



Young Planners Congress 2011 Report

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In 2011, I attended the annual Young Planners (YP) Congress, held in Wellington. This is an annual one-day event, held specifically for young planners (less than 5 years experience) and planning students.

This year's event kicked off with a Welcome function the evening before, which enabled the young planners to get to know each other in a very relaxed setting before the following day. This event was well attended and all of the Young Planners reps from around the country did a great job at running some icebreaker games to get us all talking. Big thanks to Simpson Grierson for sponsoring this event.

This year's Young Planners' Congress was held at the Mac's Brew bar on the Wellington waterfront on Tuesday 29th of March, the day before the main New Zealand Planners Institute (NZPI) conference, Winds of Change.

The day kicked off with Porirua Mayor, Nick Leggett addressing the group about planning issues in Porirua as well as his success in becoming one of the youngest Mayors in New Zealand. He also highlighted the importance of community representation.

Following Nick and morning tea, we heard from Steven Dale, who spoke about insurgent ideas and disruptive technologies. An inspiring example that Steven used was the development of "Growing Power". This organisation was started by a retired basketball player by the name of Will Allen, who purchased land on the outskirts of Milwaukee, with the intention of changing the landscape and creating a new source of food for his family. Growing Power has expanded into a teaching facility as well as helping to provide food security for the local community. Will Allen was named one of the 2010 Time Magazines' 100 heroes for his work and particularly his development of urban farming with its positive impact on communities. Steven concluded by reminding us that there are risks with new ideas but sometimes they are worth the risk to develop them.

Sir Robert Jones was the next speaker to address the Young Planners' Congress. Sir Robert provided an incredibly refreshing talk, starting with how he managed to make his way in the world. In relation to planning matters, Sir Robert shared his thoughts on the development of cities over time and how they should be changed to allow compactness and access. He also reminded us that cities should be fun, social hubs where people want to live rather than places where people run away from because they are so unbearable.

Urban Designer James Lunday was next to give his presentation in the tough spot directly before lunch. I have to admit, for me, James was one of the most enjoyable speakers of the

day. James spoke about his background and experience as an urban designer, voiced his concern and confusion about some urban environments that have won awards and encouraged us to be planning for the future. This means planning for (a) urban areas that have a minimal focus on private automotive transport, (b) high density areas particularly in cities and (c) urban environments that are walk able and encourage interaction between people and the environment, which in turn can help to create wealth and character.

Lunch was the next important event in the schedule and an all-important break. We were lucky enough to be able to sit outside on a nice sunny, windless Wellington afternoon.

Following lunch, we heard from an incredibly energetic Dr. Viv Heslop, who encouraged us to be positive deviants by executing small actions that don't need permission. She also encouraged us not to dismiss a method just because it didn't work the first time but rather we should ask why the idea didn't work and then how it can be changed so that it can work next time. She also provided the audience with some good tips, such as picking your battles, gaining an understanding of your colleagues and most importantly, having an underlying belief from which you don't waiver even when things aren't going so well. Viv was another favourite speaker for me.

The next topic we heard about was sustainable neighbourhoods, urban design and green buildings, presented by Paul Turner. Paul spoke about what makes a good neighbourhood and how much easier it is to determine 'good neighbourhood' when you have something to measure it against. Paul also spoke about the components to consider when creating a good neighbourhood. These components included things such as land use, transport, buildings and environmental conservation.

After a quick break and a walk around, we heard from Steve Preston who addressed the young planners on effective communication. Dr. Caroline Miller then concluded the day by speaking about the importance of professionalism, ethics and membership options with the New Zealand Planning Institute. The young planner congress attendees then joined in with the main conference welcome function at the Wharewaka.

Overall, the 2011 Young Planners' Congress was an incredibly successful event. The calibre of speakers was outstanding and I know this event was highly enjoyed by all that attended. There were also many comments from planners at the main NZPI annual conference about the quality of the speakers at the Young Planners' Congress and how much they had wanted to be able to attend. There has been some great feedback provided to the young planner reps and this feedback will go towards helping to make future events even better.

I would like to extend huge congratulations to Steph Blick and her amazing team for the organisation of such a fabulous event. I know you all worked incredibly hard to provide the young planners with an exceptional event. Also, huge thanks are owed to Clare Piper, national Young Planners' Group rep, for being a constant source of energy and inspiration.

And to end, I would again like to thank my local NZPI Branch-Canterbury Westland. Without their exceptionally generous support, I would not have been able to attend this event.