

# **SOLCONCER: NEW PLATFORM WITH CERAMIC TECHNICAL CONTENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The SOLCONCER ([www.solconcer.es](http://www.solconcer.es)) computer tool is now available online to provide dedicated assessment of different construction solutions using both ceramic and alternative finishing materials. The main purpose behind this advisory service is to enable the user to decide which construction solution is most suitable among the options under consideration, on the basis of economic, performance and environmental criteria.

Since the project was launched 10 years ago, the SOLCONCER tool has been aimed at a series of users with very varied profiles. However, such a variety of approaches indicated that it needed to become more specialised in order to strengthen the support it gives certain users.

With this in mind, it is proposed to extend the tool with a new approach focusing specifically on specifications writers as a way of complementing the work done so far. To this end, it is intended to create a new platform dealing with ceramic systems that diversifies the project's current scope of action.

This effort seeks to make SOLCONCER a reference platform for decision-making in regard to coverings, where it can continue to offer not only assessment of construction solutions but also more technical information for visitors related to ceramic systems.

The aim of all this is to:

- Create a virtual space where visitors can find all information of interest in terms of innovation, installation, products, regulations, sustainability, etc. in regard to ceramic systems.
- Make SOLCONCER a dynamic platform, with quality technical content, updated and published on a regular basis.
- Seek synergies between specifications writers and ceramic companies, in such a way that, by offering specifiers quality content on ceramic systems, the assessment of construction solutions will have greater visibility, thus enhancing the value of ceramic products.

This paper presents the work undertaken to perform the transition of the construction solution assessment tool to the new platform with ceramic technical content. It also describes the results of the study and analysis carried out in order to define it adequately.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main objectives of the project is to incorporate accurate, up-to-date and verified technical information on ceramic systems. For that purpose, the proposal is to create a new web platform focusing on ceramic systems that diversifies Solconcer's current field of action (until now, a tool based solely on assessing construction solutions), which compiles fully updated content on ceramic systems in terms of innovation, tile installation, products, regulations, etc.

The information contained on the new platform will deal with numerous aspects affecting different thematic areas intrinsically related to ceramic products and, in particular, to ceramic construction solutions.

To define this new web platform, a **strategic online marketing plan** was implemented with the aim of:

- Obtaining an accurate definition of the technical contents to be uploaded.
- Defining the optimal web structure and organisation.
- Gaining a better understanding of the new platform's target audience.

In order to achieve these objectives, a series of tasks were undertaken that enabled the new SOLCONCER web platform to be designed:

- Research on users.
- Study of potential demand (Google Spain)
- Website design concept (architecture, flow, and graphic design)
- SEO (*Search Engine Optimisation*) strategy

The sections below describe the main tasks carried out within the framework of this strategic plan.

## 2. RESEARCH ON USERS

One of the initial actions in the Strategic Plan for Online Marketing was to conduct research on potential users, which consisted of:

- **Interviews:** Qualitative information was gained from semi-structured interviews. Six interviews lasting between 45 minutes and one hour were conducted via video conferences. Profiles that fit the potential users defined for the new Solconcer platform were interviewed. The pre-defined users were: 3 specifications writers, 1 ceramic distributor, and 1 ceramic manufacturer.
- **Surveys:** Qualitative information was obtained from an online survey of the pre-defined profiles once the results of the interviews had been analysed. A total of 37 responses were received from specifications writers.

### 2.1 INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the interviews was to profile the standard user of the new platform and the online route required to reach the website. The following is a summary of the main conclusions drawn from our analysis of the information provided by the specifications writers – the type of user that was finally selected.

#### Conclusions

##### Type of user

The differences between architects and interior decorators are notable when it comes to defining user profiles. However, both are concerned with ceramic materials from the outset of the project to its final execution, as they both seek to avoid future problems on site. Both professionals display significant creative vision.

##### How they acquire their information

They mainly consult experienced peers from the industry. In addition, they consult highly technical contents created by other architects and indeed other colleagues' projects are one of their main sources of inspiration.

##### The materials

- Beyond their conventional uses, ceramics are relatively unknown.
- The main drawback associated with ceramic materials is their installation.
- Sustainability is becoming increasingly important.

