Panfilenko, Klaus Fischer
STREAM	1	Ricardo Jimenez Peris
SOCIETIES	5	Kevin Doolin
SERENOA	5	Ignacio Marin

Focus Group 5		
Wed 23, 13:45-15:00 CET		
Projects	Call	Representative
SERVFACE	1	Steffen Goebel
ADMIRE	1	Rob Baxter
CLOUD4SOA	5	James Ahtes
CLOUDTM	5	Diego Didona
PLAY	5	Nenad Stojanovic

Table 1: Participants in SEQUOIA's Focus Group Sessions

For the focus groups sessions we used the vyew.com online platform, customised with SEQUOIA colours and logo, to view and work on the workshop documents collaboratively. With this tool the moderator (Antonella Passani) was able to take notes on the shared white board, while the participants were speaking, and participants were able to see and modify these notes, similarly to a face-to-face focus group. For some sessions the same Vyew platform was used also for voice, while for others Skype was used (it offers a better sound quality). Figure 1 shows a screenshot of the vyew interface with the SEQUOIA banner.

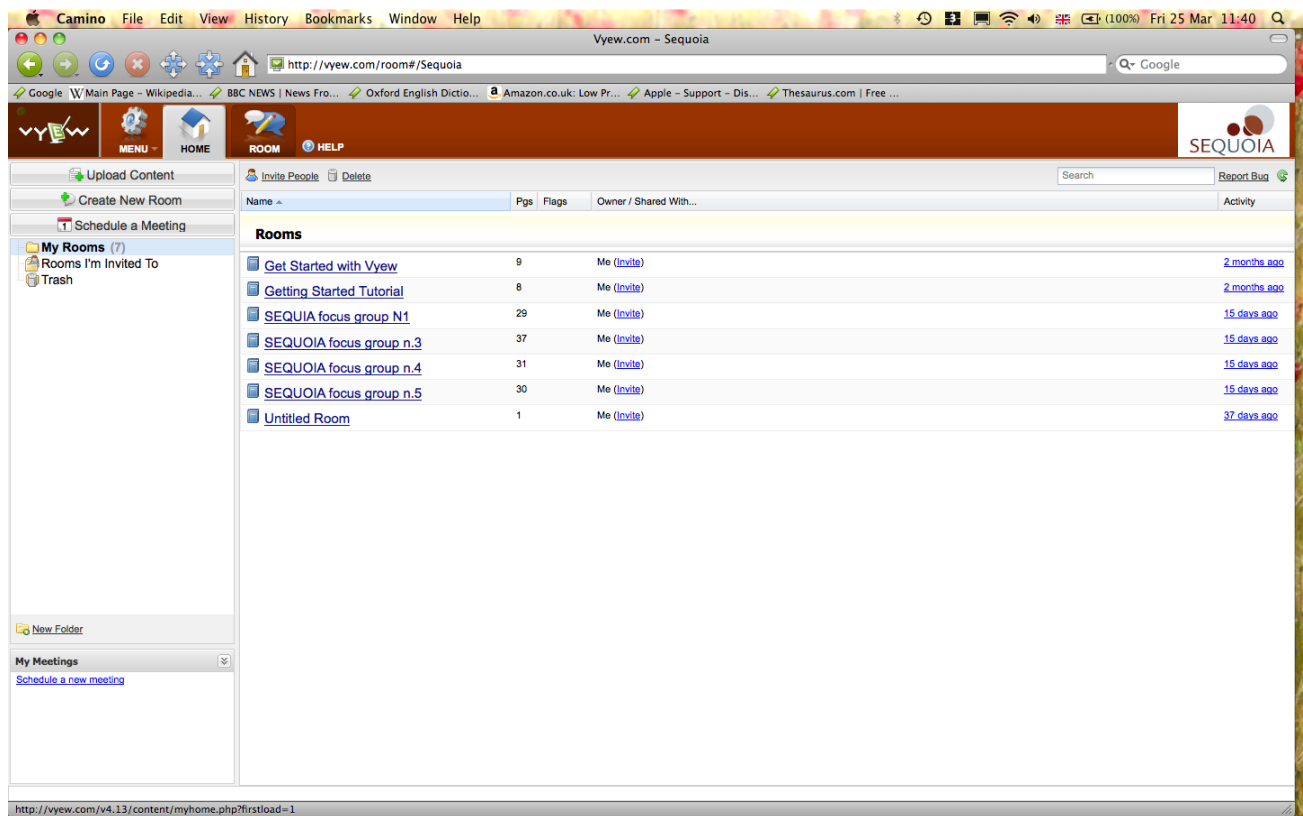


Figure 1: vyew web interface customised for SEQUOIA

Each focus group session lasted about 75 minutes, and was run according to the following agenda:

