

## Better Explain EIA for a better public participation : Review and outlook



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Hello everyone, I am pleased to present the results of our project entitled Better Explain IAs for a better public participation , led by the Quebec Association for Impact Assessment to which I participated.

## The Environmental Assessment Process: A Decision-Making Tool or a Confusing Tool?



- Role of the different actors misunderstood
- IAs have become a complex task
- IAs do not seem to be an effective decision-making tool

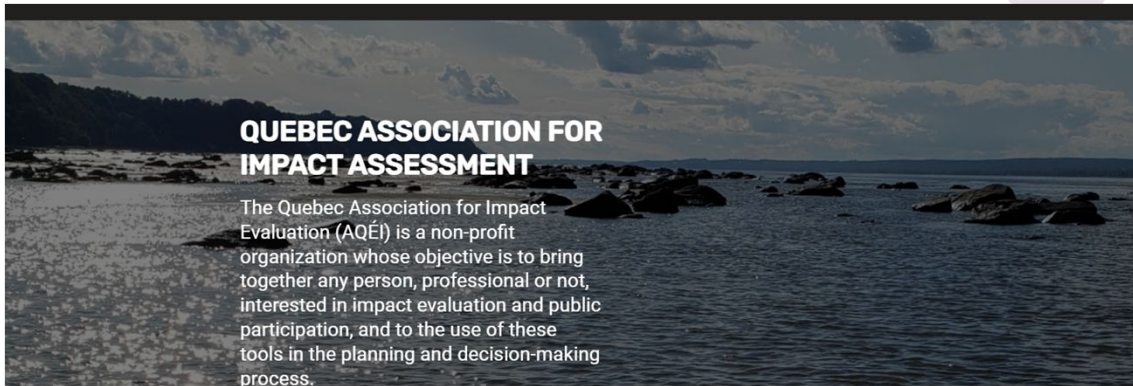
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The practice of environmental assessments is still largely misunderstood. Despite a practice established for around fifty years in Quebec, the role of the various actors remains largely misunderstood by the public, the media and even decision-makers. The picture is not clear for anyone.

Carrying out impact studies has become a complex task, and can be daunting.

## Project Launch: Better Communicating IA



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At the Québec Association for Impact Assessment, we care about bringing people together to discuss impact assessments and their role in planning and decision-making. This is why, In 2021, we launched the project.

## Why is it so important to better communicate what IAs are?



Facilitate public participation



Trust on the process/  
Better decision making tool

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One might ask, why is it so important to better communicate what impact studies are? I can see at least two good reasons:

First - A good comprehension of the process and the roles of different actors facilitate its appropriation and public participation. In other words, understanding IAs improves the quality of participation and allows for a positive contribution.


Second : It increases the general public's trust in the governance aspects and decisions that arise from the process. This makes impact studies better decision-making tools.

## The example of Northvolt

Quebec Lands \$7B Battery Gigafactory Investment from Sweden's Northvolt



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### La confusion s'est installée au sujet des évaluations environnementales

[Accueil] / [Opinion] / [Idées]

LEDEVOIR  
**Le Courrier des écrans**  
Le meilleur et le pire des écrans, petits et grands  
M'inscrire gratuitement

Quebec / News  
**Northvolt battery project is becoming a major crisis, Liberals say**  
Meanwhile, the Parti Québécois accused Premier Legault of ignoring Quebecers' intelligence and treating them like

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Recently, Northvolt decided to build a battery factory in Quebec. This giga project received unparalleled media coverage. First presented as a project to help the energy transition, it was criticized from all sides because it was not subject to an IA. We saw, day after day, that the environmental assessment process was poorly understood by journalists, the population, even the Government did not communicate clearly on the topic.

The coverage quickly became a polarized debate – pros and cons. This media crisis generated:

- Public distrust of the environmental assessment process
- a loss of credibility on the part of the Government and the project promoter

As an association, we tried to influence the public debate by reacting on social media as well as publishing articles in newspapers. It is risky to take part in the debate and invest the public battleground without having all the right tools. We are almost there! Let's say that this controversy strongly motivated us to finalize our communication strategy.

## Two Phases Approach



1. Communication action plan



2. New model of IA reports

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To achieve our objectives, we based the project on two distinct components: A communication plan and a new impact study report model.

## 1. Communication Action Plan - Media



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- Publication of articles in the media
- EI Expert Representatives – Training
- Key Messages
- Q&A



One of the first activity was the publication of articles on the role of stakeholders in IAs, their main steps as well as on strategic environmental assessments.

Three articles have already been published and a fourth is coming. We must offer a response to disinformation. We see a void that must be filled with quality, factual and concise information. We must place IAs in their context.

