Creative tropical city
mapping darwin’s creative industries
PROJECT AIMS AND METHODS

The Creative Tropical City: mapping Darwin’s creative industries project is funded through the Australian government’s Australian Research Council Linkage Project scheme, and is jointly supported by Darwin City Council, Tourism NT and the Northern Territory Government’s Department of the Chief Minister and Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts. Each industry partner has an interest in pursuing new policies to enhance Darwin’s creative industries, liveability and attractiveness to new migrants and existing residents. Responsibility for the content of this report and related interim reports remains with the research team.

Specifically, the research project’s three stated aims are:

- to determine the nature, extent and change over time of the creative industries in Darwin
- to interrogate the applicability of national and international creative industry policy frameworks to Darwin
- to identify opportunities for transformation in the creative industries in Darwin.

The methods used were:

- interrogation of Australian Bureau of Statistics data
- interrogation of data provided by our industry partners
- 98 one-on-one interviews, including a visual mapping exercise, with those who work in creative industries
- literature reviews of the prolific creative industry literature written over the last decade
- reviews of existing policy frameworks
- focus groups with representatives from creative industry sectors to discuss research findings
- one-on-one interviews with key policy stakeholders
- collaboration with creative industry practitioners to establish a policy feedback exhibition.

Authors:
Associate Professor Tess Lea, Charles Darwin University
Dr Susan Luckman, University of South Australia
Associate Professor Chris Gibson, University of Wollongong
Associate Professor Donal Fitzpatrick, Curtin University (ex Charles Darwin University)
Chris Brennan-Horley, University of Wollongong
Julie Willoughby-Smith, University of South Australia
Karen Hughes, Charles Darwin University

Other Contributors:
The research team would like to acknowledge Professor Ian Buchanan who initiated this project, and Jennene Marum, Francesca Baas Becking and Hayley West for their invaluable input and support.

Photography:
All photography by Fiona Morrison Photography and Fleet Photography, unless credited otherwise.

Report Design:
Zise

This research was supported under Australian Research Council’s Linkage Grant funding scheme (project LP066744S). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Research Council.
CONTENTS

Why CI? 4
The arts sector and the commercial creative economy 6
Who and what is creative Darwin? 8
Darwin’s strengths as a creative city 10
The need for a creative industry policy in Darwin 12
Employment 14
Small-to-medium enterprises and micro-business 16
Networks 18
Information technology 20
Education & training 22
Spatial planning 24
Monsoonal creativity: an inspirational environment 28
Maintaining tropical character 30
Seasonality 32
A remote tropical city 34
Cultural mix and discontents 36
Darwin by night 38
CI, tourism and visitor perceptions 40
Whole of community approach 42
Questions for policy 44

Note on the report: The report is organised according to main themes that arose in the research, with policy implications attended to at the end. Explicit policy recommendations are mostly embedded within the presentation of research findings in each section. To make these easier to quickly locate, purple font marks key passages.

The definition of Darwin used in the research included Palmerston, Darwin’s satellite city. Our mental mapping exercise incorporated relationships with the surrounding Litchfield shire and further hinterland but did not map these areas specifically. Finally, in putting this report together, the research team was conscious that many of the issues extend beyond the creative industries (CI) to other business sectors; and similarly, that many of the issues apply more broadly than Darwin. However, identifying only CI industry specific issues that are unique to Darwin would have stripped the information of its wider implications.

Within the report is a selection of questions, responses and quotes taken from the 98 interviews conducted in 2007/8, with anonymous responses. A number of photographs and breakout stories featuring creative practitioners and their companies or organisations were chosen to illustrate the report, to both highlight the diversity of the creative industries in Darwin and illustrate key points from the research. It should be noted that a small number of photographs were staged and feature individuals with no direct involvement in the research. The authors thank those who granted permission for their photographs, images, words or artwork to be reproduced within this report, and state that those featured do not necessarily share the views expressed within the report.
WHY CI?

The widely quoted definition of Creative Industries (CI) is:

‘..those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.’

If, as our research has shown, there is a treasured creative vein to Darwin already, and the definition is so all-encompassing, then why do we need to specifically focus on creative industries? Why conjure the need for government and corporate attention if there is a vibrant creative scene already in place, which could be damaged by clumsy attempts at commoditisation? In short, why CI?

For those governments that have already perceived the importance of the creative industry sector to their economic viability, the rationale for investment is usually framed in terms of economic competition and the attraction and retention of smart young people who don’t stay in a place unless the place is interesting to stay in. The argument is that promoting CI yields positive dividends in terms of jobs, wealth creation, tax revenues, real estate value (making a place trendy), cultural tourism and consumer spending.

Our research certainly affirms the major role that the creative industries play in building and sustaining vibrant communities. This includes their function as magnets for small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs), talented employees, and extensive networks that value-add in otherwise isolated areas and contribute to regional regeneration and reputation building. For this reason, every city wants CI practitioners. They are perceived as value-adding to existing economic entities as generators of new economic models of practice and development. This is best achieved by funding and supporting the concentration of new and emerging clusters and industries.

But there is a bigger picture again, one of pressing importance to Darwin, its future, and sense of identity in the Asia-Pacific region. At present, Darwin is principally a town designed around the Australian Defence Force’s needs, the delivery of government services, and the extraction and distribution needs of the mining, agriculture and pastoral industries. The role of such industries in the past and present development of the north is reflected in enabling policy frameworks and taxation regimes which explicitly encourage sector growth and development. A visual reminder of these emphases can be seen in the industrial design of the Darwin harbour, the zoning of key parcels of land, the location and quality of roads, the allocation of government budgets, and in the architectural style of entire housing estates.

Compared with such industries, CI is relatively invisible, tending to be associated with fringe activities or the visual and performing arts, and not viewed as a core industry sector in its own right. It gets less policy

1 www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/foreword.pdf
attention in terms of framing the future of Darwin than its close cousin, tourism. Yet, as this report reveals, CI is not just culturally but also commercially important to the city of Darwin and its future. While traditional resource industries and tourism remain vulnerable to sudden changes in global conditions, the creative industries are the means by which communities have the diversity, talent and resourcefulness to respond to rapid global, technological and political shifts. CI is the link. CI is important to the pressing need to diversify the north’s industry base, away from over-dependency on traditional resource extraction sectors and public sector subsidy, toward a more resilient, entrepreneurial and innovative modality.

Creative industries are themselves diverse. They draw on the self-employed, freelancers, and SME developers working in micro-niches and across modes. As the following section makes clear, they can also be large employers like the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Those involved are versatile; they multi-task and job hop, work independently and collaboratively, operating in multiple niches, sometimes simultaneously. They are, by definition, resourceful and innovative. This qualitatively improves the resilience of regional economies to fluctuations in market conditions. By contrast, places that rely on single industries are more vulnerable to the whim of market volatilities.

