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“Beyond the inner city: Real and imagined places in creative place policy and practice”

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## **Abstract**

As the economic and social benefits of creative industries development become increasingly visible, policymakers worldwide are working to create policy drivers to ensure that certain places become or remain ‘creative places’. Richard Florida’s work has become particularly influential among policymakers, as has Landry’s. But as the first wave of creative industrial policy development and implementation wanes, important questions are emerging. It is by now clear that an ‘ideal creative place’ has arisen from creative industries policy and planning literature, and that this ideal place is located in inner cities. This article shifts its focus away from the inner city to where most Australians live: the outer suburbs. It reports on a qualitative research study into the practices of outer-suburban creative industries workers in Redcliffe, Australia. It argues that the accepted geography of creative places requires some recalibration once the material and experiential aspects of creative places are taken into account.

**Keywords:** Creative Industries, outer suburbs, suburbia

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**Running Head:** Beyond the inner city

This article presents preliminary findings from an Australian research project called *Creative Suburbia*. It argues that ‘creative place’ policy, planning and analysis literatures tend to be based on a separation between the imagined aspects of place from its material and experiential aspects. Policy imaginations informed by ‘creative city’ strategies (Florida 2002) may lead to a mistaken, ‘one-size-fits-all’ emphasis on inner-city locations as the focus for creative industries workers, creative clusters, and ‘creative place’ policy. Conversely, the suburbs are construed as unproductive, passive, and culturally moribund. As our preliminary findings demonstrate, not only are creative industries active in outer suburbs, but interview responses also consistently foreground the gaps between policy imaginings of inner city creative places and the lived experience of outer-suburban materialities for creative workers.

As the economic and social benefits of creative industrial development become increasingly visible, local planning authorities are responsive to ‘creative place’ ideas and policy drivers. Gertler notes that “with the widely acknowledged shift to a knowledge-based...economy, creative cities have become the key locus for the creation of economic value” (2004, p. 1). This article draws upon the work of Gibson and Brennan-Horley (2006) which critiques the emphasis on inner-urban localities in creative place thinking in Australia and argues for a more complex understanding of where and how the creative industries operate beyond inner-urban areas.

First, this article reviews a selection of current creative place discourses to show how they privilege inner-urban sites. Second, it presents early findings of qualitative research

with outer suburban creative industries workers in an Australian outer suburban locality. This article uses the Queensland State Government's definition of creative industries which includes "music composition and production; film, television, and entertainment software; writing, publishing, and print media; advertising, graphic design, and marketing; architecture, visual arts, and design" (Queensland, 2008; see also Higgs, Cunningham & Pagan, 2007). For research grounded in spatial experience, we use Soja's (1996) understanding of 'place' as being comprised of three mutually-dependent aspects: an objective material space, the ways in which space is imagined and represented, and the ways in which it is experienced by people. Place is most coherent when all three of these constituent elements are in alignment (Lefebvre, 1992). This type of geographical approach to studies of the creative industries remains uncommon (Gibson and Connell 2003; Gibson, Murphy, & Freestone, 2002). Creative place research that focuses on all three aspects of place provides a complex and nuanced understanding of the ways in which creative industries operate in their outer suburban localities.

### **Imagined Place: Place In Creative Industry Discourse**

Creative city policies and analyses are proliferating across a range of geographical sites: from international developments such as UNESCO's Creative Cities Network to national strategies such as Singapore's 2002 *Creative Industries Development Strategy*. At the local scale, there are city-wide strategies such as Charles Landry's 2003 *Rethinking Adelaide* report, and highly local 'creative place' measurement indices such as those used in the Australian Local Government Association's *State of the Regions* analysis (National Economics, 2002). Florida's work (2002; 2005) has achieved canonical status among policymakers, as has Landry's (2000). But as what might be

termed the first wave of creative city policy development and implementation wanes, important questions are surfacing.

