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Reappraising the role of suburban workplaces in Darwin's creative economy

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Abstract
Traditionally, suburbs have been conceived as dormitory – in binary opposition to the inner-city (Powell). Supporting this stereotypical view have been gendered binaries between inner and outer city areas; densely populated vs. sprawl; gentrified terraces and apartment culture vs. new estates and first home buyers; zones of (male) production and creativity against (female) sedate, consumer territory. These binaries have for over a decade been thoroughly criticised by urban researchers, who have traced such representations and demonstrated how they are discriminatory and incorrect (see Powell; Mee; Dowling and Mee). And yet, such binaries persist in popular media commentaries and even in academic research (Gibson and Brennan-Horley). In creative city research, inner-city areas have been bestowed with the supposed correct mix of conditions that may lead to successful creative ventures. In part, this discursive positioning has been borne out of prior attempts to mapthe location of creativity in the city

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Introduction

Traditionally, suburbs have been conceived as dormitory – in binary opposition to the inner-city (Powell). Supporting this stereotypical view have been gendered binaries between inner and outer city areas; densely populated vs. sprawl; gentrified terraces and apartment culture vs. new estates and first home buyers; zones of (male) production and creativity against (female) sedate, consumer territory. These binaries have for over a decade been thoroughly criticised by urban researchers, who have traced such representations and demonstrated how they are discriminatory and incorrect (see Powell; Mee; Dowling and Mee). And yet, such binaries persist in popular media commentaries and even in academic research (Gibson and Brennan-Horley). In creative city research, inner-city areas have been bestowed with the supposed correct mix of conditions that may lead to successful creative ventures. In part, this discursive positioning has been borne out of prior attempts to mapthe location of creativity in the city.

Existing research on the geography of creativity in the city have relied on proxy data forms: mapping data on firms and/or employment in the creative industry sectors (e.g. Gibson, Murphy and Freestone; Markusen *et al.*; Watson). In doing so, the focus has rested on "winners" – i.e. headquarters of major arts and cultural institutions located in inner city/CBD locations, or by looking for concentrations of registered creative businesses. Such previous studies are useful because they give some indication of the geographical spread and significance of creative activities in cities, and help answer questions about the locational preferences of creative industries, including their gravitational pull towards each other in an agglomerative sense (Scott). However, such studies rely on (usually) one proxy data source to reveal the presence of creative activities, rather than detail how creativity is itself apparent in everyday working lives, or embedded in the spaces, networks and activities of the city. The latter, more qualitative aspects of the lived experience of creativity can only at best be inferred from proxy data such as employment numbers and firm location.

In contrast, other researchers have promoted ethnographic methods (Drake; Shorthose; Felton, Collis and Graham) including interviewing, snowballing through contacts and participant observation, as means to get 'inside' creative industries and to better understand their embeddedness in place and networks of social relations. Such methods provide rich explanation of the internal dynamics and social logics of creative production, but having stemmed from text-based recorded interviews, they produce data without geographical co-ordinates necessary to be mapped in the manner of employment or business location data – and thus remain comparatively "aspatial", with no georeferenced component. Furthermore, in such studies relational interactions with material spaces of home, work and city are at best conveyed in text form only – from recorded interviews – and thus cannot be aggregated easily as a mapped representation of city life. This analysis takes a different tack, by mapping responses from interviews, which were then analysed using methods more common in mapping and analysing proxy data sources. By taking a qualitative route toward data collection, this paper illustrates how suburbs can actually play a major role in creative city economies, expanding understandings of what constitutes a creative workplace and examining the resulting spatial distributions according to their function.

Darwin and the Creative Tropical City Project

This article draws on fieldwork carried out in Darwin, NT a small but important city in Australia's tropical north. It is the government and administration capital of the sparsely populated Northern Territory and continues to grapple with its colonial past, a challenging climate, small population base and remoteness from southern centres. The city's development pattern is relatively new, even in Australian terms, only dating back to the late 1970s. After wholesale destruction by Cyclone Tracy, Darwin was rebuilt displaying the hallmarks of post-1970 planning schemes: wide ring-roads and cul-de-sacs define its layout, its urban form dominated by stout single-story suburban dwellings built to withstand cyclonic activity. More recently, Darwin has experienced growth in residential tower block apartments, catering to the city's high degree of fly-in, fly-out labour market of mining, military and public service workers. These high rise developments have been focussed unsurprisingly on coastal suburbs with ample sections of foreshore. Further adding to its peculiar layout, the geographic centre is occupied by Darwin Airport (a chief military base for Australia's northern frontier) splitting the northern suburbs from those closer to its small CBD, itself jutting to the south on a peninsula.