Consideration of the role of the creative industries to the future of Darwin raises big questions about where Darwin wants to go in the future. Is it a fully-fledged city with a diverse economic base, a stable residential population, and its own critical mass and momentum? Or is it merely a frontier locale for the efficient extraction of minerals, administration of remote area programs, and training of defence forces – a place for people to reside briefly to make money in a couple of industries, to then leave?

If Darwin wants to be more than the sum of its parts, the key question posed by this report is critical – namely, what strengths and capacities does Australia’s northern-most capital have to draw upon to be renowned as a Creative Tropical City?
It is not wrong to associate the creative industries with traditional arts activities. Without being too hard and fast about these categories, it helps to imagine there being two ‘branches’ along the CI continuum. First, there are those activities that cluster under the ‘arts for arts sake’ banner; comprising community arts events and organisations, individuals who write, paint, perform, craft and create; together with the many people who support such activities and outputs on a volunteer, casual or even full-time paid basis. Generally speaking, this part of the sector will always need external funding and grants to operate. These are the types of creative activities and events which communities value, not always with the expectation that they will make money (such as youth theatre); but with the knowledge that they will contribute to quality of life, social inclusion, and provide interest and intrigue for residents and visitors alike.

Most communities recognise their importance for grassroots community identity and civic development, leisure pursuits, entertainment, and even independent voice and political challenge. Creative industries are a joyous, provoking and essential part of local cultures; they bring people together, gel social life and generate outlets for expression. Think festivals, dance classes, live music performances, writers’ centres, libraries, community radio, street art, busking, the ‘buzz’ and ‘funk’ of a vibrant cultural scene. Fostering creativity in everyday life for its own intrinsic pleasures and rewards is crucial.

Then there are the commercial sectors that operate as private enterprises. Participants here may even spurn the idea of public subsidy – except insofar as it might assist the creation of new markets or the fielding of risk. They may be small, home-based enterprises, larger firms, solo practitioners, collaborative ventures, or established firms; they provide employment, pay rates and generate taxation revenue. They might be design, architecture, fashion, multi-media and software development businesses; or they may be practising artists. The creative industries incorporate aspects of ‘popular culture’ as well: comic books and tattooing through to radio and television production. Because of their diversity and scale, CIs activate a long chain of interconnected services by networking and building capacity across and between industries. CI draws on other businesses within and outside of the CI sector. CI is not a single industry but a dispersed field of operations, operating in a symbiotic relationship with other sectors. Not only is CI entrepreneurship less individualistic, tending toward collaborative and team-based ventures, CI generates new demand for good food and beverage outlets, accessory supplies, digital technologies, broadband communications and the like (see Information Technology section), yielding a higher multiplier effect for local economic development than any equivalent such as mining.

Both kinds of orientation – the non-commercial and the commercial – need to be recognised if the true potential of CI for Darwin’s viability as a regional economy is to be realised. Recognition does not mean regulation but rather, fertilisation and imaginative investment, giving individuals and companies the opportunities and technical knowledge needed to develop and innovate. It means protecting those parts of Darwin that attract CI producers and incubators to settle here, knowing that their talents are valuable to many economies, a number of which target this sector more explicitly than the NT does at present.

It means encouraging the sector to identify itself as an economic force for the good, sponsoring trade shows and business tours abroad and fostering ever more strategic clusterings and collaborations so that Darwin based SMEs can compete for national contracts and provide a higher grade of professional service or product.

It means providing appropriate infrastructure – broadband, talent development, entrepreneurial training, provision of industry brokers, managers and translators, subsidised accommodation and venue space – to enable the sector and individuals to flourish.

It means all this – without damaging the original distinction of the CI ‘product’ being from the north of Australia – and, in turn, without reducing ‘distinction’ to a pastiche of Aboriginal iconography.

How to manage these competing requirements is the subject of this report. It is organised around key themes that arose in the research, with a concluding section discussing major policy questions and future directions for research and investment.
Q. “Where do you feel Darwin’s strengths lie as a creative city?”

A. Probably in the diversity that exists across all of the industries. So whilst, obviously, my primary experience and my most familiar area is the arts in that sort of acknowledged sense, performing and visual arts, and music, etc., but then, I think the fact that we have so many different architectural styles and practitioners, that we have a university, that we have the different faculties there, and that Darwin, by its very nature of being such a cosmopolitan city, then has drawn influences from all over the place that have become distinctly Darwin.

There is no single archetype of the creative person. For some, being creative in an artistic sense is a hobby, or something done on the weekend, rather than something done for a living. For others, creativity is much more commercial and part of their business life. For this reason, there are different ways to categorise what is included in the definition of ‘creative industries’. Usually, definitions include people who work in industries such as music, film, theatre, performing arts, architecture, design, radio and television. As a recent report on innovation policy puts it:

Definitions of the scope of the ‘creative’ industries vary. The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation includes advertising and marketing; architecture, design and the visual arts; film, television and radio; music and performing arts; software development and interactive content; and writing, publishing and print media.²

In Darwin, all these industries are present to some extent, and are included here in our analysis of the Creative Tropical City.

But also, Darwin has its own creative workers who might ordinarily sit ‘outside’ the usual categories: people who make artefacts for sale at Darwin’s famous outdoor markets, such as Mick’s Whips, and cultural tourism operators. And of course, people can be creative in whatever their field of endeavour might be – we all have capacities to be creative.

In all places, many people who are involved in creativity are often not paid for their efforts – musicians in bands who have only begun to play live music; artists painting in their home studio who have not yet become professional enough to sell many of their own paintings; budding writers who are writing their first novels. For many people in this situation, they may never become professional. Others may hope for, and indeed achieve success. In Darwin, this pattern of unpaid, semi-professional or ‘pro-am’ labour is particularly apparent. Darwin is a comparatively small place and so enabling creative people to transition from hobby to professional status is difficult. Paid opportunities are limited and audiences never so large to be lucrative. How to make creative pursuits more viable is a central issue for Darwin to address.

At the same time, creative places require the kind of big grassroots creative community that abounds in Darwin to support the few that will ultimately become very successful. **Places that encourage creativity for the many, for instance through school programs, will do better on average than those places that only invest in a few ‘likely successors’.** This is the case regardless of whether most people involved in creativity do so for their own pleasure, rather than profit.

Darwin is in a peculiar situation. For its relative size, it has a vibrant and substantial grassroots creative community of artists, musicians and others who currently do not get paid, or are not making a full living from their preferred vocation. Darwin is also a networking hub for Aboriginal musicians, dancers, visual artists, radio broadcasting and film and television work – some of who are highly trained and well-paid, while others operate informally, receiving little official recognition or support. But the mechanisms for breakthrough need also to be in place.

A latent opportunity exists for Darwin to be able to capitalise on the breadth of its grassroots creative community. **It demands that ways are found to make the transition to full professionalism possible, despite the population size.** While there is no single solution, the ideas contained in the following sections (especially SMEs and micro-business; Networks; Information technology; Education & training) suggest productive ideas for ways forward.
Q. “Where do you feel Darwin’s strengths lie as a creative city?”