In particular, questions are emerging about the geographical sites of creative industries, partly produced by a reassertion of place and its social, cultural and economic role in creative industries development. This is in contrast to an earlier view in which technology was seen by some critics (eg Cairncross, 1998; Castells, 1989) as the enabling vector that would eventually help transcend geographical boundaries and cultural contexts to create a non-geographical 'space of flows' for technology-mediated communication (Castells, 1989). But as Hutton notes, "place is demonstrably a defining feature of the new production economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century...and 'place' in this context ineluctably comprises both concrete and representational features" (2006, p. 1839).

Predictions about the death of geography have proven to be incorrect in three ways.

First, drawing on Porter's economic geographical studies of industry clusters, creative industries analysts and planners have become increasingly aware of the existence and the value of "creative clusters"; sites in which sectors of the creative industries benefit economically and professionally by close geographical collocation (Porter, 2000, cf. Pratt et al, 2007). The Australian Government *Creative Industries Cluster Study* (DCITA, 2002), for example, focused specific attention on geography, noting that "cluster approaches potentially offer a means of addressing barriers and market failures for sectors producing digital content and applications" (DCITA, 2002, 1).

Second, Florida notes that high-tech workers seem to prefer to live and work in places with specific local characteristics, particularly "technology, talent and tolerance" (2005, p. 37). Florida investigated sites in which hi-tech creative industries were flourishing and found that these places shared certain physical and cultural geographical

commonalities, such as inclusivity and open social and ethnic diversity, “bohemian enclaves” (2005, p. 117), and “natural features and amenities” (2005, p. 172). Florida concludes that for creative industries development, geography does matter. Based on his findings, he creates indices with which places could measure their own potential to attract “the creative class” and thus to prosper (2005).

Third, creative industries analysts argue that the cultural characteristics of specific places do not just attract creative workers but trigger particular kinds of creativity (Drake 2003, p. 513; Helbrecht, 2001; Hutton, 2006) or endow those places’ products with a form of geographical cultural capital (Scott, 1999). Geography is thus far from dead when it comes to the creative industries. In fact, place has emerged in the literature as one of the key drivers of creative industrial strength. But what kinds of geography have emerged in creative place thinking as ideal, and as less than ideal, sites for creative industries productivity and development?

The key geographical division which runs through the bulk of creative place analysis and planning is the splitting of cities into ‘creative’ inner cities and ‘uncreative’ suburbs, particularly outer suburbs (Gibson & Brennan-Horley, 2006). In this thinking, clustered creative industrial productivity takes place in inner cities, while outer suburbs are ‘hinterland’ sites of uncreative, conservative, dispersed non-productivity and consumption (Florida, 2004). Gibson and Brennan-Horley characterise this binary as “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” (2006, p. 456). Florida characterises the outer suburbs—which he terms “sprawl”—as a major negative factor in his creative place index. In his analysis, cities such as Los Angeles, San Diego, and Phoenix are awarded

“dishonourable mention” due to their high scores on the “sprawl risk ranking” index (2005, p. 65). When it comes to being a site for creative industrial productivity, Florida concludes that “sprawl is a vexing problem” (2005, p. 64). For Florida, there is a direct equation: the more suburbs a city has, the less creative potential it has. In Florida’s analysis, outer suburbs are not just uncreative: in reducing a place’s “creative place status”, they are actively anti-creative, and economically “choking” (2004).

When the Australian Local Government Association used Florida’s “creative place” indices to determine which places in Australia were the most creative, and therefore most likely “to be successful in the modern globalised economy” (National Economics 2002, i), the winners were (in order) Sydney, Inner Melbourne, the Australian Capital Territory, Central Perth, Central Adelaide, and Brisbane City. Not surprisingly, Australia’s outer suburbs, or “sprawl”, ranked poorly. Similarly, the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research adopted Florida’s indices to rank regions across Australia and compared them to US regions (National Institute, 2004). Central Melbourne and Sydney both scored a ranking of 4 (only 3 US cities ranked higher). But when their outer suburbs were factored in, Sydney’s ranking dropped to 26, and Melbourne’s to 34 (National Institute, 2004). The global uptake of Florida’s indices for ‘creative place’ analysis ensures that outer suburbs will never achieve official ‘creative place’ status and are thus unlikely to attract government or business creative industrial investment. As Danaher (2007) notes, in this “metrocentric” vision of creative places, suburbs “can only be poor relations, inadequately seeking to replicate the conditions that enable creative practice to flourish in the cities” (pp. 13-14).

