

User engagement

Presented by

Davy Van Landuyt, EUD Project Officer

What does EUD do?

- ENGO representing European deaf communities
- 31 Members: National Associations of the Deaf (NADs) of all 27 EU Member States, plus Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the UK
- Our work:
 - Capacity building for NADs
 - Advocacy at EU Policy level
 - Equality in both public and private aspects of life
 - Recognition of the right to use national sign languages
 - Empowerment through communication and information
 - Equality in education and employment
 - European projects around deaf communities or sign languages

A little background

- Historical frustration in deaf communities due to experiences with “hearing researchers” in past projects
 - Technosolutionism: technology to “help fix deaf problems”
 - Doubts about personal motivation to do this research
 - Paternalistic attitudes
 - Ignorant assumptions about sign languages or deaf communities
 - Fears about unintended consequences impacting deaf communities
 - Some domains are very sensitive

“In contrary to what many hearing researchers think, deaf people are not resistant to technologies, but because technologies are usually not designed with them. Hence the importance of including deaf user communities from the start.”

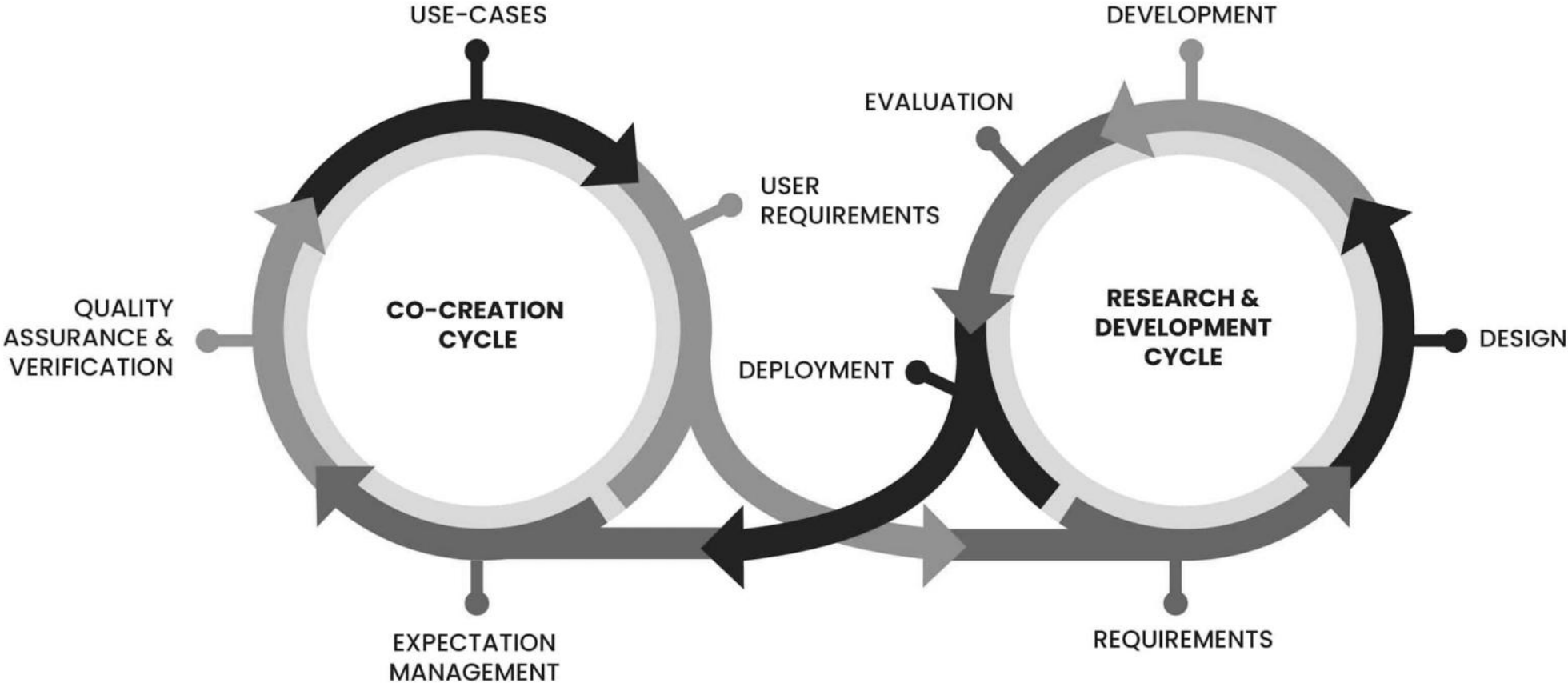
Deaf communities and research

- **Research fatigue**
 - Deaf people are very often asked to participate in research
 - Often without compensation
 - Often feeling like the research is “useless”
 - “Another” hearing researcher
- People respond better to **personal recruitment**
- **Peers** are trusted more – shared deaf experience
- 🤝 This is where deaf professionals with strong networks come in

Researcher responsibility and allyship

- To work with sign languages and deaf communities is not just research: it is **political**
- SLT is **not just a “fun”** problem/challenge to solve to push individual work forward
- Researchers need to understand this and also work on their allyship to deaf communities, but **this takes a long time**
- When participants, communities see researchers demonstrating **allyship**, they will be more willing to participate and more trusting

Co-creation as essential part of research



Deaf-led involvement in current SLMT research

- EUD is involved in both SignON and EASIER, leading a specific work package related to user engagement
 - **Co-creation** with deaf communities
 - **User** requirements and needs
 - Research on possible **use cases**
 - **Human-centred** end-user evaluations
- Also VGTC (Flemish Sign Language Center) in SignON
 - Specific **science communication strategy** targeted to deaf communities in different national sign languages
- Some partners with some deaf staff members, or hearing allies with long-standing relationships with deaf communities, who don't hesitate to recommend deaf people to others