A: “I think its unique environmental and cultural make up, its proximity to South East Asia, its relative isolation from the rest of Australia, it’s relatively intact in terms of culture and environment and I think it just offers something that is pretty special and unique to the rest of Australia and to the rest of the world.”

A: “We have a unique cultural diversity here which has a different presence to other cities and what I’m talking about is our closeness to Asia, our closeness to Indigenous culture and as a Darwinite really you know it’s part of your job to understand that and we’re not a ghettoised community. So if I look at my friends and networks there’s a whole heap of people from different cultures; that’s very natural for most people in Darwin and it’s very hard to actually exclude yourself and only stick within one culture here. So I think from a creative perspective that access to that is totally inspiring; that’s the thing that inspires me: what does it mean to be an Australian artist who actually lives in Asia, who actually lives really close to the original Indigenous people of this country? So I feel very fortunate in that.”

A: “It is easy to go about the business because it’s a small town, you know, getting access to who you need to get access to, and finding out who you’ve got to talk to is reasonably easy, building relationships with people is reasonably quick and easy because it’s a small town. So those things make it easier. ….. there aren’t the same bureaucratic processes that I have encountered in other places.”
In the global rush to adopt a creative industries agenda, some cities and their planners make the mistake of uncritically imposing ‘one size fits all’ approaches onto unwilling communities and unsuitable sites. **Our analysis of national and international policy frameworks reveals that these work best when they are organic to their place.** Darwin is different in that to date, it does not have a creative industries policy framework. The impositions the sector has experienced come from ad-hoc decision-making that has affected their viability. When a key creative site is knocked down without thought of its role in sustaining embryonic creative activity, the sector has to enter a reboot stage. This happens over and over, creating a sense of short tenure in creative enterprise that is then attributed to the Territory’s overall population churn – when demography is not necessarily the main culprit.

To successfully position itself in the international city brand marketplace, Darwin needs to first understand what makes it truly unique as a creative city. Developing uniqueness around points of local distinction is best done in conjunction with local creatives, who are well placed to advise on local possibilities and strengths. Some cities may well need to dig deep to come up with a local story, but Darwin is blessed by a long and complex history; an embarrassment of riches in terms of its multilayered narrative underpinning its own unique place in the world. At the same time, as the mapping work completed for this research shows, the places that enable creativity and distinction are not only under threat, but because of Darwin’s size, assume a disproportionate importance in creative industry competitiveness (see Spatial Planning section).

In our study, there was great consistency around where Darwin’s strengths lie as a creative city:

- its unique geography, which gives rise to two other key strengths: the city’s multicultural diversity and the centrality of Indigenous culture to cultural life
- less hierarchical than other cities with great access to senior members of business and government
- similarly, low barriers to entry and strong networks
- strong arts and creative community, given its size; in terms of resident artists the city punches well above its weight
- the proximity to Asia, for travel and business, gives the city a non-parochial world view
- ‘give it a go’ spirit: positive, progressive, risk-taking
- youthful city with ‘sense of excitement’
- strong encouragement of individualism, sustained by a supportive community
- a university
- relative isolation and distance means creative producers are not slaves to the latest trends
- laid-back lifestyle and less competitive creative culture
- a local culture of self-reliance and making-do.

Darwin is thus extremely well-placed in terms of the key conditions for success as a creative city: an open, diverse community which welcomes newcomers. **It is the firm recommendation of this report that in whatever steps it takes to further develop the city’s creative economy potential, these unique qualities enabling Darwin’s creativity are protected, nurtured and placed at the centre of its future story.** While it is good practice to look elsewhere for possible solutions to identified problems, looking elsewhere for an off-the-shelf creative city identity is a recipe for ruining what’s already present.
Creative industries is by now a rather shop-worn term, having passed through various interpretations and models of practice both within Australia and overseas. Many of these conflicting models are determined by particular ideological interpretations of practice and are often predicated on specific disciplinary exclusions. It is important for governments and councils to understand that these exclusions are ideological and are not inherent to CI practice. Simply, it is a useful term to capture the aggregation and variety of creative practices grouped under its rubric and enables analysis of the contribution made by specific disciplines to the growth of the contemporary economy.

In terms of policy, it helps make explicit that there is in fact a definable sector, that it is not reducible to visual and performing arts, and that it needs specific forms of nurture if its economic, reputational and community benefits are to be realised. Darwin is already a creative place to be sure, but it has the opportunity to re-imagine
itself as a site of creative economic growth. Its ability to embrace venture capital models of funding and to foster and develop creative enterprise will be the determining factors in its ability to realise this potential. While much has been made of Indigenous arts, a regional economic development policy framework would see this go beyond current visual arts and performance emphases. Linking to design, to production, to software, to multi-media, to multi-outlet delivery systems that are internationally connected calls for a venture capital orientation, one that looks to the generative capacity of industry for ideas and development, rather than government policy subsidisation and unintentionally narrowed ideas for what can be sponsored and how Indigenous creativity should be supported.

To take another instance where expansive and interconnected policy is required, our mapping has shown archipelagos of creative business evolving in Darwin, which need enablers to be sustainable. Winnellie is becoming an established area for CI activity due to more affordable rents; however it is very dependant on the car for accessibility, and increased public transport to this area could prove beneficial for businesses and practitioners.

Diversification of business is one way to stabilise the greater Northern Territory economy and grow the talent of current residents. Many locals have good ideas but maybe lack confidence, knowledge and business training in methods for turning these ideas into a viable business. Mentoring, tailored CI business assistance and business incubators should be investigated, as should awareness in assisting CI companies on trade missions to Asia.

CI as a new industry thrives on cultural difference and a relaxed, tolerant environment. As noted, these are attributes identified with Darwin and in this context the city has a unique opportunity to capitalise on its ethnic diversity, location, climate and Indigenous prominence. The proximity to Asia is a key value as is the prospect of a relaxed lifestyle, which so many of its inhabitants stress as an attractive attribute of living in Australia’s northernmost city. It faces enormous challenges in securing a long term workforce given the mobility of the non-Indigenous population, but in this area CI may be an exception to the rule. Much of the multimedia industry, for example, is determined by youth employment, where the prospect of a highly mobile youthful culture could operate as a positive rather than a negative value. The city is also well positioned to operate in creative partnerships within its wider region. By building its creative workforce it would be in a position to bid for parts of major international projects. The growth and proliferation of multimedia and communication technology small businesses is a first stage toward such a position. A subsequent stage would be the combination of these businesses working in concert to bid for international projects. This is where policy can play a part, by sponsoring otherwise isolated and atomistic SMEs to form competitive consortia bids, playing on Darwin’s strengths as a multicultural hub with an interface to south-east Asia and the India-Pacific regions.

These new design industries represent the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary CI and indicate that a ‘design on everything’ approach is worth both government and industry consideration. The role of government in fostering and developing the design industries would be imperative. Transparency of tender processes and the perception, driven by government contract, that Darwin is a creative place capable of delivering unique products within the digital world would aid and abet the acceleration of Darwin as a creative technology hub within the region. This means attending to the infrastructure requirements of the CI sector; including high speed broadband at competitive prices within the CBD and hinterland. Technology and the increased awareness of good design is allowing businesses to overcome remoteness – ease of online ordering for supplies, email marketing, text marketing and website sales/info have helped to increase viability of Darwin-based business.