## 1. Communication Action Plan – Public Presentation

Public conference on IA: process, content and actors



- Universities
- NGO
- Associations

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One of my favorite activity is, no doubt, the General Public Conference presentation: Impact studies, that's my business!

It is not a training course, but rather a conference to broaden the understanding of the aim of IA, by using clear, everyday and accessible language. The conference aims to debunk myths and explain in clear terms what environmental assessments are and are not.

It is an extraordinary tool that we used on several occasions, notably in university environments.



## 1. Communication Action Plan – For Students

- Mock IA for students

- Webinars and web capsules

The screenshot shows the website for the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPÉ) in Québec. The header includes the Québec logo and the text 'Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement'. The navigation menu contains: LE BAPÉ, PARTICIPER, DOSSIERS, EMPLOIS, SALLE DE PRESSE, and NOUS JOINDRE. A search bar is located on the right. The main content area features a large image of a diverse group of young people with their hands raised, and the heading 'Trousse pédagogiques'. Below the heading, a paragraph states: 'Le BAPÉ propose des trousse pédagogiques dans le but de faire connaître l'organisation et son fonctionnement auprès des jeunes. Il souhaite ainsi favoriser une participation citoyenne plus inclusive et représentative de la société actuelle. Ces activités éducatives, développées en collaboration avec ses partenaires, sont gratuites et accessibles à toute personne ou organisme qui en fait la demande.' At the bottom left, there is a small text: 'Better Explain EIA for a better public participation : Review and outlook'. At the bottom right, there is a source link: 'Source: Outils pédagogiques du BAPÉ (gouv.qc.ca)' and the AQEI logo.

In the near future, we will produce webinars, web capsules and develop an educational kit for students to carry out mock-up IAs in their schools. We hope that it will be a first step in understanding IA for next generations. For the web capsules, we will draw inspiration from the concept of **My thesis in 180 seconds** which is very successful in academia and in the media.

## 2. New EIA Report model



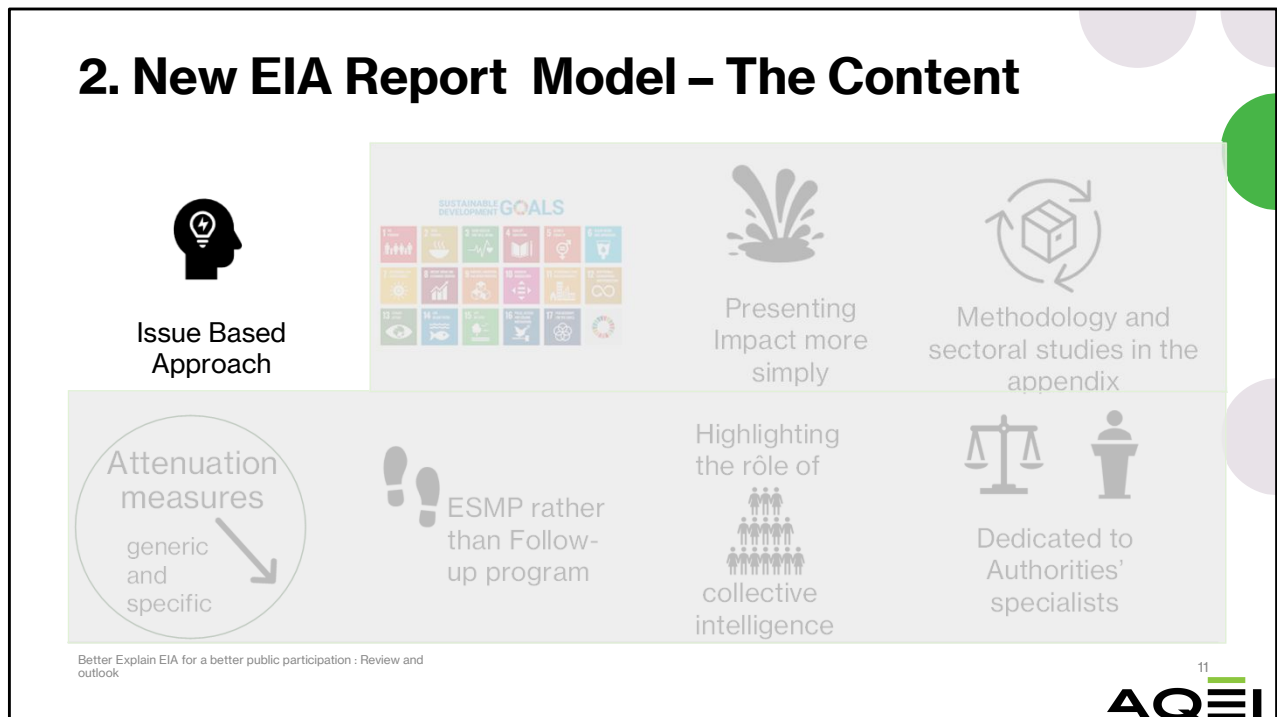
The second part of our project focuses on remodeling the IA reports that are unwieldy and convoluted.