Critiques of creative city policy observe that Florida and Landry’s analyses have swiftly been translated into homogenised, prescriptive geographies. Malanga (2004), for



example, states that “a generation of leftish policy-makers and urban planners is rushing to implement Florida’s vision [just as] an admiring host of uncritical journalists touts it”. Kate Oakley argues that Florida’s work has given rise to a one-size fits all approach to economic development, with creatively ‘backward’ regions trying desperately – often in the face of all geographical, economic, and social realities – to make themselves look like London, Boston, or San Francisco (2004, p. 71).

Ross similarly argues that ‘creative city’ policy tends to take a “cookie cutter approach to economic development [that] does violence to regional specificity” (2006-7, p. 2). In Australia, Gibson and Kong observe that:

the emerging model of academic knowledge-to-policy traffic is one of assuming singular ‘recipes’ for success in transforming places based on advice from experts and advisors not well enough grounded in places to account for the more complex and contested geographies they contain (2005, p. 552).

In Soja’s framework this general effect can be described as a tendency for policy to separate material and experiential geographies from imagined ones, thus giving only a partial and very limited view of creative place. Materiality and experience are devalued in a Taylorist discourse that assumes there is “one best way” (Kanigel, 1997) to develop creative places, despite the diversity of materiality, experience, and culture that characterises any city, town, or suburb which might find itself the object of ‘creative cities’ policy.

In order to close the gap between the imagined places of creative city policy, and material and experiential geographies of specific sites, it is necessary to understand the significant economic and social shifts that have occurred across Australian metropolitan

regions in the past two decades, particularly in its middle and outer suburban areas. This includes an analysis of the ways in which suburban sites have been profoundly transformed, realigning and contesting old assumptions about the metropolitan inner–outer divide.

### **Material Place: The Changing Suburban Landscape**

The ‘imagined geography’ of outer suburbs generally sees such places as dull sites of domestic consumption rather than creative productivity. Yet scholars in the US (Kotkin 2005) and Australia (Gibson & Brennan- Horley, 2006; Gleeson, 2002; Randolph, 2004) provide evidence of deep structural change in suburban localities. Kotkin’s ‘new suburbanism’ thesis in the United States suggests that the suburbs play a crucial role in the dynamism and development of American cities and American culture. Kotkin argues that the ‘rebirth’ of the inner core of American cities has been generally overstated:

Since 1950 more than 90 per cent of all the growth in U.S. metropolitan areas has been in the suburbs. Most of the fastest growing ‘cities’ of the late twentieth century – Los Angeles, Atlanta, Orlando, Phoenix, Houston, Dallas and Charlotte – are primarily collections of suburbs, often with only marginal links to the traditional urban core (2005, p. 9).

Gleeson (2002) similarly argues that “the suburbs of our major cities are the crucible of Australian life, but they are poorly understood and their dynamism is often not appreciated” (2002, p. 229).

The division between inner city and the suburbs draws upon a long-established discourse in Australia about the suburbs being culturally barren places where nothing of much interest happens. Summing up the deep current of anti-suburbanism among

Australian intellectuals and artists since white settlement, Kinnane observes that the suburbs have come to stand for a 'living death of conformity and safety', with "suburbia" denoting a generalised place in the imagination, rather than an actual geographical place" (1998, p. 42). Once described as 'the first suburban nation' (Horne, 1964), Australian suburban life has long been imagined and experienced as distinct from inner-city life. The association of inner-urban life with excitement, diversity, and inclusivity is a multi-experiential one compared to suburban life with its associations of peace, order, and privacy (on the one hand), and homogeneity and desolation (on the other). In Australia, the "imaginary topography" of the outer suburbs is almost entirely negative (Kinnane, 1998). Despite material shifts in the geography of the suburbs an intellectual ambivalence towards the suburbs remains.