At this time Australia lags behind its key northern neighbours in infrastructure development and in particular poor broadband connectivity, and this represents considerable risk to its future economic sustainability. It would be worth Darwin considering whether its geographical position gives it any advantages through partnership with key providers in Asia rather than waiting for the national government to commit to establishing Australia’s infrastructure future (a scenario in which Darwin is viewed as a mendicant recipient of government largesse rather than a portal to e-trade with Asia).

Such an approach has been successfully adopted in New Zealand, which has reshaped its overall intellectual image around creative design value-add to disparate businesses and ventures.
Creative industries generate diverse jobs. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2006 creative industries employed 1,918 people in Darwin across 44 industrial sectors and over 130 types of jobs. This was equivalent to 3.5 percent of Darwin’s total workforce. While in percentage terms this sounds small, it is comparable with other more visible industries in Darwin. Although they are numerically not as significant for Darwin as government administration, defence and communities services (all of which employ substantially more people), the creative industries nonetheless employed three times the number of people than mining (at 463 people), nearly twice the number in finance and insurance (1,160 people), and substantially more than agriculture, forestry and fishing combined. The comparison would be even more favourable if part-time, intermittent and ‘pro-am’ creative workers were to be included (these types of workers are not successfully captured in the census). Importantly, as well as sharing a direct link through activities such as festivals and cultural tours, creative industries are statistically on par with the tourism industry in terms of its contributions to Darwin’s workforce.

Employment in creative industries has grown steadily in Darwin over the last decade. In 2001, the figure was 1,665 jobs in creative industries (or 3.2 percent of the workforce) and ten years ago the number was 1,427 jobs (or 3 percent of the workforce). In other words, creative industries employment increased by 35 percent over the past decade and has progressively increased its share of Darwin’s workforce.

How does this compare to the national trend?

**Darwin has slightly less employment in creative industries than the rest of the country, on average.** In 2006 creative industries accounted for 5.3 percent of the national workforce in Australia. But hidden within this are stories about different individual creative industries,

---

*Other sector includes manufacturing, distribution and retailing areas of the creative economy: Printing, Book and Magazine Wholesaling, Entertainment Media Retailing, Motion Picture and Video Distribution, Motion Picture Exhibition, Zoological and Botanical Gardens Operation, Nature Reserves and Conservation Parks Operation, Video and Other Electronic Media Rental and Hiring, Newspaper and Book Retailing, Stationery Goods Retailing*

---


5 Using a slightly different measure, Darwin supported 1,829 people working in ‘creative’ occupations (or 3.4% of all jobs in Darwin). This discrepancy occurs because the census records employment in two ways: employment as belonging to industry types (e.g. the music industry, the film industry) or occupational types (e.g. a musician, a film director). There may be ‘creative’ workers in industries not counted as ‘creative industries’ (e.g. designers working in the automobile industry are creative workers, but not in an industry considered ‘creative’), or conversely, because employees may be working in ‘creative industries’, but undertaking ‘non-creative’ occupations (e.g. an accountant working for a film production firm).
15

Industries where a comparatively smaller number of people were employed in Darwin compared to the national trend included computer software designers and related IT services, music teachers, graphic designers, advertisers and marketers. On the other hand, industries where a larger number of people were employed in Darwin compared to the national trend included free-to-air television broadcasting, newspaper publishing and journalism, university teaching, libraries, museums and nature reserves and parks. There are roughly the same relative numbers of musicians, architects, writers, performers, photographers and painters in Darwin compared to the national trend. This aligns with our other findings that Darwin lacks the subtending infrastructure required to support advanced multimedia and design work, the sectors currently pushing digital innovation on a global scale. The breakdown of Darwin’s CI employment by category is shown in Figure 1.

Indigenous people are 30 percent of the NT’s total population, but make up 13 percent of the Northern Territory’s creative workers (categorised by occupation) and 8 percent of the CI workforce (categorised by industry). Statistically, and counter-intuitively, this means that Indigenous people are under-represented in the creative occupations. It may be that the method of survey (the official census) skews this result, because much Indigenous participation in creative industries (for instance, in music and art in remote communities) is informal, part-time, ‘pro-am’ employment – like that of non-Indigenous creatives – and ‘slips through the statistical net’. Notwithstanding this complication, it does appear to be the case that the stable, full-time waged jobs in the creative occupations tend to be held less often by Aboriginal persons than ought to be the case. This is certainly a point for policy discussion. If the NT is held to be (and wants to be) a centre for Indigenous creative production, the arts and cultural tourism, then the evidence here suggests that this sentiment is yet to properly manifest itself in sufficient employment outcomes for Indigenous people.

It is important to note that, as with other industries that closely relate to CI, such as hospitality, there are wide variations not only in the types of jobs generated in creative industries, but also in the rates of pay across those jobs. While some jobs (such as architecture) earn stable, comparatively high incomes; for many others, pay is intermittent or poor. Available figures on income in the creative industries from the 2006 census – which again often misses the more casual, intermittent and semi-professional creative workers – suggest that in Darwin as a whole, the spread of incomes in creative industries is split evenly between those earning very little, those earning modest incomes, and those on high incomes (Figure 2).

This spread of incomes for Darwin’s creative workers is roughly comparable with the national picture. However, further analysis of employment data shows that Indigenous people in creative industries both in Darwin and in other areas of the NT earn less income on average. There are only half as many high income Indigenous creative workers in Darwin as the figure for all of Darwin. Likewise, while about 4 in 10 creative workers nationally earn high incomes, fewer than 1 in 20 Indigenous creative workers in the NT (outside Darwin) fall into this category. Over three-quarters of Indigenous workers in creative industries in areas of the NT other than Darwin are very low income earners.
Within its unique business environment, Darwin has many successful small CI businesses operating which have seen an opportunity, developed a niche, and been creative in dealing with the attributes of operating in a small remote city otherwise dominated by defence, energy, primary industry, government and tourism policy imperatives.

Informants to this research identified the importance of networks and word of mouth as key features of what made doing business easy in Darwin, including ease of access to regulatory authorities and those in positions of power and influence. However, this was simultaneously cited as a problem. In answer to ‘What would you change?’ many replied ‘Everyone knows everybody’, as a negative. Reputations could be easily tarnished by the same gossip routes that lead to word-of-mouth opportunities; contract work can be awarded along nepotistic lines and because of familiarity rather than via fair and transparent processes.

The ‘laidback’ character of business in Darwin was similarly mentioned in both a positive and negative way: positive in that most practitioners experience a good work/life balance, less stress and greater community acceptance; but negative in that it is difficult to provide efficient customer service if suppliers delay returning calls, are tardy in responding to emails, or are slack in providing quotes. Admittedly, this systemic issue affects many business operations in the Northern Territory, not just CI. But CI businesses can be disproportionately affected given their fragility and invisibility as an industry sector.