How do we co-create?

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Round tables
- Workshops
- Focus groups
- Science communication

Key here is **direct communication in sign language**

Insights born from co-creation

- Some **distrust of “hearing” researchers** due to other failed projects in the past: co-creation is very welcomed.
- A strong tendency towards **human live interpreters first** as preferred communication method between signed and spoken languages. The gap left by this could be filled by VRS/VRI services. Then the gap left by these can eventually be filled by SLMT.
- **Always let the deaf end user decide** what method of communication is best for them/the situation.
- **Openness** to using sign language technologies, but **also very high expectations** before deemed usable. The quality of the machine translation has to be “good enough” before deaf communities consider it potentially useful. Deaf people will not settle for mediocre signing.

Insights born from co-creation

- Also **fears** that governments and other **hearing decision-makers** decide SLMT is a cheaper alternative than human interpreting, deciding to invest in these technologies and divest in human interpreters causing deaf communities to have to rely on technology only for accessibility, even **when it is against our wishes**.
- Acceptable use cases are **low-impact situations** with simple communication needs. **Medical, education or legal** contexts are **a big no-no!**
- It's also clear that deaf communities expect **social responsibility from the hearing researchers** as well. Just co-creation is not enough. Will hearing academics actually **be allies of the deaf communities** to clarify that humans are more important, or are they going to take a neutral stance when the discussions about that begin?

Just for communication?

- **Deaf people and professionals** also have many ideas around sign language technologies, which are not related to communication between deaf and hearing interlocutors. Sign language technologies could be a tool to use for e.g. work or life.
- How about ChatGPT in sign language? Or signing to Siri or Alexa? Or using technologies for sign language data annotation to speed up this time-consuming and expensive process?

Final recommendations

- Sign language research projects must have **deaf professionals at the steering wheel** to keep it going into the right direction
- **Transparent and trustworthy co-creation and science communication strategies**, led and carried out by deaf professionals are essential to build a relationship with deaf communities
- Hearing researchers must be aware of their **social responsibility**
- Don't focus on communication only

Funding acknowledgement



Funded by the Horizon 2020
Framework Programme of the European Union

