



JOSÉ GARCÍA LARUELO Y PATRICIA CUADRADO

Presidents of the Organizing Committee and Technical Committee of the SNE Virtual Meeting 2020

Text: MATILDE PELEGRÍ Photo & video: INFORMAGEN

The Annual Meeting of the Spanish Nuclear Society has a great tradition, not only in Spain, but in many countries where the nuclear industry is present, and it is recognized as a meeting point for companies and professionals.

As usual, at the closing of the 45th Annual Meeting, in Vigo, the Vice President of the SNE, Héctor Domínguez, announced the venue for the 46th: Granada. This was planned until Covid-19 changed all plans and forced rethinking a face-to-face convention to a virtual meeting.

José García Laruelo was at the head of the Organizing Committee that had to assume this important change, and Patricia Cuadrado led the Technical Committee.

We analyzed the most important aspects of the SNE Virtual Meeting 2020 with both of them.

FIRST IT WAS GRANADA

The 46th Annual Meeting should have been held in Granada. How much had the organization of the Annual Meeting initially envisioned advanced?

José García Laruelo. The organization of the SNE 46th Annual Meeting began in November 2019 and ended in April 2020, at which time the SNE Board of Directors decided to postpone the face-to-face event and start working on an online event. During those six months, progress in the different organizational activities was significant, mainly in all aspects related to institutional relations and the Granada Conference Center.

In this sense, I would like to take advantage of this interview to thank Endesa's General Manager for Andalusia and Extremadura for his support in obtaining a great institutional welcome in the city of Granada.

Has any agreement been reached with Granada? How have those responsible for the Convention Center and the authorities responded?

JGL. After decreeing the state of alarm in Spain due to the arrival of COVID-19, the Organizing Committee was forced to evaluate all possible alternatives for the face-to-face convention.

The first step was knowing the position of the Granada Conference & Exhibition Center regarding a possible postponement. In this sense, there was no problem in moving the date of the event to 2021. Regarding the local administration, the initial assistance and support shown by both the City Council and the Government Delegation of the Regional Government of Andalusia in Granada and by the University of Granada exceeded our expectations. We hope to continue counting on these institutions for the next convention in 2021.

“ The response of companies to the Virtual Meeting has been exemplary ”

What was the initial response of the companies in the sector?

JGL. Logically, one of the first actions taken by the SNE was to consult the opinion of the member, sponsoring, and exhibiting partner companies, who agreed to postpone the event until the degree of uncertainty was reduced.

Immediately it was proposed to analyze the possibility of offering an alternative event in order to fulfill the commitments of the SNE to its individual and collective partners, as well as to the professionals in the nuclear sector.

With all this input, the SNE Board of Directors made the decision to postpone the 46th Annual Meeting in Granada to the year 2021 and launch the new Virtual Meeting 2020.

THE TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

The confinement situation caused all conventions to be suspended, which forced the companies of this sector to seek suitable technological solutions for the new situation. What were the priorities set by the Organizing Committee for the Virtual Meeting?

JGL. Our first objective was to maintain the SNE's commitment to its members in terms of dissemination and as a meeting point for professionals in the sector. As a result, the second main objective was to create an event that maintained the content of the technical program, adapting it to the new normal. Finally, we had to be able to reduce the budget as much as possible, with the fundamental objective of minimizing the financial effort that companies would have to make to be present at the Virtual Meeting.

How was the change in format from the face-to-face to the virtual edition managed?

JGL. The experience acquired by the Annual Meeting over its 45 previous editions has made it possible to establish a stable and well-defined work methodology, which facilitates the work of the committees in terms of organization.

The change in format from a traditional convention to a virtual one, without any prior experience, was like looking off a cliff. To do this, and starting with a blank slate, we redefined each of the strands that make up the event, breaking the work methodology towards an agile model, prioritizing speed and flexibility to adapt to changing boundary conditions.

From my point of view, I believe that the experience gained and the organizational and work model developed this year can bring a lot of added value to future editions of the Annual Meeting.

And from a technical point of view?

JGL. The key has been the creation of a new website, which would integrate all the requirements of the Annual Meeting, but adapted to the Virtual format, and to which we have integrated a new streaming tool.



PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

José García Laruelo is an Industrial Engineer from the Gijón Polytechnic School, specializing in Mechanics, having completed a master's degree in Nuclear Science and Technology from the Polytechnic University of Madrid.

In 2018, he joined Endesa's General Directorate for Nuclear Energy as Head of Nuclear Fuel.

His previous experience was developed at Idom, in the field of life management for the CNAT and ANAV nuclear power plants, as well as at ENUSA, first in the spent fuel area and later in the management of business and commercial development.

José was president of the Nuclear Young People Commission, from the SNE, between 2017 and 2018.

“To change the format from a traditional convention to a virtual one, we redefined each of the strands that make up the event, prioritizing speed and flexibility to adapt to changing boundary conditions”

Our venue has been the website, and there have been more than 400 participants attending the different events scheduled, constantly entering and leaving, without any technical issues.

Without a doubt, the result has been very satisfactory.

What has been the response of the companies in the sector to this new approach?

JGL. The response of companies to the Virtual Meeting was very positive, I would even say exemplary. From the creation of the idea for a virtual event to its achievement, we have always felt their support. This point is very important for the organization, even more so considering the difficult times that all companies have gone through throughout this year which, despite the uncertainties of the market in general, have maintained their support for the convention.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a virtual format versus a face-to-face format?

JGL. For this point, I would like to differentiate between the technical program and the social program. Although the technical program clearly benefits from the use of streaming technologies, the social program and networking are at a disadvantage.

Patricia Cuadrado. Indeed, from the perspective of the Technical Committee, the use of the streaming format has allowed us to have foreign speakers of the highest level, and even representatives from different continents in the same session. In the case of General Session 2 on COVID-19, it allowed us to address the issue taking into account the experiences of different countries such as the United States, China, France, and Spain. Likewise, this format allows the attendance of foreign or national attendees residing in other countries, a fact that has been verified through the metrics obtained.

Another important aspect is that it is possible to have all the content for later, which allows congressmen to view all sessions at another time. This provides great added value.

JGL. As I mentioned earlier, one of the main attractions of the SNE convention is social contact, the space where professionals meet at least once a year with colleagues and friends in a relaxed atmosphere. Although the Organizing Committee has always had the possibility of holding a small face-to-face event, this event was canceled in accordance with the recommendations of the health authorities.

The initiative that we launched to promote networking was the creation of the attendee area on the Virtual Meeting web-



PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Patricia Cuadrado has a degree in Chemistry from the Autonomous University of Madrid, specializing in Analytical Chemistry.

She has more than twenty years of experience in the energy industry. She is the Commercial Director for the Nuclear Area of Advanced Projects and R&D at Empresarios Agrupados. Since 2013, she has been part of the Technical Committee of the SNE Annual Meeting, first as a member, and since 2018, as President.

Patricia is an active member of WiN Spain and has been a member of the Board of Directors since 2017. She was President of the Technical Committee of the WiN Global World Congress, held in Madrid in 2019. She has been the general secretary of WiN Spain since December 2019.

site where the list of all those registered for the event was available, with tools that allowed them to establish contact with each other. This was something new that we consider as a positive, and we hope that it can be maintained in future editions.

TECHNICAL CONTENT

The technical program is the basis of any convention, and especially for Annual Meetings. How was the program planned in this new setting?

PC. This year, with the virtual format, we decided to keep the technical sessions and the poster session in their basic aspects, taking into account that the great novelty was the live transmission of all the presentations. In addition, we incorporated interviews from various locations, such as the Zorita Nuclear Power Plant in the Decommissioning session and the ENSA factory in the Fusion session.

How was the participation of the attendees who presented papers coordinated, and how was the proper display of all the presentations guaranteed?

PC. There was very good coordination with all the speakers since they were very used to virtual platforms due to the situation we are experiencing. In addition, connection tests were carried out prior to the Virtual Meeting with each of them to make sure that everything was working correctly. And for the special sessions (general sessions, single subject sessions, and workshops) a streaming platform was used. I want to emphasize that the role of the Coordinators of the Technical Committee and the collaboration of the speakers were fundamental.

What role has the Virtual Meeting Technical Committee had for this convention?