Lacking then in Darwin are those attributes so often heralded as the harbingers of a city's creative success – density, walkability, tracts of ex-industrial brownfields sites ripe for reinvention as creative precincts. Darwin is a city dominated by its harsh tropical climate, decentralised and overtly dependant on private car transport. But, if one cares to look beyond the surface, Darwin is also a city punching above its weight on account of the unique possibilities enabled by transnational Asian proximity and its unique role as an outlet for indigenous creative work from across the top of the continent (Luckman, Gibson and Lea).

Against this backdrop, Creative Tropical City: Mapping Darwin's Creative Industries (CTC), a federally funded ARC project from 2006 to 2009, was envisaged to provide the evidential base needed to posit future directions for Darwin's creative industries. City and Territory leaders had by 2004 become enchanted by the idea of 'the creative city' (Landry) – but it is questionable how well

these policy discourses travel when applied to disparate examples such as Darwin (Luckman, Gibson and Lea). To provide an empirical grounding to creative city ideas and to ensure against policy fetishism the project was developed to map the nature, extent and change over time of Darwin's creative industries and imagine alternate futures for the city based on a critical appraisal of the applicability of national and international creative industry policy frameworks to this remote, tropical location (Lea *et al*.).

Toward a Typology of Darwin's Creative Workplaces

This article takes one data set gathered during the course of the CTC project, based around a participatory mapping exercise, where interviewees responded to questions about where creative industry activities took place in Darwin by drawing on paper maps. Known as mental maps, these were used to gather individual representations of place (Tuan), but in order to extend their applicability for spatial querying, responses were transferred to a Geographic Information System (GIS) for storage, collation and analysis (Matei *et al*.). During semi-structured interviews with 98 Darwin-based creative industry practitioners, participants were provided with a base map of Darwin displaying Statistical Local Area (SLA) boundaries and roads for mark up in response to specific questions about where creative activities occurred (for more in depth discussion of this method and its varied outputs, refer to Brennan-Horley and Gibson). The analysis discussed here only examines answers to one question: "Where do you work?" This question elicited a total of 473 work locations from 98 respondents – a fourfold increase over statistics gleaned from employment measures alone (Brennan-Horley). Such an increase resulted from participants identifying their everyday work practices which, by necessity, took place across multiple locations.

When transferring the spatial location of workplaces into the GIS, each site was coded depending on whether it was cited by the interviewee as their "major" or primary place of work, or if the place being discussed played a secondary or "minor" role in their creative practice. For example, an artist's studio was categorised as major, but other minor sites also featured in their mental maps, for example, galleries, supply locations and teaching sites.

Each worksite was then assigned to one of four categories: Front, Back, Networking and Supply (Table 1). In a similar fashion to McCannell's work on the "front and back regions" of tourist towns (597), the creative industries, predicated on the production and exchange of texts, objects and ideas also display front spaces of sorts – sites that facilitate interactions between practitioner and audiences, spaces for performance and consumption. Operating behind these front spaces, are sites where creative endeavours take place – perhaps not as so readily seen or engaged with by wider publics. For example, a rehearsal room, artist's studio or a theatre company's office may not be key sites of interaction between creator and audience but remain nonetheless important sites of creative work.

However, a binary of Front versus Back could not encapsulate the variety of other everyday, prosaic work sites evident in the data. Participants indicated on their maps visits to the post office to send artworks, going to Bunnings to buy paint (and inadvertently networking with others), through to more fleeting spaces such as artist materials fossicked from parklands to photoshoot locations. These supply sites (each themselves positioned along a continuum of "creative" to "mundane") were typified as supply locations: sites that act as places to gather inputs into the creative process. Finally, sites where meetings and networking took place (more often than not, these were indicated by participants as occurring away from their major work place) were assigned under a heading of networking spaces.