Many CI businesses are self-employed practitioners who choose to work this way for family or other reasons, not wanting the responsibility of going ‘big’ or alone, or in some cases, not wanting to get involved in what they see to be cliques and the politics of the business community. But businesses that wish to expand and be more nationally competitive quote the problems of finding suitably qualified staff, shortage of affordable housing accommodation for new employees, unprofessional services, turnover and retention rates as barriers to entrepreneurial CI success in Darwin.

The high-population turnover rates due to contract positions in government, primary industries and defence, often mean that new employees arrive but then leave when their partner is transferred. Valuable staff are open to being poached, which has forced CI ventures into a permanent juggling role: taking advantage of skilled
sojourners as and when they arrive, depending on local contractors and networkers to fill the gaps in between, always precarious, struggling to create competitive career pathways and high-end professional advancement for valuable staff.

Many businesses endeavour to support local industry where possible, only sourcing ‘down south’ or abroad when necessary. Local connections are valued by many, knowing that if an urgent job needed to be done, then local working partnerships are necessary to facilitate this. Indeed, as the following section elaborates, where efforts might be made to improve Darwin’s creative industries and their viability, networking ought to be a central concern. This could include better incorporation of CI representatives into export trade fairs and tours; help for budding creative workers to access national management and representation; sharing local expertise on finding new interstate and international audiences for creative work; and improving broadband coverage to enable web-based creative practitioners to network more effectively and to undertake their own work more reliably and efficiently.

**Simon Says TV**

Darwin-born Simon Manzie runs television production company Simon Says TV. He worked interstate and abroad during his 20s before returning to Darwin and starting the business from home in 2000. He now employs six staff at his Winnellie studio, and filmed the Darwin section of the Amazing Race, a wildlife documentary for the BBC and other major projects here, interstate and internationally.

‘We’re trying to change the concept that in Darwin you need people from Sydney or Melbourne to do projects. So, it’s a battle that you’ve got to keep moving on, because Darwin is only small. But I’ve found that a lot of people in the Territory have gone away and come back with the right skills and are now working just as strongly as what they would if they lived in Sydney or Melbourne, or somewhere like that.’
Creative places are said to be defined by their social, cultural and economic networks. Successful places are those that interlink people, firms and markets in numerous relationship webs both locally and further afield. This is particularly so for creative industries, which tend to have intricate relationships between suppliers, support services, performers, venues and audiences. These relationships are social, such as when musicians or artists ‘hang out’ together in a scene; and economic, such as when complementary skills among individuals form the basis of commercial agreements. To imagine what is meant by this, watch the credits roll at the end of a motion picture. The long list of support staff and tasks undertaken to produce even a small film attest to the webs of people and small firms involved in creative production.

For this reason, creative industries have comparatively high multiplier effects for local economies. Where creative industries are present, they tend to involve lots of individuals and small businesses within and beyond a city, in webs of relationships, which means that investment flows penetratingly within a regional economy, and many jobs are created per dollar of investment. Compelling comparisons can be now made, with the help of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, between employment multipliers for different industries. In mining, for instance, nine jobs are created on average for every $1 million in new investment. Yet in music, television and film production the figure is well over 30 jobs per $1 million in investment. Creative industries, with their more intensely interlinked networks of workers, micro-businesses and subcontractors, generate more ‘bang for your buck’ than larger, individual flagship investments such as mines, building construction projects, or large plant facilities for the manufacturing sector. Though the creative economy constitutes only approximately 3 to 4 percent of Darwin’s economy, and the scale of most activities remains small, multipliers from that small percentage are very effective.

In our Creative Tropical City project, we mapped these networks according to responses by creative workers about their activities. We recorded the places where inputs, materials and support services were sourced, as well as specific details about where, beyond Darwin, people had clients, sold their works, traveled to network with similar people, or held social relationships with people within their industry. These results indicate how well-networked Darwin is internally, and further afield.

Results show that Darwin’s creative industries are strongly embedded in the city economy. 68 percent of all supplier relationships for creative workers occurred within the Darwin metropolitan area. Indeed, creative industries are probably more embedded – and thus create even stronger local multipliers – in Darwin than the same industries in other cities. Because of Darwin’s remoteness, creative workers have to rely on local suppliers and services for most of their needs. For the remainder of supplier networks (about 30 percent were with suppliers outside Darwin), the city remains connected to a diverse set of places through supplier relationships, both interstate and overseas (Figure 3).
The picture is similarly encouraging when examining networks connecting creative workers in Darwin and clients and markets beyond Darwin. Creative producers are positioned in an intricate network of relationships regionally (especially with remote Aboriginal communities) (Figure 4), as well as nationally (with strong links to other state capitals), and internationally (Figure 5). These networks are important to acknowledge and debate for their future possibilities. For example, among Darwin’s creative workers numerous existing relationships with markets in Southeast Asia were documented, but equally, many creative producers interviewed for this project mentioned Southeast Asian links as important for Darwin, without actually being able to cite examples of such links in their own work. Everyone agrees on the opportunities for and importance of networks with Southeast Asia – but more work is needed to capitalise on this dormant potential. To reiterate a key finding of our research, this potential has not been capitalised on to date because the creative industries have not been seen as an important industry group for the NT’s economic development.
Access to IT is a core need of Darwin’s creative SME sector. It is another enabler and inhibitor, used to overcome the ‘tyranny of distance’ – particularly for sourcing material not readily available through local avenues – but also, depending on one’s resources and places of collaboration, underscoring the remaining tyrannies. Managers spoke of the key role of fast broadband in ensuring their business remains in touch with leading developments from larger interstate firms, enabling contacts to be maintained for professional development opportunities and the like.

The internet helps give expression to Darwin’s place within international networks (i.e. given its proximity with Asia and the amount of business done there), above and beyond any mitigation of distance from the Australian capitals. But of course, issues of broadband speed and reliability, plus access – especially with collaborating partners in rural, isolated and poor and poorly serviced parts of the region – remain key concerns; as does the lack of access to free wireless or broadband within the CBD.

This last finding emerged through consultations with the tourism sector as much as with CI practitioners. Both groups highly value the access to free internet at the Northern Territory Library and for those in the know, the Library can be a key convening space. As one informant noted: “because Darwin is a very small town [and] Taiwanese people like to use the internet a lot, they all go to the NT Library for free wireless internet, so in NT Library you can meet all the Taiwanese in town.” Others called for free wireless spots along Mitchell Street or the mall to re-energise these precincts, inviting visitors and creatives to share space while doing their business. Such facilities would enable people to meet and work collectively, including travellers and those unable to afford a connection at home, and be part of making Darwin a key player in the creative industries.
Michael Hawkes has over twelve years experience in digital communications and operates his new media studio Captovate in Darwin’s CBD. When asked ‘What impediments do you perceive there to be in relation to inhibiting creativity in Darwin?’ his response was immediate: ‘Broadband speed.’

