

Geosci. Commun. Discuss., referee comment RC2
<https://doi.org/10.5194/gc-2020-49-RC2>, 2021
© Author(s) 2021. This work is distributed under
the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.



Comment on gc-2020-49

Jen Roberts (Referee)

Referee comment on "The future of conferences: lessons from Europe's largest online geoscience conference" by Hazel Gibson et al., Geosci. Commun. Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/gc-2020-49-RC2>, 2021

This is an interesting and topical paper which I enjoyed reading and reviewing. It will interest many readers, and is relevant to many, beyond geoscience.

My comments and suggestions mostly focus on helping the authors to open out the paper to an audience or readership outside of EGU, since I find it assumes implicit knowledge of the organisation, EGU, and how its annual conference runs.

There's also opportunity to draw on literature about, say, environmental impacts of events and internal conflicts around climate action (in general the paper is quite sparse in references).

I'm also keen that the paper is broadened out. The content of the article currently refers to 'the future of EGU conferences' not 'the future of conferences'. Linking the discussion/analysis into how conferences are generally run (now and into the future) would broaden the content to wider readership. At the moment, my feeling is that a reader unfamiliar with EGU but keen to learn more about the 'future of conferences' might become lost.

Other general comments:

- There is the assumption that the reader knows the distinction between accessibility, inclusion, and diversity. I suggest to include definition or examples of what is meant by these measures.
- There is also the assumption that the reader is familiar with EGU, and I think this assumption needs addressing. For example, replace reference to 'medal lectures' to 'awards ceremony' or something more generic.
- I felt the paper lacked references to peer reviewed literature on inclusion, accessibility, and environmental footprint of conferences and events. To provide evidenced rationale for why EGU are implementing measures to improve on these topics, and the responsibility of organisations such as EGU to improve.
- There may be further future coronavirus pandemics and outbreaks, so I think the authors should specify that where they refer to coronavirus pandemic, they mean the COVID-19 disease pandemic, and possibly specify the virus itself (SARS-CoV-2)

- I'd like to see a bit more data on how prevalent these codes were in the range of responses for different groups. Whether shown graphically or described. Particularly because for example (seemingly) one comment about concerns about open publishing of preliminary results (which I do very much understand concerns about) becomes one of four conclusions. I don't currently readily get a sense of which codes are the majority and by which group. And whether other indicators (gender, discipline etc) saw any differences in the responses. I'd like the results to be expanded in this way.
- The discussion and conclusion on the (reduced) ability to connect and interact could be linked back to technological aspects which were removed from the analysis (for robust reasons). But perhaps the technological constraints affected this ability to connect and interact. Might the conference, if run differently, offer approaches to facilitate this aspect of conferences, for example through virtual networking lounges? How much of these effects are because of the timing (very soon after covid staled much travel in Europe, and adjustments to online working/networking) and expectation (expected face to face event in Vienna, pivoted to online). You do draw on this in the conclusions, but I feel this should go in the analysis/discussion section, too.

Specific comments

- Line 16 "six week pivot" is confusing. Suggest to clarify.
- Line 26 – are they restrictive to positive and negative? Are some points neutral?
- Lines ~37 – I think it would be helpful here if the authors explicitly lay clear that EGU is a global network and a global conference. Else the reader can easily continue with the impression that EGU = Europe only. This matters for later in the paper when noting wish to be inclusive of time zones etc.
- Line 38 – spring is relative to where you are in the world. Suggest to specify the month.
- Line 48 – might you define early career scientist?
- Line 50 – who is "EGU" in this case – do you mean the secretariate or similar, or the EGU community? suggest to replace 'build up' with alternative wording such as 'formal planning'; for some, EGU 2021 would have been building up for many years!
- Line 53 – "to lie on" is strange wording. Suggest rephrase.
- Line 59 - catering options can be an accessibility measure or an inclusion measure, depending on the measure.
- Line 62 – 'travel' and 'catering' in themselves are not measures, can you specify what the environmental measures achieved. For example, encouraging/incentivising delegates' sustainable travel choices to and within Vienna, or reducing catering waste by XYZ or reducing carbon intensity of catering options by widening plant based options. Are there sources of information (e.g. EGU reports, papers) that you could reference about these measures? You refer to environmental measures later in the paper (lines 504), whereas I think that text should go here.
- Paragraph starting Line 103
 - You start off saying the live text chat was chosen as a compromise between accessibility and interaction. It might help here to lay out what the alternative options were, and perhaps also how these differed in terms of accessibility and interaction.
 - The 'display' is well described, but I think that the text-chat and how it worked and was managed needs expanding on to make sense for readers who didn't attend EGU20. For example, please describe what the live text intended to be used for? Was it intended to be used to ask questions, give comments, other? And how did the live text work? How long did it last, was the session timed to allow all those with 'displays' that were attending in the live text session to have turn in engaging, could any participant type into the chat, to be read by all, were there moderators? I know

some of this from attending/co-convening, but other readers won't.

- Line 122 – what does enabling Division meetings via 'Chat' mean?
- Line 125 – what are the medal lectures? Would awards ceremony or session work instead? Quite a bit of this section assumes that the reader knows the EGU well, and I think the language needs broadening out. For example, you might not need to refer to Union Symposia and Great Debates – simply "Union-wide events" (as opposed to Division events).
- Line 128 – really long sentence, suggest to break up.
- Line 144 – mentoring programme isn't mentioned previously – was this done online during EGU20 or one of the activities that was cancelled?
- Line 148 – extra support from who?
- Line 152 – "this unique opportunity" lacks specificity. Refer directly to e.g. "The EGU20 online format offered unique opportunity"
- Line 155 "this year" lacks specificity. Refer directly to the 2020 conference.
- Lines 156 onwards are part of the methodology, and so could be moved forward.
- Lines 221 – how are these career stages defined? This matters given your findings, later on.
- Line 487 – you note personal attitude, but I would caution that any attitude that one held in April/May 2020 might have changed given that over the past year+ EGU members have become much more acquainted with online conferences and events.
- Lines 497 – from reduced footprint from travel, explicitly, or from broader environmental ramifications e.g. conference memorabilia, hotel stays, food and catering waste, other disposable items. My feeling would be to remove specific reference to travel, as you have raised this in the introduction.
- Line 523 – what is this "start" and how would bikes be "promoted"? Suggest to be more specific in these measures.
- Lines 687 – I agree, but this isn't really drawn upon to the depths that it could be in the previous section. Is there content in your analysis that suggests negative impacts and solutions or suggestions? And how these compare to face-to-face conferences which have accessibility challenges too?