Sister Cities: looking to the future

Stephen Yarwood will explore how experiencing other places can help us see our own communities differently.

Drawing on extensive travels across New Zealand and around the world, Stephen will reflect on his passion for cities and the time he has spent walking and observing them, including Christchurch. He will discuss how cities reveal themselves through their streets, public spaces, people and culture.

Careful observation helps us understand the patterns beneath a place: how people move, where they gather, what they value and how local culture shapes community life. Experiencing other places allows us to recognise new possibilities, but the purpose is not to copy what another city has done. The most successful ideas must be understood, translated and adapted to suit each local community.

Stephen will then turn to the rapidly accelerating evolution of society, technology and artificial intelligence. He will consider how the next five to ten years could transform global connectivity and how cities communicate, translate, exchange knowledge, identify shared opportunities and build international relationships.

As technology makes connection easier, human relationships will become more important, not less. Machines can introduce us, translate for us and help us find common interests. They cannot care, earn trust, understand cultural nuance or sustain friendships across generations.

Stephen will conclude by considering what this means for the future of sister cities. Their value will continue to come from people meeting strangers, experiencing different cultures, sharing ideas and making the effort to understand one another. Technology will expand our ability to connect. Our ethics, values and humanity will determine what we do with those connections.