Table 1: A typology of creative workplaces

Space	Definition	Coded examples
Front	A space for consumption/exchange of creative goods, outputs or expertise.	Performance space, Market, Gallery, Client Location, Shopfront, Cinema, Exhibition space, Museum, Festival space
Back	A site of production, practice or business management	Office, Studio, Rehearsal Space, Teaching Space, Factory, Recording Studio
Networking	A space to meet clients or others involved in creative industries	Meeting places
Supply	Spaces where supplies for creative work are sourced	Supplier, Photoshoot Location, Story Location, Shoot Location, Storage

Coding data into discrete units and formulating a typology is a reductive process, thus a number of caveats apply to this analysis. First there were numerous cases where worksites fell across multiple categories. This was particularly the case with practitioners from the music and performing arts sector whose works are created and consumed at the same location, or a clothing designer whose studio is also their shopfront. To avoid double counting, these cases were assigned to one category only, usually split in favour of the site's main function (i.e. performance sites to Front spaces). During interviews, participants were asked to locate parts of Darwin they went to for work, rather than detail the exact role or name for each of those spaces. While most participants were forthcoming and descriptive in their responses, in two percent of cases (n=11) the role of that particular space was undefined. These spaces were placed into the "back" category. Additionally, the data was coded to refer to individual location instances aggregated to the SLA level, and does not take into account the role of specific facilities within suburbs, even though certain spaces were referred to regularly in the transcripts. It was often the case that a front space for one creative industry practitioner was a key production site for another, or operated simultaneously as a networking site for both. Future disaggregated analyses will tease out the important roles that individual venues play in Darwin's creative economy, but are beyond this article's scope.

Finally, this analysis is only a snapshot in time, and captures some of the ephemeral and seasonal aspects of creative workplaces in Darwin that occurred around the time of interviewing. To illustrate, there are instances of photographers indicating photo shoot locations, sites that may only be used once, or may be returned to on multiple occasions. As such, if this exercise were to be carried out at another time, a different geography may result.

Results

A cross-tabulation of the workplace typology against major and minor locations is given in Table 2.

Only 20 per cent of worksites were designated as major worksites with the remaining 80 per cent falling into the minor category. There was a noticeable split between Back and Front spaces and their Major/Minor designation. 77 per cent of back spaces were major locations, while the majority of Front spaces (92 per cent) fell into the minor category. The four most frequently occurring Minor Front spaces – client location, performance space, markets and gallery – collectively comprise one third of all workplaces for participants, pointing to their important role as interfacing spaces between creative output produced or worked on elsewhere, and wider publics/audiences. Understandably, all supply sites and networking places were categorised as minor, with each making up approximately 20 per cent of all workplaces.

Table 2: creative workplaces cross tabulated against primary and secondary workplaces and divided by creative workplace typology.

	Major	Minor	Grand Total
Back			
Office	44	1	45
Studio	22	-	22
Rehearsal Space	7	11	18
Undefined	-	11	11
Teaching Space	3	1	4
Factory	1	-	1
Recording Studio	1	-	1
Leanyer Swamp	1	-	1
Back space total	79	24	103
Front			
Client Location	-	70	70
Performance Space	2	67	69
Market	1	11	12
Gallery	3	8	11
Site	-	8	8
Shopfront	1	3	4
Exhibition Space	-	3	3
Cinema	2	1	3
Museum	1	1	2
Shop/Studio	1	-	1
Gallery and Office	1	-	1
NightClub	1	-	1
Festival space	-	1	1
Library	1	-	1
Front Space total	14	173	187
Networking			
Meeting Place	-	94	94
Networking space total	-	94	94
Supply			
Supplier	-	52	52
Photoshoot Location	-	14	14
Story Location	-	9	9
Shoot Location	-	7	7
Storage	-	4	4
Bank	-	1	1
Printer	-	1	1
Supply Space total	-	88	88
Grand Total	**93**	**379**	**472**

The maps in Figures 1 through 4 analyse the results spatially, with individual SLA scores provided in Table 3. The maps use location quotients, representing the diversion of each SLA from the city-wide average. Values below one represent a less than average result, values greater than one reflecting higher results. The City-Inner SLA maintains the highest overall percentage of Darwin's creative worksites (35 per cent of the total) across three categories, Front, Back and especially Networking sites (60 per cent). The concentration of key arts institutions, performance spaces and CBD office space is the primary reason for this finding. Additionally, the volume of hospitality venues in the CBD made it an amenable place to conduct meetings away from major back spaces.