PC. The Technical Committee has played an essential role this year. In addition to the functions that the Coordinators of each session were already performing, classifying the presentations and coordinating each session, other responsibilities that the Presidents and Table Coordinators had in previous years have been added. They also moderated all sessions except the General Sessions, and all this in a new format for everyone and that, thanks to the great team we have, has been a success.

I want to thank the entire Technical Committee team and the Organizing Committee for their good work. It has been very easy for me to lead such a proactive and professional team.

“The streaming format has allowed us to have foreign speakers from different continents and of a very high level in the same session”

DATA

- 200 presentations distributed in 36 technical sessions classified in 16 subject areas, plus 1 poster session.
- 2 general sessions, 2 single subject sessions, and 1 workshop.
- Total number of registered attendees: 480.
- Average attendance at technical sessions: 32 attendees.
- Attendance at general sessions: 278.
- Maximum attendance in one session: 284 in the outreach workshop.

Looking at the technical field specifically, what are the subject areas that have had the most interest from the attendees?

PC. For the technical sessions, the Training session, where training tools related to Virtual Reality were presented, was of great interest. Also, the sessions for Engineering and Innovation, Operations, Decommissioning, Nuclear Safety, and Thermohydraulics and Neutronics were well attended.

In general, attendance for all the sessions was very high compared to other years, since it was possible to attend different sessions that were being carried out in parallel. An average attendance of 32 per session and about 200 attendees in special sessions.



“The attendance of all sessions has been very high compared to other years”

On the other hand, every year we try to innovate and offer attendees new formats, topics of interest, and top-level speakers. This year, for example, the Nuclear Power Outreach Workshop generated a lot of interest.

COMPANY PARTICIPATION

The support of companies in the sector is key. What sponsorship options have companies had for this Virtual Meeting?

JGL. The sponsorship model defined for the Virtual Meeting 2020 had to be adapted to the event since most of the activities sponsored with the face-to-face format were no longer available in the virtual format. Likewise, and in accordance with the situation in which we found ourselves, the SNE decided to strongly reduce the economic amounts, showing solidarity with the companies during this difficult period, thus facilitating their participation in the event.

For this, two ways of collaborating were created: the first consisted of sponsoring the event in general, and the second in sponsoring some of the individual activities listed by the Organizing Committee. This list included the sponsorship of the main activities for the technical program, as well as the networking tools, or the safety minute. Additionally, this year, the so-called business round tables were held for the first time, which were also sponsored, and which have been very well received and have produced good results.

We believe that the sponsorship of the activities related to the technical program has had great visibility, not only

during the days of the convention, but also during the delayed viewing period, and it may be advisable to keep it for future editions.

And the exhibitors? What innovations have been offered to companies to optimize their presence at the commercial exhibition?

JGL. From the Organizing Committee, we considered the possibility of moving the commercial exhibition to the virtual format. This point has been, without a doubt, the greatest challenge faced during the organization of the event.

Although we knew beforehand that the social component cannot be transferred to an online event, at no time did we want to abandon the possibility of networking through our website. For this, we created the virtual exhibition and a series of networking tools in order to facilitate communication between companies and attendees, as well as between attendees themselves.

Without a doubt, this point has been one of the most complicated and stressful, but the participation of companies has exceeded all our expectations. For all this, I would like to thank the support received from the sponsoring and exhibiting companies at the 2020 Virtual Meeting.

THE VIRTUAL MEETING AND SOCIETY

The participation of Nuclear Young People and WiN in the annual meetings allows the SNE to reach out to society. What have been the activities for these organizations in the Virtual Meeting framework?

JGL. In addition to the activities included within the technical program, the WiN and Nuclear Young People commissions have organized two activities oriented to society in general, fulfilling the SNE's objective of disseminating nuclear energy and its applications.

WiN conducted a very interesting session entitled Application of Radiation in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage, which featured two experts in the conservation of Spanish cultural heritage.

For its part, Nuclear Young People held a session titled Back to the Future (of the Nuclear Industry), where several Nuclear Young People members discussed the fundamental advances in the nuclear industry in the next ten years.