To him, the lack of investment in broadband infrastructure and lack of competitive speed throughout Darwin is an impingement on growth to many businesses, especially those dealing with internet marketing, web and software development.
Critically: Darwin is a university city.

The need to make this a key assertion and statement of fact is remarkable in itself. A city of barely 120,000 people with its own university is astonishing and rare in the Australian experience. It represents a tremendous cultural and intellectual asset to the city.

In terms of CI, the Charles Darwin University (CDU) acts as a hub for languages and strategic research as well as a home base for orchestras, exhibitions and design culture. The university's contribution is direct through the provision of CI literate graduates in the key disciplines of Design, New Media, Music, Technology and Engineering. It is from these clusters that the Territory's software engineers, communication designers, animators and creative entrepreneurs have and will emerge. Indirectly the university contributes through the provision of embedded CI practitioners in other disciplines as well as the cognate creative disciplines of contemporary music, architecture, writing and business. A further consideration is the role of the university as an employer, attracting and bringing to the city a diverse range of expertise and experience.

Additionally there is the potential of the university to attract and recruit international students to the city. In other cities of similar size the role of the university in attracting international students has been of central focus to both the regional government and business community. Dunedin in the south island of New Zealand is a good example of the benefits that may ensue from a community embracing the concept of a university city. Otago University is branded by the city as a key attribute. The supermarkets reflect the wide variety of produce demanded by international students and the city's by-laws were amended to encourage cafes and small performance venues to make the city a more desirable place for young students to study and live. Even the graduation parade takes place through the centre of the city with iconic coverage in the local media and the active support of the whole community.

Darwin is uniquely placed to attract and take advantage of the growth in demand for university places from Asia projected to increase dramatically over the next five years. However in order to harness these benefits to the city a fundamental realignment of priorities would need to take place.

The growth of CI in Darwin will necessitate a linking of pathways of study from pre-school

---

6 http://www.otago.ac.nz/
through primary and secondary education to VET and university. All of these educational entities play important individual roles but collectively they represent the edifice that is the intellectual life of the city. Examples from overseas indicate that the role of education in general and the teaching of some key disciplines such as Music at all levels of study and irrespective of musical ability has a pronounced effect on the creative development of communities and the ranking of cities in innovation measures.

At the tertiary level any disconnect between the university, the government and the community represents potentially the biggest long term risk to Darwin’s future CI development. The university’s city precinct campus is located at Casuarina, a site that our research revealed as a cultural ‘dead zone’, with little activity registering in the mapping project. The CBD for retail is seen as more creative than Casuarina, and mention was made of the Waterfront Development hopefully attracting local business, not national franchises, so a more Darwin ‘feel’ is created. Casuarina and Homemaker Village cater for national chains, and aren’t perceived as creative places by most people.

This represents both a concern and an opportunity.

As an opportunity there is the possibility of co-location of existing arts infrastructure with and on the university’s Casuarina campus. By way of example there is the problem of the theatre and performing arts venues for up-and-coming local practitioners in the city. They are either too small or located in expensive and inappropriate accommodations. By co-location on the university campus they would both open up the university, giving new meaning to the ‘university without walls’ concept and making the operation of multiple performance companies affordable and sustainable, while simultaneously reigniting the cultural life of Darwin’s northern suburbs where a substantial proportion of its population lives.

A practical means of both assisting the profile of the university and of bringing advanced CI scholars and practitioners to Darwin on a sessional basis to assist the professionalisation of the scene could be realised by dedicating public housing apartments to support visiting scholar and creative industry residential accommodation.

It has been suggested that the university could investigate having a CBD office to enable a physical city centre presence. As one informant put it, “at present, Darwin does not strike the newcomer as being a university city” – yet this is a sleeper asset for a renewed CI identity and profile. The embrace of the university as a key value and cultural attribute of the city contributes to future-proofing the city’s survival; diversifying its portfolio towards a re-conception of Darwin as a smart place uniquely located at Australia’s border with the north.
Within cities, creativity has its own internal geography. Specific areas become renowned as ‘hubs’ of creative activity. Of course, major institutions such as galleries and performance venues such as the Darwin Entertainment Centre can act as magnets. But creativity can also be ‘hidden’ throughout the city: bands playing in garages, artists working in home studios, dancers rehearsing in local school halls or above an accountancy firm in a suburban shopping centre. In relatively small places such as Darwin, an additional vulnerability attends creative spaces: valued locations can be eradicated without appreciation of their importance; and unlike larger metropolitan areas, rebuilding the synergies required to get something back off the ground is disproportionately difficult.

Recognising the importance of space to creativity, this project undertook a mapping exercise in order to understand the internal dynamics of creativity within Darwin’s urban and suburban matrix. Our results show patterns of employment, ‘hidden’ creativity and iconic ‘hubs’ of creativity which planning ought to recognise and be sympathetic towards.

Areas where large numbers of people employed in the creative industries live include Stuart Park, the CBD, Larrakeyah, Nightcliff, Rapid Creek, Leanyer and Karama (Figure 6). Interestingly, growing numbers of creative industries workers live outside the Darwin city area, in Palmerston, Litchfield, Howard Springs and Humpty Doo. This finding suggests that for reasons of affordability and lifestyle, creative workers are moving out of the city area to live, while maintaining working relationships and business activities within the city. For those who do not own their own houses outright, affordable accommodation is a marked concern and listed as a reason for possible departure.

When we asked creative workers “where is Darwin’s creative epicentre?” a different geography of the city was revealed (Figure 7). The city CBD and Parap emerged as hubs of activity – and although suburbs like Nightcliff and Rapid Creek were identified by some creative workers, they were not as prominent as employment figures would suggest. This shows that very specific public urban sites are catalysts for creativity. In Parap especially, the markets have become an attraction in themselves,

**Figure 6** Map of total employment in creative industries, by Statistical Local Area (SLA), ABS 2006
as well as making viable nearby art galleries and other creative businesses. In the CBD, sites including Browns Mart, Frog Hollow Centre for the Arts, and Happy Yess were repeatedly identified as of vital importance to the city's creative life. Mitchell Street and the Mall, in contrast, barely rated a mention.

A different picture again was revealed by mapping the places within Darwin where creative workers sourced their materials and support services – their ‘inputs’ (Figure 8). The city centre became even more important, with Winnellie, Parap, Coconut Grove and Nightcliff the most important suburban locations.

The story is that there are multiple layers to the creative life of Darwin. Places with statistically high numbers of employed persons in creative industries might not necessarily be the same places that people imagine as ‘creative’. Different kinds of spatial planning implications stem from this. Identifying ‘iconic’ creative spaces is important, because these generate the productivity that creates reputation and presence. In small places experiencing rapid development, such as Darwin, planning needs to develop with acute sensitivity to what gives a place its vitality. This appears especially the case for Parap and its markets. The role markets play in Darwin’s urban fabric, and creative life, is quite unique internationally. Opportunities exist to capitalise on this to further encourage the markets’ reputations as places to sample local creativity.

