Mayoral Speech
Mayors’ Forum, 12th Annual Meeting of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network
Wednesday, 12 June 2019

Mayoral address on the question of: “How do you address inclusiveness and youth participation? What city-level mechanisms are in place to respond to increased community engagement?”

I’ll take the second question first.

Dunedin has several mechanisms in place:

- We have established a Youth Council to act as a bridge between the city council and young people.

- Last month we launched a youth vision for the city: “In Dunedin, young people are valued, accepted and empowered to lead fulfilled lives, and their wellbeing is nurtured”. The vision is about realising an optimal future for our young people. Many government agencies, local organisations and businesses have become signatories to the vision.

From a UNESCO Creative City of Literature perspective, just a few of many initiatives to increase engagement and participation with young people include:

- Dunedin UNESCO City of Literature invites each Dunedin secondary school to send a City of Literature Ambassador with an equal voice to the City of Literature Collaboration Group meetings.

- The City of Literature’s Little Landers Literature programme has rugby players from the well-known Highlanders team visit Dunedin’s lowest decile primary schools to encourage a love of reading. This contributes to improved life outcomes for the kids because the players are great role models.

- Dunedin City of Literature works closely with community radio station OAR FM on a shared vision to foster inclusion and diversity.

Many of those initiatives address and promote Sustainable Development Goal 11 – Making cities safe, resilient and sustainable.

But not many of these initiatives address Sustainable Development Goal 13 – Combating climate change through resilience, raising awareness and climate change planning and management.

However, it is climate change effects on their future that young people are most vocal, worried and critical about. Of all the Sustainable Development Goals, 13 is arguably the one that will most affect the others. Climate change will potentially make all the others so much worse.
Young people have realised that. Climate change is an existential threat to humankind.

Now Dunedin City Council has a pretty good track record on climate change. Our council has already opposed new off-shore oil and gas exploration. We have divested of fossil fuel exploration investments and I was the first mayor in New Zealand to sign our Climate Change Declaration about mitigation efforts.

But our young people are not happy with all that. It’s not enough.

For example, just recently our city had massive demonstrations protesting at the presence of the coal industry at a conference promoting increased production potential.

Almost all of the protesters were young, although a surprising number were elderly. They were not only upset that the coal industry were there and promoting expansion. They were also upset that I, as mayor, was giving the conference a welcome. Now that’s despite the fact I had previously said that during my welcome I would make our city’s climate change policies very clear to the conference.

So our young people – and I suspect young people all over the world – clearly want more than words and pious intentions. They want action. They know that the current mantra of putting economic growth – of any kind – is the supreme value pursued by governments and cities, is not sustainable.

Of course, our communities, our cities, need to keep developing, but the philosophy of growth for its own sake – especially based on fossil fuel energy, is the philosophy of global cancer. And it will kill us. It is unfettered growth and consequent resource depletion that is driving climate change.

Climate change is THE existential problem facing humanity, and it will obviously affect young people far more than the older people currently making the decisions. So, our creative city efforts can not only focus on increasing economic growth.

The challenge in the Creative City context is: how do we better enable meaningful climate change initiatives – focusing on the needs and concerns of young people – through our city’s creative sector?

And although Dunedin is a City of Literature, that effort cannot be confined to literature. It must encompass all our creative streams.

I suggest it is a challenge that ALL creative cities in all the themes must meet. Actively and urgently.

**Dave Cull**  
**Mayor of Dunedin**