We looked for ways to make it more user friendly and its content easier to consult.

In fifty years of impact studies, they have become more complex and new issues have emerged: climate change, methodologies , public participation

As practitioners, we are faced with increasingly precise and detailed requests from government agencies on topics that are often peripheral or unlikely to influence the decision to authorize or not the project. We are also urged to do things faster so as not to delay projects, often with insufficient data on the project itself but a huge amount of public data on the environment. So, we have to make choices.

## 2. New EIA Report Model – The Content



Here are the main recommendations.

The first preferred avenue for revamping the IA report is to remodel it using the Issue **Based Approach**.

This requires making a major change in practice calling for a consensus from parties involved. It's a serious paradigm shift from an **analytical** to a **systemic** approach.

How to select and focus on the key issues of citizens and authorities? How we, as overseers, can select and properly formulate the issues? How can we provide the answers that citizens and decision-makers expect?

## 2. New EIA Report Model – The Content Issue Based approach

### Our actions:

- Acquire a common definition of the Issue Based Approach
- Multi-stakeholder round table (to be implemented)
- Serie of webinars (ongoing)
- Training (coming soon)

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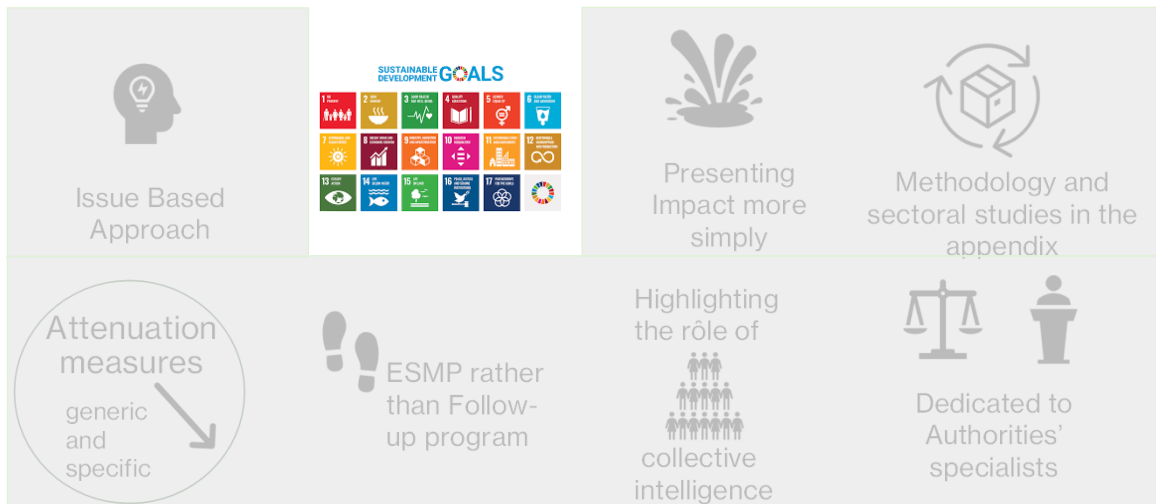
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### We need to:

- Elaborate a common ground on: concerns, impacts and issues; this will be accomplished through a multistakeholder discussion table
- Properly publicize issue-based approach through webinars and training;