##### Contents

- Features and performance of ceramic materials.
- Complete construction solutions, an understanding of the project as a whole is critical.
- Regulations, especially in public-sector projects.
- Fixing and installing ceramic products.

## 2.2 SURVEYS

Having analysed the replies received from the personal interviews, quantitative analysis was carried out via a remote survey of specifications writers, with a view to validating assumptions and obtaining additional information about our target audience.

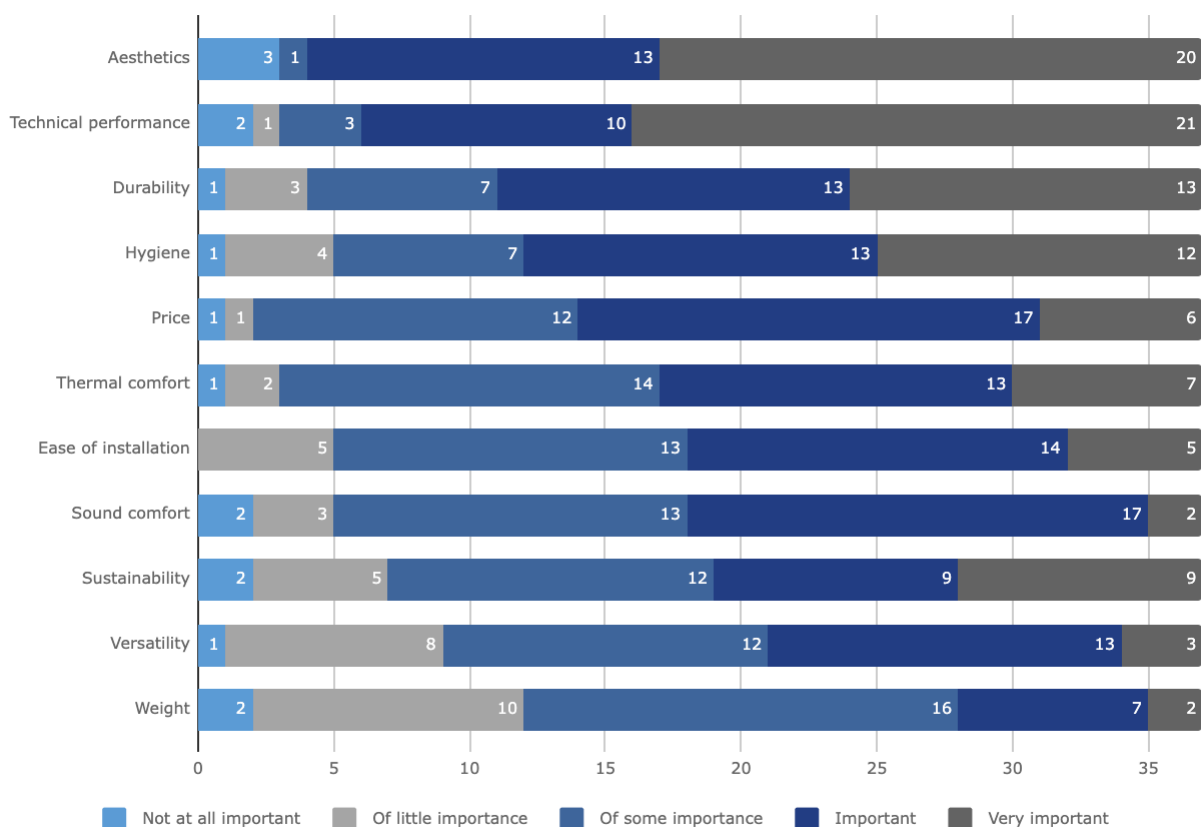
<b>Sample group</b>	No. of replies received	37
<b>How do you identify?</b>	Female	49%
	Male	51%
<b>How old are you?</b>	25 - 34 years old	5%
	35 - 44 years old	51%
	45 - 54 years old	30%
	55 - 64 years old	14%
<b>Where do you work?</b>	Valencia Region	62%
	Catalonia	19%
	Abroad	16%
	Navarre	3%
<b>What kind of projects do you work on?</b>	New construction: residential	23
	Refurbishment and renovation: residential	27
	New construction: tertiary sector	11
	Refurbishment and renovation: tertiary sector	14
	Tenders and public works: building	12
	Tenders and public works: urban planning / landscape	9
	Interior design	12