Since urban consolidation began in the late 1970s, the Australian suburbs have changed dramatically. One of the most significant shifts in the suburbs is demographic. No longer the heartland of the traditional nuclear family with mum and dad living on a quarter acre block, in the twenty-first century the suburban population is more atomised, older, and the structure of household composition has changed significantly (Randolph, 2004, p.484). In the suburbs, couple-only households, single-parent households, and single-person households have all increased rapidly in the 10 year census period to from 1996 to 2006 to the extent that they now outnumber households of couples with children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Australia's multicultural policies and the processes of gentrification have contributed to another major demographic shift in which many outer suburbs have become more ethnically diverse than some inner city localities. In Brisbane, one of Australia's fastest growing cities, demographic trends in the inner-urban regions

reveals a decreasing proportion of ethnic and socio-economic diversity (Stimson, 1998, p. 211; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Consequently, sites of disadvantage once associated with the inner-city and public housing are now emerging in private housing in the middle suburbs (Randolph, 2004, p. 488). The increasing homogeneity of Australia's inner-urban areas is in danger of producing fewer of Florida's creative city requisite markers of diversity, from which (it is assumed) tolerance and inclusivity follow.

The ways in which people live in the outer suburbs has also changed: the quarter acre block is now being carved up to make way for townhouses, villas, and apartments, producing suburban neighbourhoods of high density (Randolph, 2004, p. 489). Higher density housing contributes to an environment with characteristics formerly typical of inner-city areas. O'Connor and Stimson (2004) note a further significant reorganisation of material space in suburbia: the proliferation of commercial and public facilities across the breadth of the metropolitan areas, particularly in middle and outer suburbs:

This outcome is the result of the construction of new hospitals, universities and other community facilities as well as factories, shopping centres, offices and warehouses, restaurants and entertainment facilities which have been built by firms recognising the opportunities created by the re-organisation and re-direction of business operations. (2004, p. 45)

Greater commercial and public infrastructure reflects changes in work-space relations over the past two decades and the complex role of the middle to outer suburbs in the wider economy. The suburbs are no longer passive places from which predominantly male workers leave to commute to the inner city each day. They now support a wider

range of occupations and activities, with only 20-30% of jobs now being situated in inner-urban areas (Gipps et al, 1996).

Empirical studies of creative industrial activity in Sydney and its surrounding exurban areas presents confronting evidence against an inner-city bias: exurban areas such as Wollongong and the Blue Mountains experienced the highest rates of creative industries employment growth in all of Sydney between 1991 and 2001 (Gibson and Brennan-Horley, 2006, p. 467). Similarly, the exurban areas of Wyong, Camden, and Wollondilly achieved higher rates of growth in creative work in the last 20 years than did inner-city areas such as Sydney City and Marrickville (2006, p. 465). Yet this finding is only surprising when pitted against the entrenched imagined geography of suburbia. Gibson and Brennan-Horley explain that the growth pattern of creative industries in the outer suburbs of Sydney is entirely logical. Outer suburban areas are the fastest growing areas in Australia so it makes sense that their creative industries workforces are also growing (2006, p. 468). The growth of creative industries in the outer suburbs also makes sense when paired with real estate trends: for many creative workers, the inner city has simply become too expensive a place in which to work and live so they have moved out to the more affordable outer suburbs.

Empirical evidence increasingly demonstrates that there is a notable level of creative industries activity taking place in outer suburbia and periurban regions. The transformed suburbs are now places of intense commercial and demographic complexity, with some suburbs becoming urban centres in their own right. To understand the ways in which the many material and demographic shifts impact on creative industries in the outer suburbs, it is necessary to address the experiential aspects of outer-suburban place as they are experienced by creative industries workers. For this reason, the Australian

Research Council-funded project Creative Suburbia explores creative industry workers principally from an experiential perspective.

### **Experiential place: Evidence from creative workers in an outer Brisbane suburb**

The Creative Suburbia project is designed to investigate whether, how, and to what extent creative industries are active in outer-suburban areas of two major Australian cities: Brisbane and Melbourne. The research methodology is primarily qualitative, using interviews with creative industries workers based in selected outer suburbs.