## 2. New EIA Report Model – The Content



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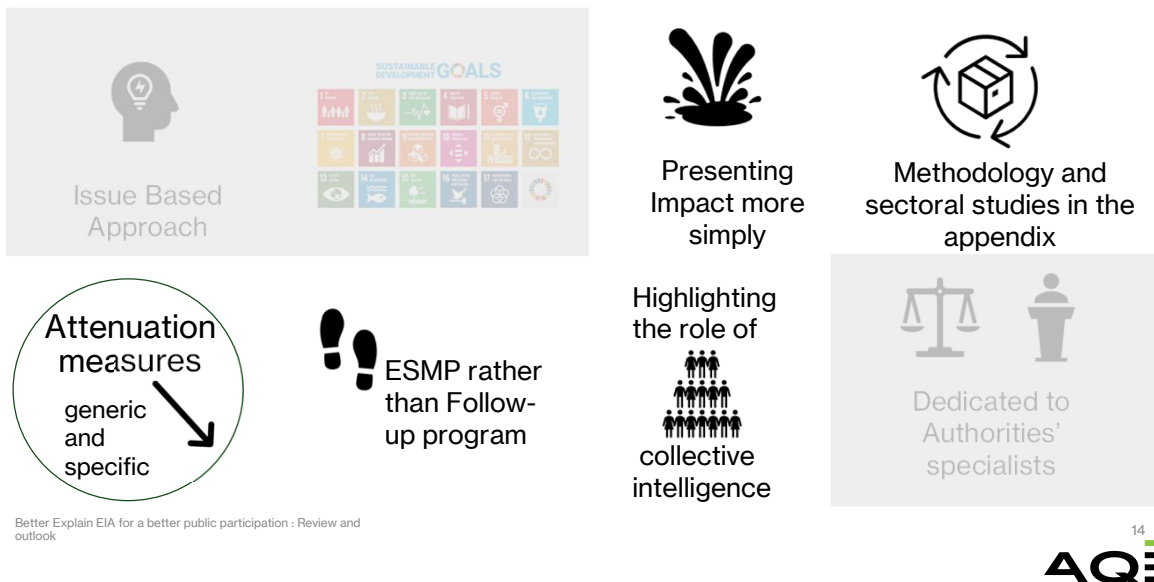
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We also believe that for a better understanding from authorities and citizens, the IA report should address the principles of sustainable development. In Quebec, the Ministry of the Environment requires that this be part of the IA. However, a review of the studies carried out reveals varying approaches that rarely make it possible to assess the sustainability of a project.

The challenge here is to avoid generalities associated with the pillars of sustainability and not give in to the charms of greenwashing by issuing broad statements without proof and possible corroboration.

## 2. New EIA Report Model – The Content



As we recommend, impact descriptions must be simpler. It should be summarized, methodologies and technical studies be relegated to the appendices.

It is also important to emphasize the application of so-called generic mitigation measures and clearly explain those that are specific to the project.

For the benefit of all participants, it would be important to clearly highlight the role of **collective intelligence** in carrying out the impact study. In other terms, the role of public participation in IA.

## 2. New EIA Report Model – The Form

Story telling



Linguistic review



Hyperlinks



More Pictures



Adopt a neat graphic design and layout



Interactive digital mapping - (GIS)



Towards a digital living document



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Recommendations are also made on the form.

First, the information contained in the report must be easily accessible.

More efforts should be devoted to final editing, inserting hyperlinks to ease navigation.


We should further exploit the potential of interactive digital cartography (information by layer).

Second, we must tell a story, provide an overall vision without losing the suspense or the essence of our work. Some countries even limit the number of pages to one hundred.

Of course, a good linguistic revision must be ensured.

Always think that a picture is worth a thousand words.

And then, eventually, migrate to a digital living document.



## 2. EIA Report – Form and content

Our actions:

- Write a best practice guide (to come)
- Redesigning an existing impact statement (to come)
- Participate in regulatory review (on going)
- Training in Writing/Popularizing Science (on going)

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To support our initiative:

We propose to write a Manual of good practices or a writing guide .

Next, we would like to rework an existing IA report according to the new proposed model and compare the Before and After

Finally, our association is participating in regulations review and we are offering training in scientific writing.



## To capture complexity in IA

The Issue Based Approach and a Good Communication plan

### As **Opportunities**:

- Quickly understand the main impacts associated with a future project
- Target the level of analysis and information needed
- Clarify the disclosure of results
- Enhance the process by making it more relevant and visible to the media and the public
- Allow you to move from the technical to the political
- Better explain IAs for the public, the specialists and the decision makers

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The **Issue Based Approach** combined with a good **communication plan** are our answers to **capture complexity** in IAs.

The issue-based approach makes it possible to focus the analysis on impacts that are key for understanding and decision-making.

It allows for a more transparent disclosure of results.

This approach also makes the IA process more relevant and visible to the media and the public. It allows us to move from the technical to the political side. This is powerful for decision-makers and it is closer to a journalistic approach where they get to the point by narrative.

A good communication plan, so we don't forget, for which purpose and for who's this is for.

# Project participants



Bureau  
d'audiences publiques  
sur l'environnement  
Québec

Environnement  
et Lutte contre  
les changements  
climatiques  
Québec

TRANSFERT  
Environnement et Société

Québec  
Ministère  
des Transports

Économie  
et Innovation  
Québec

Hydro  
Québec



Agence canadienne  
d'évaluation environnementale

Canadian Environmental  
Assessment Agency

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Thank to all our partners in the implementation of the project to better communicate the impact studies.

# Let's continue the conversation!

Post questions and comments in the IAIA24 app.



## #iaia24

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