Meanwhile, the CBD – which is already quickly being transformed by high-rise development – could be imagined and better branded as the creative heart of Darwin. In the CBD, exercises such as an empty space audit ought to be considered by Darwin City Council and the Northern Territory Government, to explore possible future locations for creative services, and more permanent venues found for Happy Yess and other arts organisations. The CBD’s already strong position as the functional centre of Darwin’s creative services could be capitalised on in more visible ways (with obvious benefits to the tourism industries and existing retailers). In Chicago, USA, a similar exercise led to community arts organisations accessing otherwise empty retail space, forging new relationships with local creative communities and bringing people back to dilapidated or under-utilised main streets.\(^7\) In Hobart and Geelong, incorporation of not-for-profit arts and youth cultural activities into the redevelopment of waterfront districts has lent them legitimacy, and added much-needed vibrancy, preventing them from becoming

\(^7\) [www.cityofchicago.org](http://www.cityofchicago.org) Open Studio Program

---

**Figure 7 Map of ‘creative epicentres’ in Darwin - from interview mental mapping**
odes to dead investments. Similar strategies could be considered in Darwin.

Such ideas ought to be logically integrated with policy-making around Darwin’s city-centre as a district of nightlife (see section ‘Darwin by night’). Creative industries and organisations could fill ‘dead zones’ in the CBD’s night-time geography and enhance the vibrancy and quality of streetscapes encountered at night. Imagine the youthful creativity of Happy Yess bringing life to the Mall after hours!

But also, there is a need to acknowledge and facilitate planning for the ‘back office’ locations for creative production. The creative city needs affordable places for artists to work and live, whether that be cheap housing, studio space, practice rooms, or community facilities for performance groups and supporting organisations. Some of these spaces are most logically provided in light industrial estates or near warehousing and port facilities. Given Darwin’s low-density, spread out suburban form, other sites with potential include the city’s suburban shopping villages (like those in Parap, Coconut Grove and Nightcliff), closer to where creative workers reside. Subsidised accommodation for visiting creative industry practitioners and theorists would help put Darwin on the international CI map, in partnership with the university, as word of mouth would assure reputational pulling power.

---


---

**Figure 8 Map of input materials and support services for the creative industries by SLA (interviewee data)**
The Happy Yess Community Arts venue is a key creative place for CI practitioners. Housed in a small building on Bennett Street in the CBD, the venue has operated on short-term leases due to planned redevelopment of the site and hence demolition of the current building. The threat to its existence and the potential real loss to the creative community, especially to that of original music, but also as an art space and networking hub, was a real concern to many.

Happy Yess grew from the needs and desires of local musicians to have a live venue that specialised in original music. Open three nights a week, the venue is recognised as the place to see original music. It operates as a non-profit organisation.

As manager Zeb Olsen said, ‘Happy Yess is the only place exclusively dedicated to original music in Darwin. Before Happy Yess there had been nothing like it for a long time, and if something happens to the venue there will be nothing, so it’s really important. We’re under pressure because we’re still a fledgling organisation that relies a lot on volunteers. We don’t have much money but we all feel that it’s really, really important, a cultural thing that we need to keep supporting.’
MONSOONAL CREATIVITY: AN INSPIRATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Darwin’s creative practitioners told us that the natural environment is fundamental to local creativity. Darwin’s unique climate, proximity to the sea, seasonal rhythms, risk of cyclones, the relative dearth of indoor spaces and the emphasis on outdoor festivals, not to mention markets and performances during the dry season, all means that nature figures strongly as an inspiration for creativity.

In this respect Darwin challenges conventional creative industries thinking, which has mainly focussed on large, densely-populated post-industrial urban centres of the global north. This points to a more complex relationship between culture and nature than has been acknowledged in much policy and industry discourse regarding the knowledge economy, yet this has been rarely addressed beyond a focus on street-scaping and parklands in much of the thinking on creative cities.

Darwin reminds us that there is a lot more to creativity than critical mass, global companies and a constant rubbing together with other creative industry practitioners. It reminds us that creativity has long also been deeply connected to solitude, space for reflection and nature as a source of inspiration. Darwin’s distinctive environment, climate and seasons press themselves into one’s experience of place, and this is central to its productivity. Darwin’s proximity to stunning natural spaces enables creative producers to escape the hustle and bustle characteristic of southern Australian cities, finding opportunities to ‘chill out’, visit peaceful places, and find the requisite time to concentrate on their work and new ideas. Nature is also a competitive lifestyle marketing advantage, being a key reason cited for why both local creative producers and newly arrived people choose to stay.

Figure 9 Map of ‘creative inspiration’ in Darwin - from interview mental mapping
The central role the local natural environment plays in defining what people mean when they cite ‘inspiration’ and ‘vibe’ clearly emerges when they were prompted to elaborate in the interviews:

“That sounds a bit airy-fairy, but I think the other extraordinary advantage is the beauty of the place and the surrounds; the physical environment.”

“...there’s the different culture, and obviously the environment, the sunset, the beach, and the colours…”

This finding is additionally supported by the maps drawn by participants when asked to indicate any places ‘that inspire you to be creative in your work’. The resulting maps clearly present a focus on Darwin’s extensive coastal frontage to the Timor Sea (see Figure 9).

We further asked people to consider the built environment and their work place by asking: ‘What is it about your workplace that enables you to be more creative in your work? What are the qualities of that place?’ The responses to this question are summarised in Figure 10.
“I find the development really ugly. I think it’s really, really ugly and it’s all about enclosing and shutting out the environment. I worry about that and I worry about the affect on people’s psyche with that too; if you’re just always closing yourself in your little concrete box with the air-con on, the outside world becomes something that you’re trying to keep out rather than embrace. If it means that people only go out of their little dog boxes in the dry season then I think that’s a bit sad really. I worry for the way that Darwin’s heading with lots of high rise and concrete because it is a tropical city and I think that we should actually be embracing that as much as we can, plus the fact that we’ve got so little of our history left standing and what little there is seems to be being dismantled or knocked down or put on the backs of trucks and stuck in a block out in Virginia. I just think that’s really sad.”

“There’s an ongoing issue of whether we should have high rise in Darwin or should Darwin remain the little tropical houses with louvers and 30 degree pitched rooves and all that sort of thing, but unfortunately that’s not the real world. The real world is that we have to live in less space and we have to go up. There’s limited land and the cost of development is such. So the city will develop like every other city in the world; there’s no city in the world that doesn’t have high rise, so it’s going to happen.”

Alongside a focus on the natural environment, creative practitioners expressed a strong desire to see what’s left of Darwin’s unique architectural character preserved and taken forth into a new century, facing as it is a global crisis around sustainable living. For creative industry participants, Burnett-inspired architecture and a capacity to live outside in and around nature form a key part of the desired lifestyle on offer.