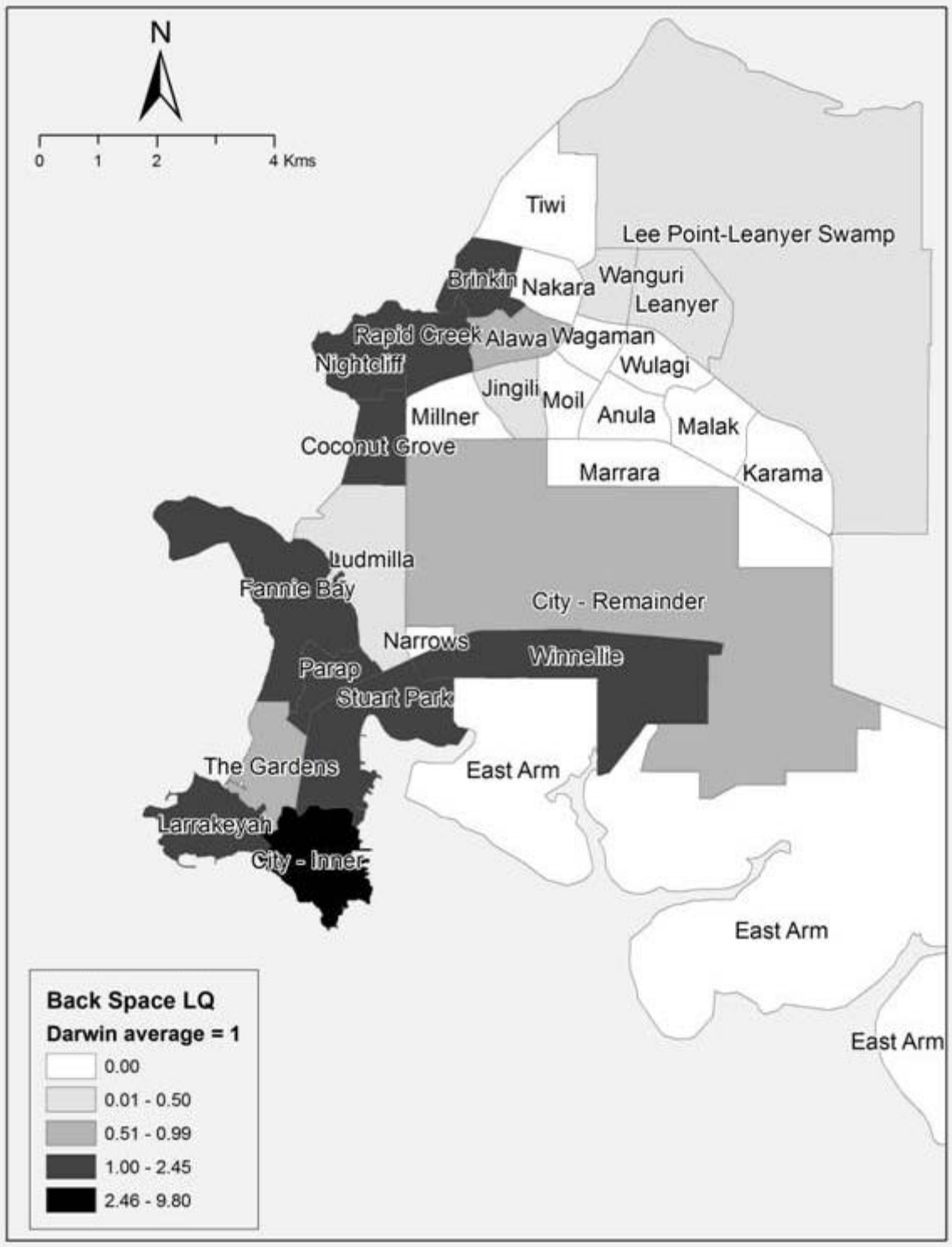

Figure 1: Back spaces by Statistical Local Areas

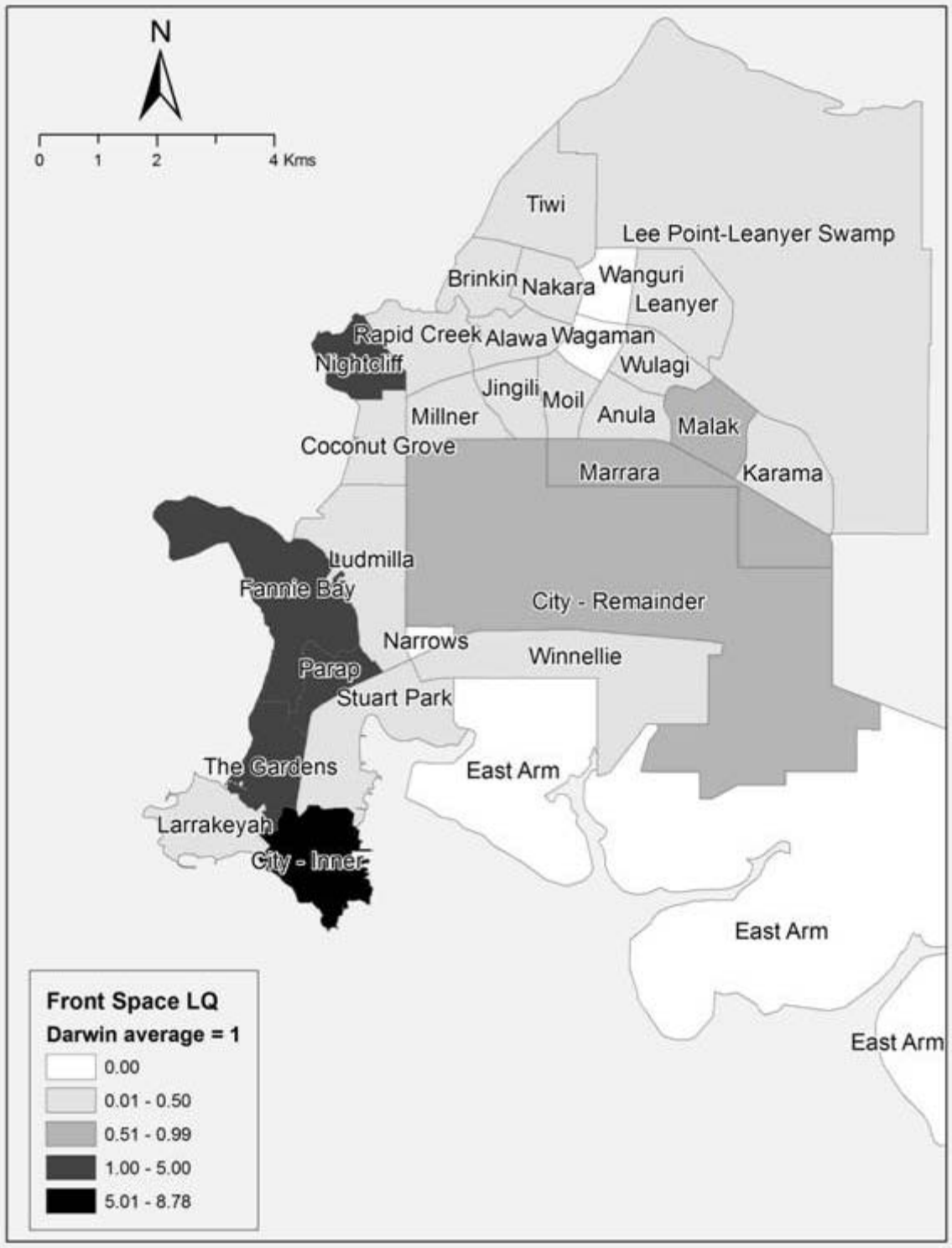

Figure 2: Front spaces by Statistical Local Areas

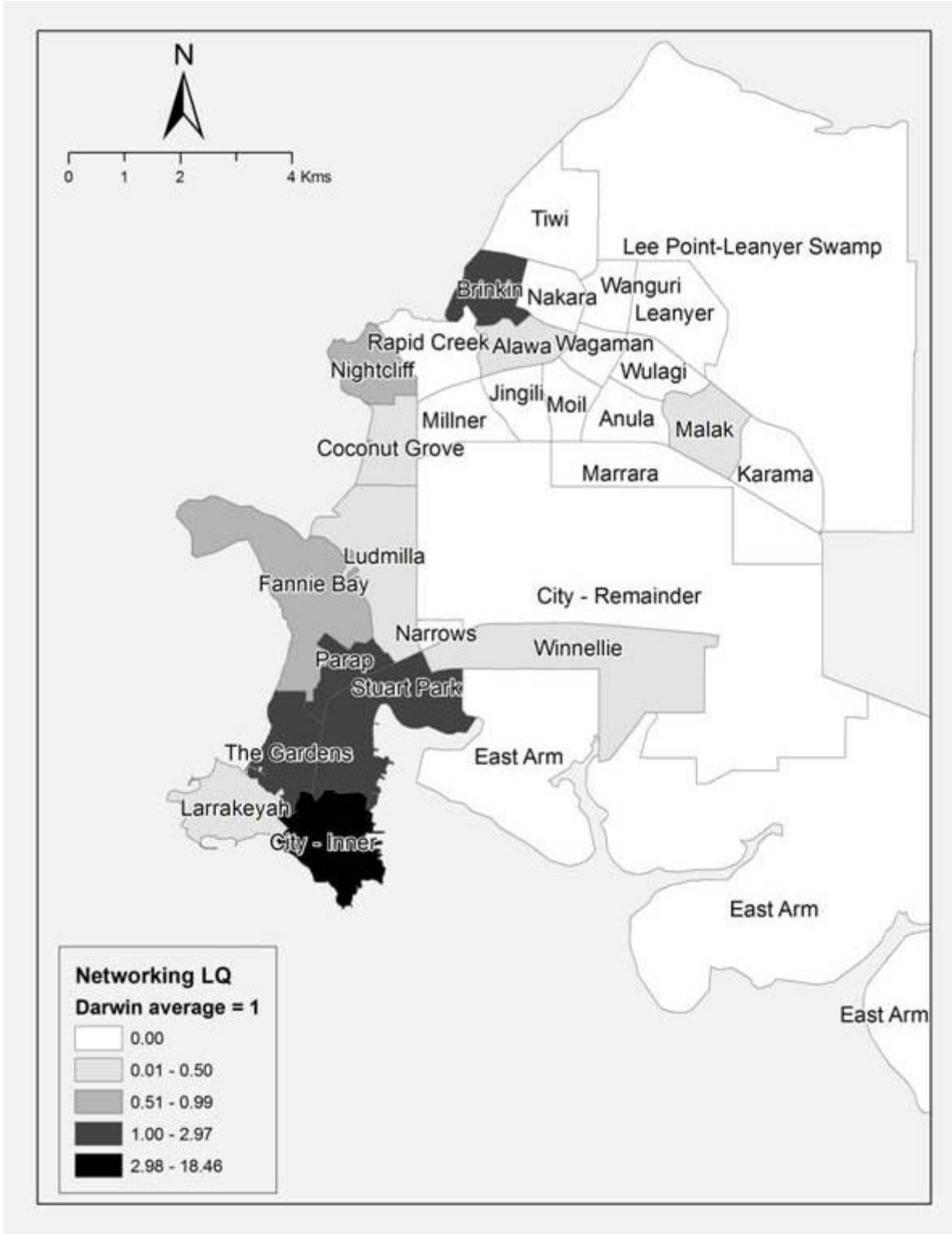

Figure 3: Networking sites, by Statistical Local Areas

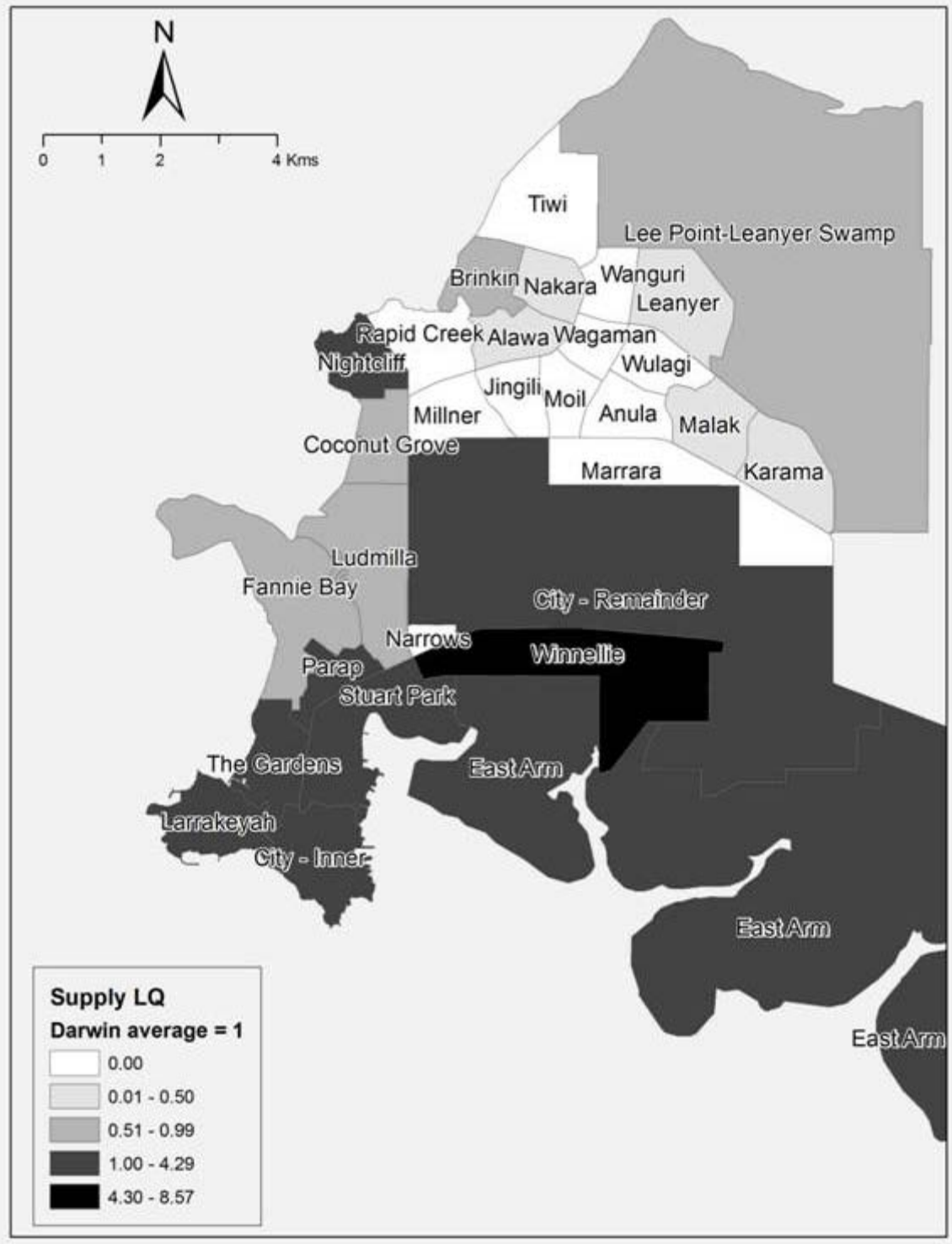

Figure 4: Supply sites by Statistical Local Areas

However this should not deter from the fact that the majority of all worksites (65 per cent) indicated by participants actually reside in suburban locations. Numerically, the vast majority (70 per cent) of Darwin's Front spaces are peppered across the suburbs, with agglomerations occurring in The Gardens, Fannie Bay, Nightcliff and Parap. The Gardens is the location for Darwin's biggest weekly market (Mindl Beach night market), and a performance space for festivals and events during the city's long dry season. Mirroring more the cultures of its neighbouring SE Asian counterparts, Darwin sustains a vibrant market culture unlike that of any other Australian capital city. As the top end region is monsoonal, six months of the year is guaranteed to be virtually rain free, allowing for outdoor activities such as markets and festivals to flourish.

