



International Symposium - Active Living and Environment: Towards a healthier and more sustainable future

Jillian FRATER

*Lecturer in Professional Planning Practice, Department of Environmental Management,
Lincoln University, New Zealand*

In August 2017, the University of Otago, Dunedin, hosted the inaugural International Symposium on Active Living and Environment (ALE). The symposium was designed to facilitate and grow an international multidisciplinary and multi-sector dialogue related to active living and environment. The themes of the symposium included health, transportation, environment and sustainability. The symposium was attended by approximately 80 people and brought together international and national experts from multiple sectors including academic, government, public health, urban design, transportation and the environment. International attendees came from Spain, Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. In particular, there was a strong contingent from Spain as Sandra Mandic, the Chair of the ALE, has collaborated on several academic papers with academics from the University of Zaragoza and the University of Granada.

For me, the conference was an opportunity to reconnect, and connect in person, with academics I had collaborated with in writing two papers on adolescent cycling practises. These collaborations grew from the Built Environment and Active Transport to School Study (BEATS). This study investigated habits associated with transport to school, the neighbourhood environment and physical activity of Dunedin high school students <http://www.otago.ac.nz/beats/index.html>.

The three key note presentations that resonated most with me were those by

Andrew Jackson (Ministry of Transport), Anna Stevenson (Canterbury District Health Board) and Alex McMillan (University of Otago). Andrew discussed the future of transport in New Zealand including smart cities, autonomous vehicles, and the concept of mobility as a service (Maas). He explained that cost, comfort and convenience were the three factors that people would base their transport decisions on. Anna described how the health sector did well with chronic diseases but not so well with lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and recommended the health budget for this area of health be increased. Alex criticised neo-liberal approaches that equate economic growth with well-being and suggested this approach needs to be reconsidered by Government.

Together with James Young from the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy, I presented a session on travel demand management and changing the travel behaviour of commuters returning to work in central Christchurch. This work was part of the Greater Christchurch Healthy Commuter programme and has involved presentations and one-on-one discussions with approximately 700 people working for organisations about to relocate to the central city following the earthquakes of 2010 and 2011. The intention of this programme was to encourage people to move away from single occupancy car trips and towards trips by foot, cycle, carpooling and public transport.

I appreciated the range of experts who came together for this symposium. In

particular, I consider the inclusion and discussion between those interested in public health, government and transportation was

very beneficial and I look forward to future opportunities where these sectors can come together.



Photo: Enrique Garcia Bengoechea, Jennifer Roberts, Daniel Camiletti Moiron, Ricardo Oliveira, Eduardo Generelo Lanaspa (seated), Alberto Aibar Solana, Palma Chillan, Sandra Mandic