**Table 1.** Respondent profile

## VALIDATED ASSUMPTIONS

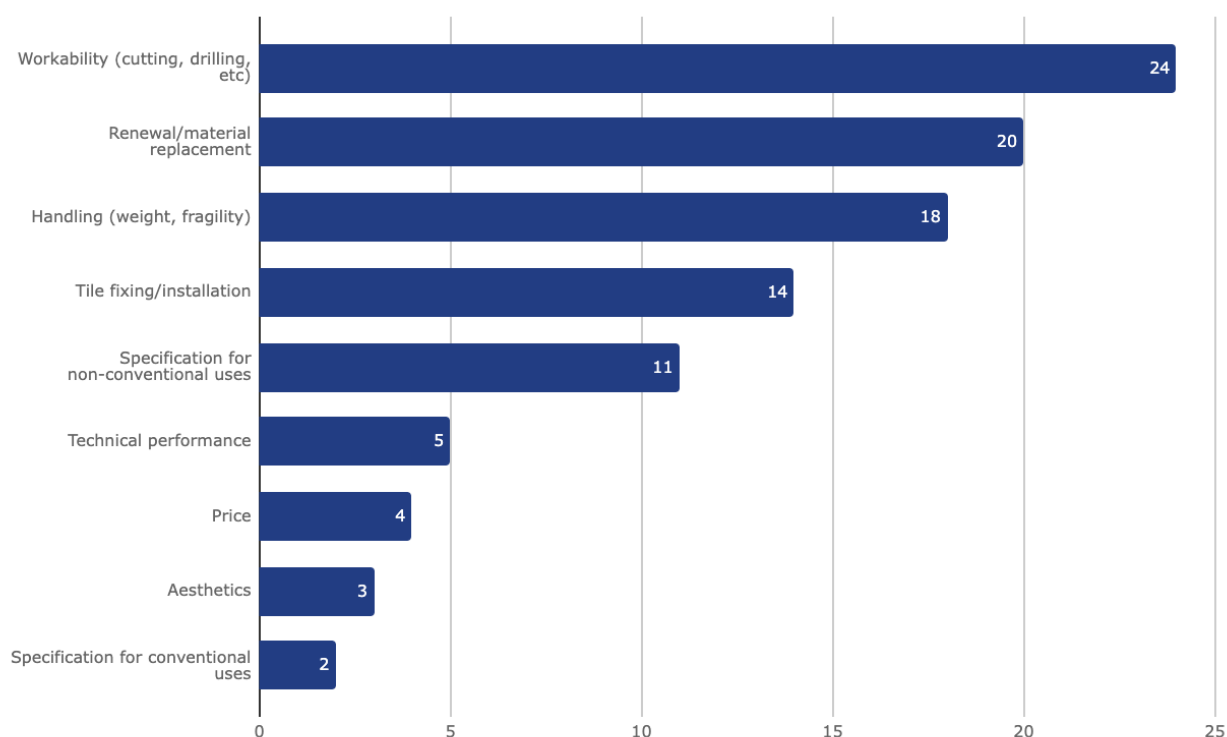
Despite the fact that the sample group in this study was not as large as is to be desired in order to reach much more rigorous conclusions, the analysis of our results led to a definition of several approaches and enabled us to validate the following assumptions:

- Aesthetics and **technical performance**, key in covering materials:



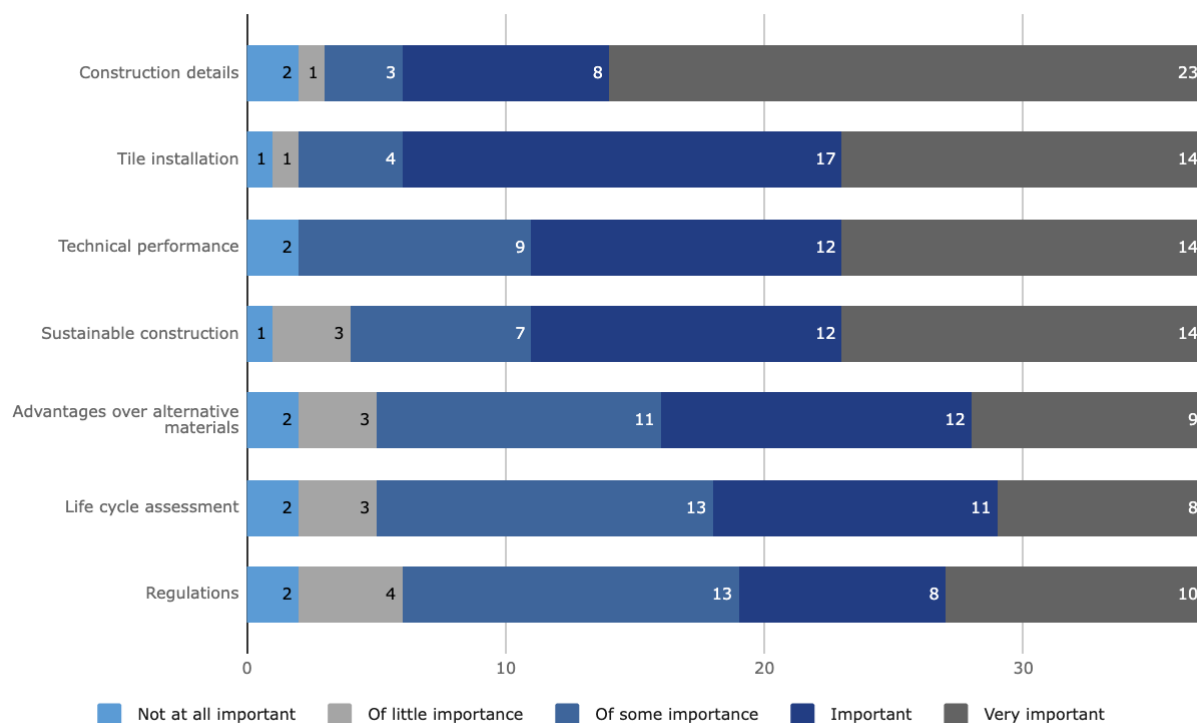
**Graph 1.** Selection criteria for covering materials.

- **Installation** of ceramics – a problem (albeit not the only one):



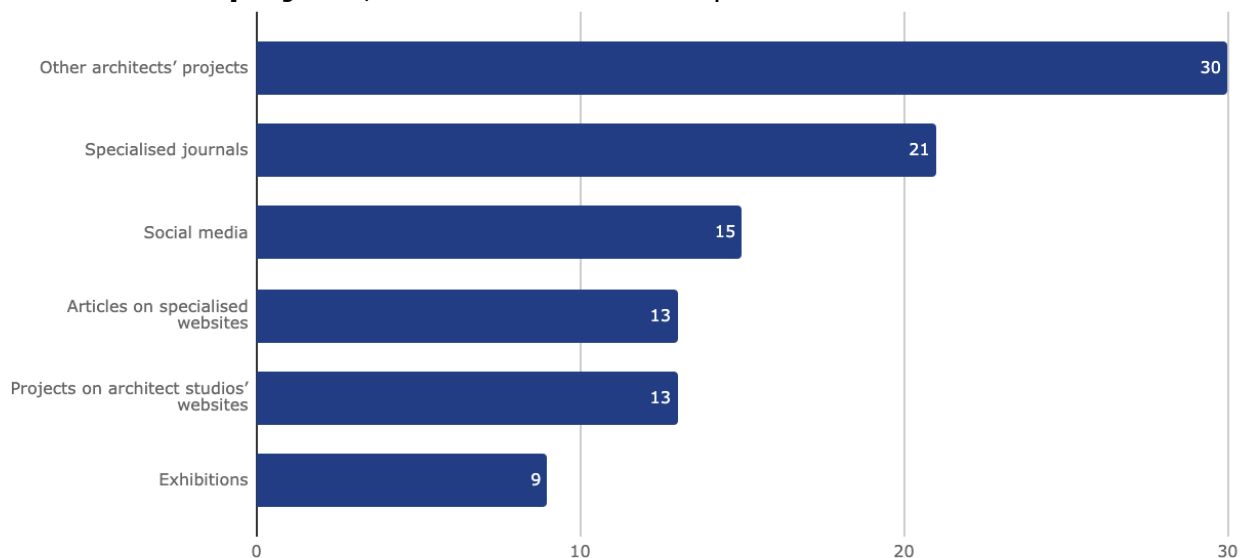
**Graph 2.** Characteristics considered most problematic in ceramics.