The results presented here are drawn from interviews with participants who live in Redcliffe, an exurban satellite of Brisbane. Brisbane has experienced significant local and state government investment in cultural infrastructure from the late 1980s, a trend accelerated by urban renewal programs throughout the 1990s (Stimson 1998). This has resulted in several large-scale cultural venues and exhibition spaces around which many smaller-scale, privately-owned venues and exhibition spaces have been built. All these facilities are within a two-kilometre radius of Brisbane's inner-city core.

Respondents represent a cross-section of creative industry workers including multi-media developers, architects, graphic designers, musicians, and visual artists, all of whom live on the Redcliffe peninsula about 40 km from Brisbane's centre. The majority of people work where they live, while a few commute part-time to inner-city workplaces. The most pronounced theme at this stage of the investigation is the respondents' relationship with their suburban location to their work. We group the findings into three key areas in relation the creative industries professionals and their locational choice of the outer suburbs: 1) economic factors such as affordability; 2) locality preferences for creative workers, which include the concept of creative stimuli (Drake 2003); and 3) professional and creative networks.

## 1. Locality and Affordability

Urban renewal occurring in Brisbane's inner city for the last decade has had the well-documented effect of displacing many low-income residents (Zukin 1995).

Affordability of location was a constant theme among interview respondents. While many respondents had lived in Redcliffe for many years, a significant number had also recently moved from inner-city locations. Several attributes of locality are identified by respondents as underpinning decisions to live and work in the locality; these varied according to the individuals and to the type of creative industries work in which they were engaged. Primarily, location was perceived as important in terms of affordability of business premises, or of housing, in comparison to inner-city areas (see also Gibson & Brennan-Horley, 2006; Gibson et al., 2002, p. 186).

John, a graphic designer and multimedia developer who runs his own business and employs eight staff, says:

*It's a good place to work because the rent is affordable, it's about half to a third of what you'd pay in the city . . . it's nice and relaxing here too. I've thought about moving but probably wouldn't because it's easier here.*

Affordability appears to work for the creative worker and their clients. John also states that low rent is an advantage for his clients because he can keep costs down and his clients know they are not paying extra for his services to cover high rental overheads. This was repeated by Gary, an advertising executive who had recently relocated his office from the inner city. In the event of other inner-city based advertising executives being forced to put up their fees due to rising rents, he was able to maintain a competitive edge and keep his costs stable. Distance from the city is generally not seen

as a problem among respondents with city-based clients. For instance, while many of John's clients are within driving distance of the premises and the majority (about 65%) are local and regionally based, he does not always meet them and many remain 'virtual' clients. Similarly, while Gary had maintained his predominantly city-based clients, he either deals with them online, or is happy to drive into the city for occasional meetings. The flexibility provided by online technologies and the relative ease of commuting by car (but not public transport) enables a flow between the city and outer suburbs which, in the case of our respondents, meets both their clients' and their own needs.

While technology has not rendered geography redundant as widely predicted, it has contributed to the flexibility and reach of certain work practices and markets (Drake, 2003, p. 512). This was evident in the case of Declan, a graphic designer who works part-time in the inner-city and part-time at home from where he runs an online T-shirt design business selling to clients locally, nationally, and worldwide.

Most respondents in the 25-39 age group moved to Redcliffe from the inner city because they couldn't afford to purchase inner-city houses. Although several respondents stated that they once would have preferred to buy homes in the inner city and had misgivings about moving to an outer suburb, they had little choice if they were to purchase their own home. Yet once they had made the move, all were unequivocal about their decision. Lifestyle factors that combine work and family in an environment that is both financially and culturally sustaining were cited as significant reasons to live and work in an outer suburb. A third of visual artists and musicians identified affordability as one of the main reasons for moving to Redcliffe, with most of these having studios in or under their houses.



## **2. Locality and creative work**

Environmental influences in relation to creativity have been explored in psychological and other literature (Drake, 2003; Menin & Samuel, 2003; Lubart & Sternberg, 1998). For our purposes here we focus on the specificity of the outer-suburban experience of creativity compared to that of the inner city. Responses to the question of whether and to what extent their suburban environment influenced respondents' creative work are spread along a continuum from 'not at all' to far greater elaborations of the ways in which locality is critical to their creative work and business.

