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Comment on gc-2020-49

Anthea Lacchia (Referee)

Referee comment on "The Future of Conferences" by Hazel Gibson et al., Geosci.
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I really enjoyed reading this paper. The topic is one that will be of interest to any geoscientist or scientist today. The survey captured the views of scientific audiences at a unique moment in time, when virtual conferences had not yet become the norm (91.5% of participants said they had never attended a virtual conference before). The qualitative analysis employed in this paper is entirely appropriate. The paper is well written and the method is clearly explained, with subject-specific technical terms defined (e.g., lines 259-260 and Section 2.5). The quotes selected in the paper are engaging and appropriate to the themes. The results and conclusions clearly follow from the analysis, and the ending of the paper is poignant (lines 706-722). I particularly appreciated the self-reflective tone of the paper and think this work brings up some important issues for geoscientists to reflect upon.

My main suggestion to the authors is to ensure it is clear, especially in the title, abstract and conclusions, what the results mean for the EGU assembly, and what they might mean for other future conferences. The title of the paper is very effective in that it immediately draws the reader in, but it also seems to promise that a solution will be offered in the paper. What might the future of conferences look like? Can EGU's experience help light the way ahead for others? The recommendations provided at the end of the paper (line 672) are stated as valid for 'future general assemblies', but are some also likely to be valid for conferences in general? I suggest that to elaborate on this question (limitations of the sample in mind) would be useful in terms of aiding the scientific community in organising future events.

Minor notes:

Suggest inserting '(SIC)' in the tables as well as the quotes in the main text, where appropriate.

Line 17: suggest removing 'of its size' as you have not yet described the size of the conference.

Line 21: suggest writing themes in italic or using another way of differentiating them from the rest of the text. Suggest doing the same in the rest of the paper.

Line 22: suggest rewording and starting a new sentence from where you say 'and include' to make sentence structure clearer.

Line 48: change 'make' to 'made' to account for new year.

Line 149: 'among others': should this read 'among other things'?

Line 210: change ':' to ','.

Table 2: In the definition of 'lack of engagement', should read 'fewer opportunities'.

Line 522: Missing word "made" after "been".