- Desired contents: **construction solutions and details:**



**Graph 3.** Technical contents considered most important.

- Actual **projects**, the main source of inspiration:



**Graph 4.** Type of contents used to inspire respondents.

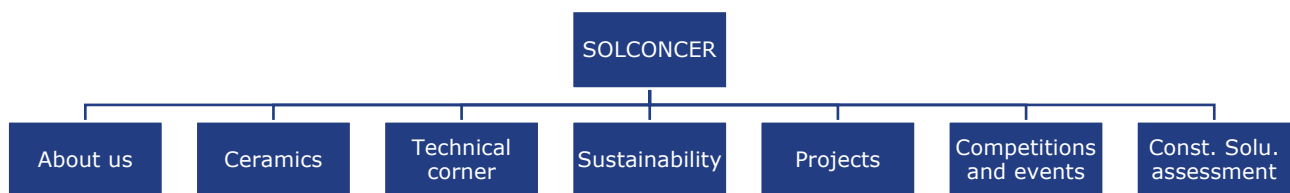
### 3. WEBSITE DESIGN CONCEPT

To define the concept of the new web platform and of the technical contents to be included, not only were the results of our **user research** taken into consideration, but also a **demand study** that enabled us to ascertain users' explicit interests when they search on Google, as well as the search volume on Google Spain regarding ceramic systems.

#### 3.1 INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

The information architecture is a preliminary scheme of the pages that will make up the website, which establishes relationships between certain items and sorts all the contents so that information can be easily found by the targeted potential user. In addition, it also provides some ideas about the main contents that certain pages on the platform should incorporate.

Despite the fact that numerous possible themes were identified with which to organise the web architecture and to generate content on the new platform, given the scope of the project, priority was given to incorporating those topics that were considered to be of greatest importance.



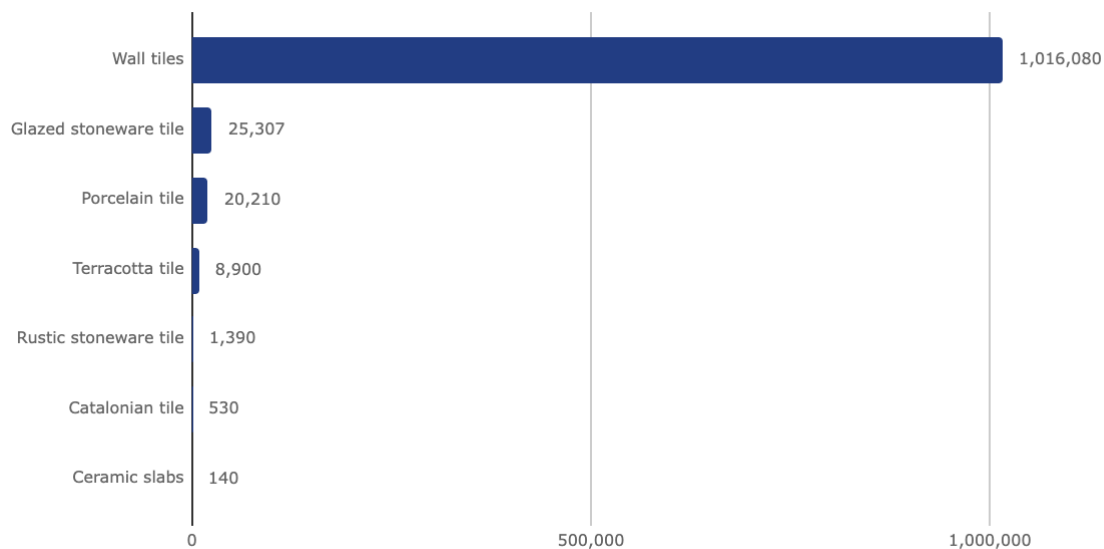
**Figure 1.** Information architecture for the new web platform (first level)

The main sections that form part of the new architecture are described below:

#### CERAMICS

The aim of this section is to provide the user with general knowledge about the different types of ceramic products and detailed information about the main technical characteristics of ceramic materials. This section is organised into three different subsections, in line with the search criteria found in our demand and user analysis:

- **Ceramic Product** ranking: +1M monthly searches on Google for different types of ceramic materials, 95% of which are for tiles. Although much of this demand comes from private users and not so much from specifications writers, there is evidence of a lack of knowledge about ceramic product terminology since this ratio does not coincide at all with the sector's production output or sales.