For some respondents, lifestyle is also integral to productivity and the outer suburb are seen as facilitating a balance between work and play. While negative factors were identified -- such as a smaller local market for their products and services, and clients who were not willing to pay as much as a city-based business could expect -- the positive attributes of location were couched more in terms of a psycho-social relationship to place that has an impact on the creative process itself (see also Drake, 2003). Experiential articulations of place and creativity were frequently cited, with serenity and freedom from distraction being one of the key positive attributes of the locality. This is a theme dominant among musicians and visual artists. 43% of interview respondents described their attachment in physical terms, particularly in relation to the geographical separation of the Redcliffe peninsula from the mainland. Larry, a visual artist, describes the peninsula as "an island surrounded by a moat", a "haven", and a "sanctuary". Leah, a sculptor, identified the area as free from distractions and compares it to where she formerly lived in Brisbane's inner city, "it's far less distracting ... in Brisbane there were too many distractions, too many

exhibition openings and things to go to.” Contrary to Floridian conceptions, creative industries workers may not necessarily gravitate towards buzzing inner-urban hubs. Several respondents who had moved to the suburb from areas they considered more creative expressed surprise at the ways in which the locality was able to support their creative endeavours in a variety of ways. Julie, a fashion designer and retailer, moved from a northern coastal town with a strong arts-based community. She was pleasantly surprised at how the locality was “ready for something different,” and that

*it’s encouraged me to be more creative because they are willing to accept things that are different . . . it’s given me the incentive to actually get back into being more creative.*

Julie later muses that although in some ways she would have liked her business to be based in the inner city, she suspects that she wouldn’t have been as experimental in her designs had she not been located in her outer suburb.

Respondents typically work across several geographical sites and in multi-site work places, reflecting the diversity of their work roles and lifestyle arrangements. Most of our respondents work across sites within their suburb, while a handful move between work places in in the inner city and their outer-suburban home where they work in a home office or studio. This points to the connection between inner and outer localities and is to some extent representative of changes in broader patterns of work and workplace mobility and flexibility (Gurstein, 2001). In some instances it represents the multiple roles that many creative industries workers pursue in order to make a living (Gibson et al., 2002). For example, it is typical of musicians and visual artists, at the lower end of the income scale, to have other ‘day’ jobs such as teaching

in their area of expertise. This is a common among the visual artists and musicians interviewed.

Living in an outer suburb therefore means it is necessary for some respondents to commute to places beyond where they live. Commuting time from Redcliffe to the city by public transport is about an hour. There are no direct train lines to the city but there are direct buses. Interestingly, several respondents who commute, typically on a part-time basis, regard the time on public transport as useful because it allows them time to spend on their creative work. For example, Charlotte, a singer songwriter who also works two days a week in the inner city in a government job, describes commuting time as “invaluable for songwriting” because it gives her time to “dream and think and read and write”.

Similarly, Declan, a graphic designer, found the commuting time useful in preparing for work at his inner-city based architectural company, or for doing his own work:

*Because I commute I get the train (from nearby Sandgate), I don't really like driving that much, so with the train at least gives me a bit more time to sketch and draw and get ready for work coming in.*

What might, on the surface, appear as a negative aspect of outer-suburban life is in fact experienced as a beneficial or positive aspect of multi-locational work.

Moreover, the experience of working across two or more geographical sites is indicative of the connections between inner and outer urban areas: as sites of creative industries, inner and urban areas are closely linked.