Markets in Darwin have a distinctly suburban geography with each of the three top suburban SLAs (as measured by Front spaces) hosting a regular market, each acting as temporary sites of networking and encounter for creative producers and audiences. Importantly, over half of the city's production sites (Back spaces) were dispersed across the suburbs in two visible arcs, one extending from the city taking in Fannie Bay and across to Winnellie via Parap, and through the northern coastal SLAs from Coconut Grove to Brinkin (Figure 1). Interestingly, 85 per cent of all supply points were also in suburban locations. Figure 4 maps this suburban specialisation, with the light industrial suburb of Winnellie being the primary location for Darwin's creative practitioners to source supplies.

Table 3: Top ten suburbs by workplace mentions, tabulated by workplace type*

SLA name	Front	Back	Networking	Supply	Workplace total
Inner City/CBD					
City - Inner	56 (29.9%)	35 (36%)	57 (60.6%)	13 (14.8%)	162 (34.3%)
Inner City Total	**56 (29.9%)**	**35 (36%)**	**57 (60.6%)**	**13 (14.8%)**	**162 (34.3%)**
Top 10 suburban					
The Gardens	30 (16%)	3 (2.9%)	6 (6.4%)	5 (5.7%)	44 (9.3%)
Winnellie	3 (1.6%)	7 (6.8%)	1 (1.1%)	24 (27.3%)	35 (7.4%)
Parap	14 (7.5%)	4 (3.9%)	6 (6.4%)	9 (10.2%)	33 (7%)
Fannie Bay	17 (9.1%)	5 (4.9%)	4 (4.3%)	2 (2.3%)	28 (5.9%)
Nightcliff	14 (7.5%)	7 (6.8%)	2 (2.1%)	4 (4.5%)	27 (5.7%)
Stuart Park	4 (2.1%)	8 (7.8%)	4 (4.3%)	4 (4.5%)	20 (4.2%)
Brinkin	1 (0.5%)	8 (7.8%)	9 (9.6%)	2 (2.3%)	20 (4.2%)
Larrakeyah	5 (2.7%)	5 (4.9%)	1 (1.1%)	3 (3.4%)	14 (3%)
City - Remainder	5 (2.7%)	2 (1.9%)	0 (0%)	6 (6.8%)	13 (2.8%)
Coconut Grove	3 (1.6%)	4 (3.9%)	1 (1.1%)	4 (4.5%)	12 (2.5%)
Rapid Creek	3 (1.6%)	6 (5.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (1.9%)
Suburban Total**	**131 (70.1%)**	**67 (65%)**	**37 (39.4%)**	**75 (85%)**	**310 (65.7%)**
City-Wide Total	**187**	**103**	**94**	**88**	**472**

*All percentages calculated from city- wide total

**Suburban total row includes all 27 suburbs, not just top tens

Discussion

There are two key points to take from this analysis. First, the results show the usefulness of combining in-depth qualitative research with GIS mapping methods. Interviewing creative workers about where activities in their working days (or nights) take place, rather than defaulting to incomplete industry statistics can reveal a more comprehensive view of where creative work manifests in the city. Second, the role that multiple, decentred and often suburban facilities played as sites of supply, production and consumption in Darwin's creative economy leads theories about the spatiality of creativity in the city in new directions. These results clearly show that the cultural binaries that theorists have assumed shape perceptions of the city and its suburbs do not appear in this instance to be infusing the everyday nature of creative work in the city. What was revealed by this data is that creative work in the city creates a variegated city produced through practitioners' ordinary daily activities. Creative workers are not necessarily resisting or reinventing ideas of what the suburbs mean, they are getting on with creative work in ways that connect suburbs and the city centre in complex – and yet sometimes quite prosaic – ways. This is not to say that the suburbs do not present challenges for the effective conduct of creative work in Darwin – transport availability and lack of facilities were consistently cited problems by practitioners – but instead what is argued here is that ways of understanding the suburbs (in popular discourse, and in response in critical cultural theory) that emanate from Sydney or Los Angeles do not provide a universal conceptual framework for a city like Darwin. By not presuming that there is a meta-discourse of suburbs and city centres that everyone in every city is bound to, this analysis captured a different geography.

In conclusion, the case of Darwin displayed decentred and dispersed sites of creativity as the norm rather than the exception. Accordingly, creative city planning strategies should take into account that decentralised and varied creative work sites exist beyond the purview of flagship institutions and visible creative precincts.

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