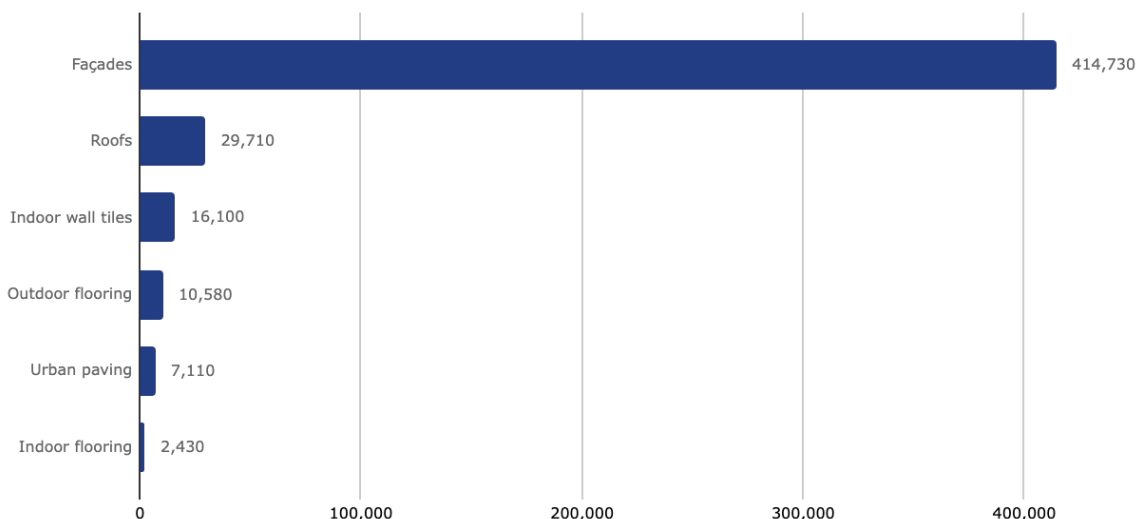
**Graph 5.** Number of monthly searches for ceramic products. Demand study results (Google Spain)

- **Comparative study** with other covering materials: the users interviewed called for a comparison of the properties of different materials with each other, and similar search patterns can also be seen on Google.
- **Material performance:** in the surveys, technical performance was one of the most highly appreciated aspects of ceramics.

## TECHNICAL CORNER

The aim of this section is to make Solconcer a reference in terms of its reliability as a source of information. This section is organised into three different subsections, in line with the search criteria found in our demand and user analysis:

- **Ceramic systems:** interviewees seek technical details on ceramic construction systems from Solconcer. Significant demand for information on façade systems was identified on Google.



**Graph 6.** Number of monthly searches for ceramic products. Demand study results (Google Spain)



- **Tile installation:** the surveys identified workability, installation and handling of ceramic materials as one of the main issues. Search patterns on Google also relate to this matter.
- **Regulations:** Half of the users surveyed consider contents about regulations and legal requirements to be “important” or “very important”. A wide range of search engine optimisation (SEO) opportunities are identified using keywords related to the topic.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The main objective of this section is to promote the competitive advantages of ceramics in terms of sustainability, as well as to enhance the growing importance of sustainability in the sector.

70% of respondents consider sustainable building contents to be “important” or “very important”. In this case, the demand study (Google) also identified a large number of SEO opportunities with related keywords.

## PROJECTS

The aim of this section is to inspire architects/specifiers through projects where ceramic materials play a leading role.

In our user research, the importance of projects and newbuilds as a reference and source of inspiration for specifications writers was clear. For example, in the last year, 600+ searches were made on Google (Spain) each month looking for “architecture projects”.