### **3. Locality and Networks**

Professional and social networks are identified as critical to the success of the creative economy (Florida, 2002). In creative city discourse many of these networks are clustered around inner-city hubs (Florida, 2002). In Redcliffe creative networks also exist, with respondents' networks being diversely represented in the data. Only 7% of respondents claim to have no professional networks they considered important while 65% have professional networks that span local, national, and international scales. While much 'creative place' thinking assumes that key networks are based on close geographical proximity (Adkins et al., 2007), outer suburban creative industries network patterns demonstrate that 'proximity networks' are only one among a multi-scalar complex of professional networks. As Beauregard argues, "actors simultaneously have interests at multiple spatial scales; that is, their activities spread out over different geographical fields" (1995, p. 240). For our respondents, technology is a predictably significant factor in creating and sustaining networks beyond the suburb. This is especially evident among multimedia developers, graphic artists, and musicians. Jack, a musician in a band whose members live on the other side of the city from Redcliffe, states that distance is not a problem due to the easy exchange of sound files via the internet. The band is able to compose songs this way and then rehearse at a location equidistant for each member. Tony, an architect whose practice is in the suburb but who has clients throughout the adjacent region, echoed others' remarks about the facility of technology to create and sustain professional networks. For Tony, efficient local transport routes were also cited as enabling professional connectivity:

*With technology and the transport corridor and what not, I don't find it [lack of local networks] much of an impediment. You just have to manage your time properly.*

Our respondents are also active in drawing on and fostering local, proximity-based networks within Redcliffe. John, a graphic designer and multimedia developer, sees locality as creating a unique business edge that provides a good opportunity for networking. John states that the locality can be good for business because the “community feel” is an important leverage point for local businesses: people like to support their local businesses. He also creates and makes use of local clusters, using the services of local photographers and other allied freelance personnel.

The Redcliffe peninsula has an established artistic community with local networks focused upon the two local galleries that have been operational for many years as hubs of social and professional interaction. Our research found a strong local network of 25 - 39 year old artists whose homes are rotating hubs at which they gather on a weekly basis. The group is active in developing a local creative identity and coordinates events such as a small-scale festival and markets where the emphasis is on locally-produced music, art, crafts, and foods. In addition to promoting a local identity, one respondent said that an aim of the festival is “...to try and put on an event that's something that we'd want to go to, and hopefully that attracts those people that we want to meet.” The importance for ‘network sociality’ that combines both work and play is a recognised feature of creative industries workers (Wittel 2001).

Understanding the professional networks of outer-suburban creative industries workers has clear implications for ‘creative place’ policies. Not all productive creative industries professional networks are proximity-based clusters, and in less dense areas such as outer

suburbs, proximity-based clusters may not at all resemble those found in inner cities. That does not mean that creative clusters do not exist in the suburbs. The multi-scalar networks of our interview respondents highlight the complex geographies of the creative industries, and suburbia more generally.

## **CONCLUSION**

This preliminary research into creative workers in a Brisbane outer suburb indicates that, as Gibson and Brennan-Horley found in Sydney, there is much evidence of current and potential creative industries activity in outer suburbia. The research so far has shown the extent to which creative industry workers in outer suburban areas work across multi-locational sites, and the importance they attach to their locale as a place removed from the distractions and the busy-ness of inner-urban life. They are well-networked in general, facilitated by technology and efficient road systems, and there is some evidence of creative clustering.

Soja's (1996) assertion that space is physical, imagined and experienced is important when considering the disjuncture between the imagined space of creative city policy and writings, and the experiential and material space of outer suburban areas. In the case of the Australian 'creative place' thinking, the imagined space of policies and planners, and the empirical and experiential spaces of outer suburbia do not currently marry up: studies might give evidence of creative industries activity and growth in the outer suburbs, but the imagined geography of the suburbs continues to construct the suburbs as banal, unproductive, uncreative, and outside of the glowing centre of the inner-city creative core.

The capacity to link creative enterprises to the new suburbanism presents itself as a major opportunity in the development of an innovation culture and economy able to generate wealth and job opportunities through new enterprise formation in growing, high-value-added sectors. Yet there are a series of recurring conceptual issues that need to be critically addressed before such a policy strategy can be pursued. It is easy to think about cities in terms of simplistic inner/outer binary: it's also easy to make policy in this way. But it is time to move beyond this traditional, nostalgic binary. Failing to do so means perhaps disregarding an entire component of the creative industries in Australia, and misunderstanding the nature of those industries. It may also result in creating an inner/outer socioeconomic binary geography in Australian cities if creative place funding and policy energy is predominantly focused on inner cores. In order to avoid these outcomes, it is time to rethink the suburbs, bringing together their imagined geographies with their experiential and material aspects.

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