



New Zealand Planning Institute Conference, 24 – 26 March 2021

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As the recipient of the 2021 Papa Pounamu Whakatutukitanga Scholarship, I was invited to attend the annual New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) conference in Nelson, lasting 3 days. The theme of the conference was *Values, Voices, Visions*. The conference focused on the diversity of voices and values within our communities, and future visions in planning for the world's current challenges, like COVID-19 and climate change. This year it was a "hybrid conference," accessible to both in-person and on-line attendees who were unable to make it due to COVID-19 restrictions. This also meant people from all over the world could present their work and knowledge which took the conference beyond the New Zealand (NZ) context.

As a third-year planning student from Lincoln University who had never attended a conference, I had no idea what to expect. I was slightly nervous, but very excited. I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of how my planning career could evolve, and to improve my awareness of the types of subjects' planners are currently focused on.

While there, I was able to enjoy many thought-provoking sessions on a wide range of topics. The overall sub-themes were climate change, placemaking & identity, local & national vision, and Mātauranga Māori. Under these sub-themes, keynote speakers presented ideas around smart cities, resilience, risk reduction, transport, regeneration, treaty-based governance, and urban design.

One presentation that stood out for me was by Nicki Williams, a landscape architect at the Christchurch City Council. She advocated for gender-sensitivity to be incorporated into the planning of future spaces, as different genders have different needs within a city. She used the example of a children's playground where girls tended to be less interested in skateparks, soccer fields, and bike tracks than boys; The addition of activities that are more attractive to girls, like fun hangout zones for them and their friends, could help attract more girls back to the playground, especially older ones. She discussed how beneficial it would be to apply a gender lens to our policies and plans. Vienna, Austria has already done this, and all genders of all ages are reaping the benefits.

Nicki Williams also discussed current initiatives that are starting to merge gender-sensitivity and planning together. For example, the "Free to Be" initiative in Australia. This initiative is a crowd mapping tool targeted at women, it allows them to map where they feel safe and unsafe within a city and explain why. This is so people, like planners, can have better insight into where more gender-sensitive design is needed around a city. After this presentation I talked to multiple planners who said they hadn't really thought about this aspect of planning before, which I found very interesting. Personally, my Lincoln University courses had already exposed me to this connection between gender and place, but I found it very beneficial to dig into this idea more and see real life examples of it.

The reform of the Resource Management Act 1991 was also discussed briefly by Hon. David Parker. He talked about how the three new acts will have a stronger inclusion of mātauranga Māori, how joint committees will be created consisting of central, regional, local government and mana whenua to create district plans, and how these plans will reduce down to 14 across NZ. This discussion provoked mixed reactions from planners attending the conference.

Overall, I entered the NZPI conference not knowing a single person, with no expectations, and left with a greater appreciation for what planners do, some new knowledge under my belt, and excited for what lies ahead.



Figure 1. Emerging Planners Conference social event in Nelson, 2021



Figure 2. Acceptance speech for the Papa Pounamu Whakatutukitanga Scholarship 2021

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