## COMPETITIONS AND EVENTS

This section is proposed as an up-to-date information site on different events related to ceramics (trade fairs and/or congresses), as well as on different architecture competitions and awards related to projects where ceramic materials play a prominent role. From the results of our user research, this section is organised into two different subsections:

- **Competitions:** this section seeks to highlight contests and initiatives such as the Urban Regeneration Competition (CRU) sponsored by the Castellon County Council – a contest closely aligned with the objectives of this platform, as it promotes the regeneration of urban spaces through proposals that use ceramics as the main material in developing projects. All of this on top of other initiatives in the sector related to ceramics and architecture/interior design.
- **Events:** more than half of those surveyed get their information about covering materials from trade fairs and events, so this section is proposed as a compilation of all manner of events concerning ceramics and architecture.

ASSESSMENT OF CONSTRUCTION SOLUTIONS

Finally, an area dedicated to assessing construction solutions is maintained as a further section on the new platform. It is of great importance as a tool with which to make comparative assessments of a wide variety of ceramic systems from different points of view (environmental, economic and performance). The aim is to create synergies between the different contents of the various sections on the new platform and the assessment tool and the results it offers.

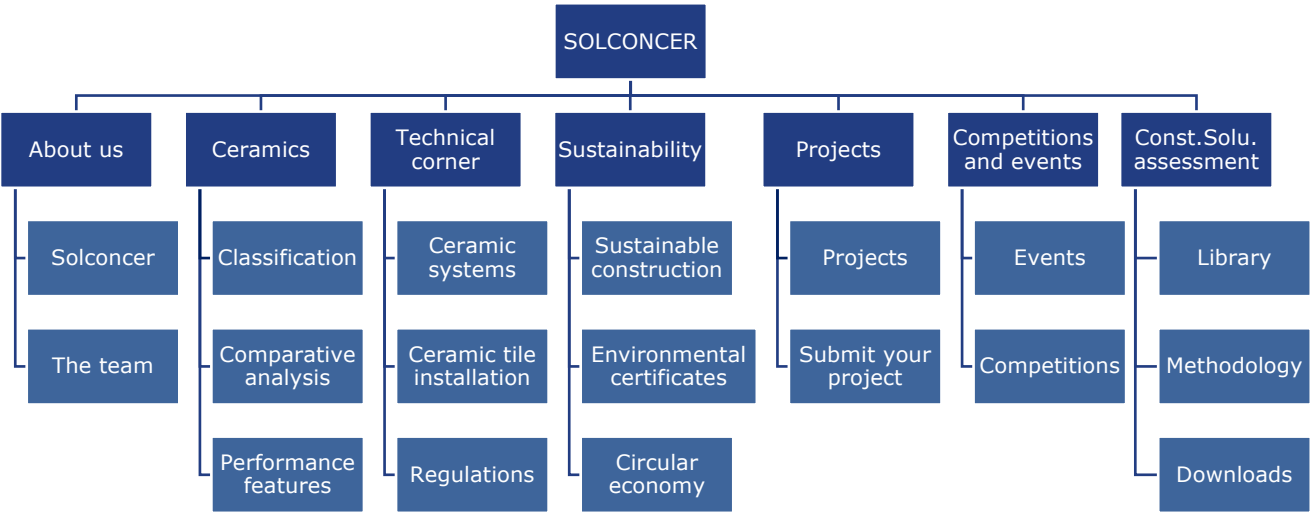


Figure 2. Proposed information architecture for the new web platform (second level)

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

- The needs of specifiers in terms of ceramic materials have been analysed through user research.
- Search patterns and keywords in web search engines (Google) related to construction solutions and ceramic systems have been studied.
- An information architecture has been proposed for the future web platform, adapted to specifiers' needs and responding to the demands, preferences and tastes of this type of user and to their way of finding information about covering materials.
- This information architecture has made it possible to organise the contents to be published and to identify the topics of greatest interest, which will then form part of the information presented on this platform for ceramic technical contents.
- Additionally, the architecture will make it easier to gain a more visible position on Google.
- All of the above aims to better acquaint specifiers with ceramic products and systems, disseminating knowledge thereof and promoting them.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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