



Vienna has become a second home to the European GeoSciences Union – a diverse organisation fascinated by the workings of planet Earth, writes **James Lancaster**

**T**he European GeoSciences Union (EGU) has held its General Assembly in Vienna, Austria, for the last ten years but this year's event was the biggest by some margin, attracting 12,437 scientists (an increase of 11.5 per cent on 2013). Almost one in three delegates was a student, a statistic other European and international associations, with aging or static memberships, will regard with envy.

Once again, the meeting was held at the Austria Centre Vienna and the building's comprehensive suite of event spaces allowed those fascinated by this wide-ranging planetary science to debate, scrutinise and exchange knowledge in style: small conference rooms were used for workshops and meetings while the main plenary hall housed the poster presentations, of which there were 9,583.

The EGU General Assembly has always been delegate-led and much of the programme is shaped by their input. To keep up with the steady increase in poster contributions, new formats have been developed, including PICO, which stands for Presenting Interactive Content.

It's a trademark of organiser Copernicus, the PCO behind the assembly, and it is a curious blend of oral and poster presentation, designed to satisfy those who want just a quick overview and those who like to explore the author's findings in more detail. Almost five hundred delegates – 483 – chose to exhibit their research using PICO. Every PICO author has just two minutes to present their work orally. Afterwards they show their presentation on large display panels in more detail.

While geosciences is focused on planetary-sized issues, it is the small things, the attention to detail, that makes or breaks an event. One of the most oft-repeated bugbears of organisers is the quality of Wi-Fi in congress centres. In Vienna they've just installed a new 450-megabit connection, which meant EGU delegates were spared egg-timers and dropped connections.

Congress organiser Martin Rasmussen, of Copernicus, says the improvement was noticeable: "Digitalisation plays a major role in boosting benefits for our delegates. The new wireless LAN at the Austria Center Vienna is now so good that we can all work online effectively at the same time."

The Austria Center Vienna's proximity to the UN headquarters gives events an unmistakably international atmosphere, and this is enhanced by the local and regional specialities offered at the catering facilities, as well as, of course, a good cup of coffee (that was an improvement on 2013 too, according to delegate feedback!) For the EGU, the green meeting approach and the use of regional products are priorities, and the Austria Center Vienna provided both with aplomb.

Professor Günter Blöschl, president of the EGU and head of the Institute of Hydrology and Water Resource Management at Vienna University of Technology, says: "With up to 60 talks going on at any one time and delegates from 100 different nations worldwide, the conference has a highly diverse visitor profile and presents a number of technical challenges – factors which call for a flexible partner. The team at the Austria Center Vienna always take time to listen to us." ■

#### EGU GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN NUMBERS

4,829 oral presentations  
9,583 posters  
483 PICO presentations  
568 unique scientific sessions  
12,437 scientists  
27 per cent students  
106 countries represented

#### DID YOU KNOW?

There are now six 'Certified Meeting Professionals' working for the Vienna Convention Bureau – making it the most qualified convention office in Europe. Congress experts are only permitted to use this title if they have taken part in a demanding training programme and demonstrated the knowledge they have acquired in a rigorous examination. No other European convention office has so many employees who have been awarded this 'seal of quality'.