- Introduction of the moderator and the SEQUOIA partners participating (2 minutes)
- Introduction of the projects (3 minutes for each project)
- Participants' expectations (10 minutes)
- What do we mean by "socio-economic impact assessment"? – open discussion (10 minutes)
- Presentation of SEQUOIA's methodological approach (5 minutes)
- Open discussion (with guiding questions) about SEQUOIA's variables and indicators (15 minutes) and related questions on the second questionnaire
- Summarising and planning possible next actions

Before each session the participants received an e-mail with the focus group agenda, information about the focus group methodology, and technical information about vyew. Then, after the session, a thank you e-mail was sent together with the slide presentation used during the focus group.

Each focus group session focused, in addition to the SEQUOIA methodology, on one aspect of the Second Questionnaire. This approach was chosen in order to keep focus group duration under one hour as

productivity of a teleconference or web conference tends to decrease if it lasts much longer than an hour. In particular, the first focus group addressed Section B “Knowing more about your project”, the second Section C “Base-Case Scenario Identification”, the third Section G “Technological Dimension of the project”, the fourth Section E “Social Impact” and the last one Section D “Economic Impact”. Antonella Passani (T6) acted as facilitator and moderator for all the sessions.

4. THE FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY: A SHORT DESCRIPTION

The focus group methodology can be seen as a special kind of group interview, during which the moderator poses a series of questions but, instead of asking each participant to answer in turn, he/she encourages people to talk to one another, to share and to compare opinions and experiences. This method is particularly useful for understanding people’s knowledge of and opinions on a specific topic or issue.

Normally focus groups take place in a face-to-face environment with a number of participants that can be from a minimum of 4-5 participants to a maximum of 12-15. The number of participants is important because the moderator is interested not only in the opinion of each participant but also in the way the participants interact with each other and share or contrast points of view. Group dynamics theories (Lewin, 1948; Simmel, 1976, 1990; Schutz, 1958) suggests a group composed by 5-15 persons as the most profitable for this kind of activity. In the case of SEQUOIA we were forced to run the focus group sessions in an online environment due to the difficulty and cost in arranging in-person meeting for such a large number of projects. Thus, we used the collaborative environment vyew in order to stimulate the interaction among participants, in an attempt to reproduce online the characteristics of a physical meeting.

The focus group is normally conducted by a single person who is supported by a second person who acts as “mirror”, i.e. is a silent observer who takes notes on the interaction and, if the discussion goes too far from the original plan, supports the moderator in bringing the discussion back on track by intervening in the interaction.

5. ANALYSIS: POSITIVES, LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the point of view of SEQUOIA’s dissemination activities the focus groups were very successful. Starting with the e-mail requests to participate in the Doodle polls, where the rationale for holding meetings with us was first introduced, the visibility of SEQUOIA increased significantly over what we had already achieved during the last Collaboration meeting in October 2010. We experienced a good response rate in filling out multiple polls and in setting aside time for the focus groups. The multiple e-mail exchanges that this required helped the projects become more familiar not only with SEQUOIA’s objectives but also with SEQUOIA’s researchers themselves, thus facilitating the communications.

We took extra pains to explain at every opportunity that we are working closely with the HOLA! project, whose main responsibilities are two facilitate the projects’ dissemination activities and to foster the collaboration between the projects. The focus groups, in fact, indirectly had a positive effect on the latter objective, even though this was not their planned purpose. For example, the first part of each focus group session was dedicated to the presentation of the projects. In this way each project had an opportunity to ‘disseminate’ its activities and get a sense of what other projects are doing.

It was particularly useful for the project representatives to be able to hear other representatives about what they considered important about their projects in terms of socio-economic impact. The development of such a shared understanding will make it much easier for the dissemination documents generated by SEQUOIA to be understood and utilised to derive maximum benefit from our work.

Although we had previously tested the tool, we still experienced some significant technical issues with the vyew platform during the first focus group, which caused us to switch the audio part to Skype. We alerted the vyew support team about the problems and the stability of the audio system did improve in subsequent meetings, but in most cases we used skype for the audio in any case, just to be safe. The ability to use the

common white board and built-in chat still made a big difference in keeping the participants focused on the points being discussed.

6. NEXT STEPS

We will probably use the same vview platform in future activities. For example, we may use this tool to support projects that face difficulties in responding to the second questionnaire, or for other networking activities. Having created an environment where several project participants got to know each other and exchanged views on several important impact-related issues it is a good idea to build on this and strengthen SEQUOIA's outreach and dialogue with all the projects.

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