

IMPRESSIONS OF THE AMS ANNUAL MEETING

An Interview with the European Meteorological Society's Tanja Cegnar

Recently I have had the privilege to attend sessions of the European Meteorological Society (EMS) Annual Meetings and European Geosciences Union (EGU) General Assemblies. At those meetings I have connected with American and international scientists and—in the form of formal interviews (available on the AMS YouTube website) and in past contributions to this column, or off-the-cuff conversations—I have tried to get a flavor of the differences between scientific meetings; research styles, practices, and directions; university and/or institute dynamics; and other related topics in Europe and the United States.

Tanja Cegnar, a meteorologist at the Slovenian Environment Agency, a television weather presenter on Slovenian television, and the head of Media and Communications at the European Meteorological Society (EMS), attended the AMS Annual Meeting in Seattle this past January. To get her impressions of the AMS Annual Meeting and how it compares, both subjectively and objectively, to similar meetings in Europe, I asked her a series of questions. The following are some highlights of our exchange.

—MONIQUE KUGLITSCH, AMS SENIOR INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

Question: The EMS and AMS regularly send delegates to each other's Annual Meetings. At the most recent EMS Annual Meeting, in Trieste, Italy, AMS President Fred Carr was in attendance. In addition to these delegates, there is also overlap among attendees of these meetings. Was this your first visit to the AMS Annual Meeting and was it in an official capacity as an EMS delegate?

Cegnar: Yes, indeed, this was my first visit to an AMS Annual Meeting. I am honored that I had the chance to be there as an EMS delegate delivering a talk at the “Presidential Town Hall Meeting: EMS Lecture—Media and Outreach Activities and Networks in Europe.” AMS Commissioner of Professional Affairs Maureen McCann, a broadcast meteorologist in Orlando, Florida, moderated a panel of AMS Certified Broadcast Meteorologists (CBMs) following my presentation. The panel included Rob

Eicher (WHDH, Boston), Alex Garcia (KABB, San Antonio), Erica Grow (WNBC, New York), and John Morales (WTVJ, Miami). We focused on industry practices and challenges in both the United States and Europe.



CBM panelists at the AMS Annual Meeting (from left to right): Rob Eicher, John Morales, Alex Garcia, Erica Grow, Maureen McCann, and Tanja Cegnar.

Attending the AMS Annual Meeting in Seattle was an excellent chance to get in touch with many colleagues and to attend many very interesting sessions. Besides, I am an AMS member, and it was exciting to see how the AMS Annual Meeting is organized. It was also fascinating to see the meeting from the organizational point of view, not only the scientific.

Question: In an average year, what other scientific meetings (and in what countries) are typically on your agenda and why?

Cegnar: I mainly attend workshops and meetings of smaller expert groups and a few big conferences, among the most important of which is the EMS Annual Meeting. On average, two of the events take place outside of Europe. For the rest, my activities are restricted to Europe.

Question: At the AMS Annual Meeting, which sessions and events did you attend? Did you attend them as a presenter or as a spectator?

Cegnar: I had only the one presentation for the Town Hall. For the rest, I followed presentations that were at a very high scientific level. Among so many appealing options, I chose sessions related to service delivery to society and sessions on human biometeorology, including impacts of heat waves and impacts of climate on the spread of diseases. I also dedicated some time to sessions on climate variability and change.

Question: Did a particular session or event make a strong impression? If so, why?

Cegnar: On Sunday, I was impressed by WeatherFest—an outstanding outreach event, dedicated to those who have an interest in meteorology and would like to learn more. It was mainly organized for children, but believe me, I was not the only adult impressed by the number of booths and their means to explain what is going on in the atmosphere and what weather does. Outreach to children is very important. That’s how meteorologists can raise awareness and interest for meteorology among youngsters.

Another special event was the “17th Presidential Forum: Earth System Observations in Service to Society,” the plenary on Monday morning—not only because of the large audience but also because of the theme. Interaction between science and society was always one of my main interests. If we meteorologists and climatologists do not make the effort to interact with end users and recognize the needs of society for weather and climate services, we are not fulfilling our mission to serve society. During the rest of the conference, I attended several sessions elaborating on services to society.

Of course, I didn’t participate at the career fair, but I’m sure that young meteorologists really appreciated the opportunity to get in touch with potential employers.

I also need to mention one of the side panel events that took place during the lunch break on the last day of the conference: “Challenges, Opportunities, and Trends in Digital Weather Journalism.” The media landscape has changed significantly during the last decade, and the changes driven by rapid development of communication technologies will continue. Web platforms and social media have also impacted journalistic work: the number of journalists is being constantly reduced and, on the other side, the need for the immediate release of information is increasing. Is a number of “hits” and “likes” the measure of performance or is it still credibility and professional integrity?

A pleasant surprise was also the number of exhibitors. While we have only a few exhibitors at the EMS meetings, at AMS a huge hall was filled with a large number of exhibitors, and it was a pleasure to see the booths offering a variety of products and information.

Question: How did the choice of sessions and events compare to those at comparable European meetings?

Cegnar: The variety of sessions is much broader; the choice is so much greater compared to our EMS meetings. Within EMS, we are trying to compress the number of sessions. At AMS, the number of sessions and side events is huge, so everybody has the chance to attend very specialized sessions. I had to make tough choices because I have many interests.

Question: How did the size and demographics of the AMS Annual Meeting compare to those at comparable European meetings?

Cegnar: The scale is very different. At EMS Annual Meetings, the numbers are from 500 to 850. In Seattle, the number of participants was more than 4,600—almost tenfold the number of participants at the EMS meetings. Of these, there were 542 international participants, including 75 from China, which was the second highest non-U.S. total behind Canada with 88. The number of sessions and posters was impressive. I noticed that participants were there not only to present and learn but to meet with colleagues, to build networks, and to look for employment and project opportunities.


Among other events, I attended the “97th Annual Review, New Fellows, and Featured Awards.” It’s nice that this event is opened to all members. It was good to see the president and the president elect, to hear the reports of commissioners, and to see the awardees.

Question: What was your overall impression of the AMS Annual Meeting in terms of atmosphere and communication?

Cegnar: Although it was my first AMS meeting, I really felt like I was part of the event because of the overall atmosphere—congratulations to the organizers. As far as I’ve seen, the organization was running smoothly in spite of the record number of participants. Also, despite having two buildings and several floors with meeting rooms, it was easy to find the right room.

Question: The theme of the AMS Annual Meeting was “Observations Lead the Way.” How does this theme apply to your work?

Cegnar: Since I was a student, it was clear to me that meteorological science and services are based on observations. We cannot understand and model the



atmosphere without data from observations, including both in situ measurements and remote sensing. The huge improvement in numerical weather prediction in this century is not only due to increasingly capable computers and sophisticated codes of numerical models, but [also to more] data from satellites. Special measurement campaigns enabled meteorologists to understand the processes, to understand their connections and dependence on other factors, and to describe them with equations. We need observations not only to deliver better

weather forecasts but also to understand the climate system and its variability and change. Both weather and climate services are based on observations. Collected data in our archives represent valuable assets for our work at present and in the future. We are fascinated by the most modern computers and numerical models, but we shouldn't forget that their outputs are based on input data. Observations and collected data are indispensable and represent a fundamental part for not only operations and services, but also for research.