COMMITTEES

Leading the organization of an Annual Meeting is a challenge and doing so when you have had to manage the transformation to a Virtual Meeting is even more challenging. How has the work of the Organizing and Technical committees developed?

JGL. As I mentioned before, an agile work model was established, which was characterized by coordination and decision-making in short periods of time, seeking constant adaptation to changing conditions. For this, good



“The heads of companies must be aware of the great work that the members of the Technical Committee have developed, especially this year”

coordination and communication between the different working groups are essential.

At this point, I would like to thank the Technical Committee and, in particular, its president, Patricia Cuadrado, for the great work done. Not only have they known how to adapt to changes, but they have considerably increased their responsibilities. The effort carried out by the entire team has been key to the success of the technical program.

PC. For my part, I would like to convey to the heads of the companies the great work involved in actively participating in the committees, and especially this year, the role that the members of the Technical Committee have played. Executives are often not aware of this large volume of work, and just as the financial support of companies is necessary, it is essential to also recognize the work of the professionals who participate in the committees and who, therefore, make the meeting a success.

How has the relationship with the Board of Directors been?

JGL. The relationship with the Board of Directors has been excellent and we are very grateful in this regard. The Organizing and Technical Committees asked the Board of Directors to hold weekly meetings in order to speed up decisions since the time we had to organize the virtual meeting was minimal.

PC. With this idea in mind, a working group made up of the Permanent Commission and several members of the Board of Directors, presidents of other commissions, José, and me was set up to discuss issues and make decisions with greater agility, and that has helped us a lot in the organization of the Virtual Meeting.

LESSONS LEARNED

Every year, a survey is conducted among attendees. What are the most significant results of this meeting, so different from the previous ones but with the same spirit?

JGL. Some of the results will be included in the issue dedicated to the Virtual Meeting, but I think the most significant refer to the good evaluation of the technical program, the business round tables, and the website.

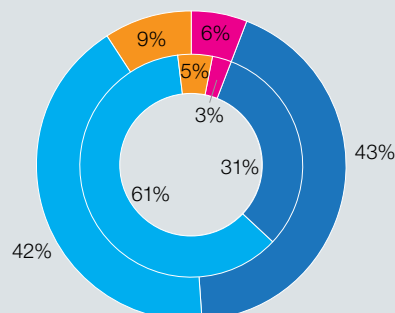
PC. It is important to note that the overall assessment of the technical program has clearly improved compared to previous editions. It has been the first year of this virtual format. We have learned a lot, and we also know what aspects need to be improved, but clearly, the technical program has been very satisfactory, and this has been reflected in the survey.

SATISFACTION SURVEY

Outer Ring: Virtual Meeting 2020 Inner Ring: 45th Annual Meeting

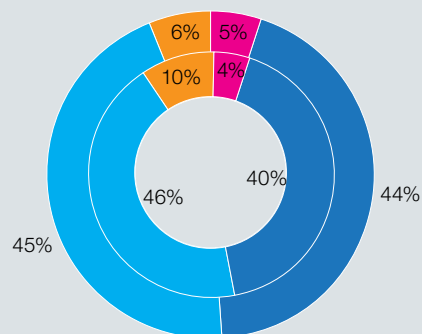
Overall evaluation of the Technical Program

■ Very well ■ Well ■ Regular ■ DK/DA



Overall evaluation of the Website

■ Very well ■ Well ■ Regular ■ DK/DA



What are the lessons learned that you consider most important to pass on to the next Committee?

JGL. Although the organization of the virtual event has been complicated and tedious, the experience of holding the event online opens the doors to new possibilities that can greatly enrich future face-to-face meetings and other SNE activities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Both José García Laruelo and Patricia Cuadrado insist on sending a final message of thanks.

JGL/PC. We would like to thank the Board of Directors for their ongoing support. Likewise, we want to recognize all those people who have contributed their work and effort, which has allowed for the success of the 2020 Virtual Meeting, such as the members of the technical and organizing committees, the people who make up the SNE secretariat and collaborators, the Communication, Nuclear Young People, and WiN commissions, and the professionals from Grupo Senda.

And, of course, thanks to all the attendees, speakers, and sponsoring companies who have made the good result of this Virtual Meeting possible.

Thank you all very much for joining us on this exciting journey.■