“Sympathetic tropical design, maximising natural air movement, shading and indoor/outdoor spaces, has a key role to play in this, and represents a growth opportunity for the local architecture and design sector, beyond the Darwin market. Again, this requires an encounter with and resolution of the competing tensions which come with Darwin’s other characteristics. As a defence town, a strong imperative exists to build housing precincts which reduce contact with the environment; that are low maintenance and highly transferrable to sojourning tenants. This translates to conventional designs built to efficiently contain air conditioning, using robust building materials (cement and besa blocks) to reduce repair and maintenance overheads.

Of course, this desire for tropical architecture is also beset with contradictions. While it is easy to call for architecture and planning that more appropriately reflects tropical living by integrating indoor and outdoor spaces, the competing imperatives of Darwin being a defence town and not an independent city need also to be confronted. Many CI practitioners have work which needs to be protected from extreme temperatures and from the mould and damp of the monsoon season. Their cry was for access to affordable air-conditioned storage and work venues. As one reader of a draft of this report put it, “it is a fact that, in Darwin, nature is out to kill you—we need to build buildings to protect ourselves from the environment!”

This said, the greatest concern emerging from the project was the potential for Darwin to lose its unique character and instead become a facsimile of other places should development be allowed to run rife without planning intervention. Residents expressed shock that most of Baz Luhrman’s recent film Australia was filmed elsewhere, as so few examples of the original Darwin architecture remained. There is clearly a need for preservation of ‘history’ to contribute to Darwin city’s character, while developing a unique tropical savannah look for the future.
The dry season sees Darwin full of tourists and other visitors; all the major festivals and other events occur at this time (Darwin Festival, Mindil markets, Telstra Art Awards, etc.). Infrastructure is at a premium, even with the effective utilisation of outdoor spaces which require portable hire facilities (stages, sound equipment, seating, caterers, portable toilets, and so forth). Most of the year’s high profile action occurs during these months, hence the desirability of some recuperative downtime during Darwin’s version of the ‘summer season’ (the build-up and the wet) when much of the local commerce also winds down for Christmas. Literally, the climate requires a degree of turning inward, away from the outdoor lifestyle of the dry. Interviewees take advantage of this time to plan for the new year; head into the studio and prepare new artworks for exhibition in the dry; start new projects; and be inspired by the changing colours and environmental renewal brought about by the rain.

The build up to and ascent of the monsoon season is thus a productive time for creative practitioners; one where the focus is on creating and planning. It is thus the ideal time to conduct training programs around business skills, small-scale entrepreneurialism or specific creative practices. Another suggestion would be the establishment of visiting artists and artists-in-residence programs in the wet season, rather than in the already overloaded dry season.

Darwin’s seasons also pose unique challenges to mobility. At the heart of much creative cities thinking is a commitment to moving away from cars as preferred modes of transport, and instead planning for increased pedestrian and cycling traffic. Darwin’s geography and climate mean that cars will likely remain the main form of transport for the foreseeable future, but some simple planning initiatives to make walking around Darwin more comfortable during the extremes of wet and heat that the city experiences can only benefit the local economy generally. Visitors often don’t have access to vehicles for much of their stay in Darwin, and can feel rather limited in the parts of the city they get to see. This is a key complaint from tourists. An example of this is a public bus route that does not service the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT), leaving tourists, often elderly, to walk in the rain or extreme heat between the main road and MAGNT. Linking key sites via covered walkways which shelter from the sun in the dry and rain in the wet would make the CBD a more user-friendly space. Local artists, designers and landscape architects can be brought in to ensure that the covered walkways are not only functional, but represent Darwin as a unique creative city.
A REMOTE TROPICAL CITY
While to much of the rest of the country Darwin appears far away and remote, for the creative practitioners who live here the distance from the Australian eastern seaboard was far less of an issue, with proximity to Asia (and the rest of the world) defining more how they located themselves. Indeed while distance was clearly an issue for many, especially those with family interstate, in an age of relatively affordable air travel, not to mention communication and mail order via the internet, no overwhelming negative feeling of ‘remoteness as lack’ emerged in the Creative Tropical City study. Instead, there was a feeling of creative Darwin being well connected into both global and local networks.

Remoteness is as much a state of mind as a geographical reality. The story that emerges around creative practice in Darwin is by and large one of opportunity: to work amongst a diverse multicultural community, and to take advantage of close ties with near neighbours such as Indonesia, East Timor, and the Philippines. Darwin’s diverse cultural population and close proximity to Asia contributes very positively to a unique sense of place. For Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike, the reality that the land around them is anything but empty and remote, but rather home to the Larrakia and other Indigenous people, and central to their universe and networks, informs a post-colonial understanding of Darwin’s location in the world. This is coupled with a post-Keating awareness of Darwin as Australia’s gateway to the booming markets of Asia, which is built on the far deeper reality of Darwin as an Asian city – trading with and being home to peoples from Asia for centuries.

But Darwin’s location far removed physically from the urban centres of Australia cannot be totally ignored. The distance can contribute significantly to costs: both in terms of importing materials and talent, and to exporting them. Touring exhibitions or performers is not a cheap undertaking from Darwin, and Singapore or Jakarta is as cost-effective an option as Melbourne, which can create its own unique opportunities. For some creative practitioners the relative distance from other centres is a boon; it allows them to develop creatively, free to pursue their own vision, unfettered by the demands of metropolitan trends, fashion and funding imperatives. For others, the isolation is a professional isolation, where one lacks the stimulation of a competitive environment. Recruitment issues remain tantamount, but the inability to easily be challenged by the best creators in your field was by far the most important negative associated with distance and isolation.

Q: What would you change?

A: Lack of a critical dialogue given a small scene where everyone knows (and is dependent on) everyone else
The demography of Australia’s Northern Territory is quite distinct from the other states. It is the least populous jurisdiction with only 206,000 people (or roughly one percent of the national population). It is relatively young – there are more children and more people in their 20s and 30s, with a small but growing elderly population. Within the non-Indigenous population, it experiences high in- and out-migration of younger workers and a high out-migration of retirees.

As the country’s smallest and northernmost capital city, Darwin markets itself as having a distinctive multicultural mix and laid back attitude toward ethnic diversity, and certainly informants to this report highly value these attributes. Many respondents spoke in glowing terms of their Indigenous to non-Indigenous collaborations. The lived reality is slightly more complex. While Aboriginal people own roughly fifty percent of the land in the Northern Territory and form one-third of the total population, only eleven percent of the people residing in Darwin identify as Aboriginal. Where once there was only one Anglo-European settler for six Chinese and ten Aboriginal residents, now the proportions have shifted. And while there is an honouring of the ethics of tolerance and, particularly among the CI community, an explicit celebration of diversity, there is an underbelly of intolerance and anxiety about Aboriginal issues in particular, realised in the multiple forms of racial inequality and spatial policing present in the everyday life of the suburbs and the CBD.

The Indigenous demographic profile looks like that of populations from less developed countries, combining high fertility and mortality, and little interstate migration. Professor Jon Altman from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University has recently warned that Darwin’s demographics could soon resemble those of Papua New Guinea’s troubled capital Port Moresby. We are mimicking Port Moresby’s dual society, with many of the radical poor living in ghettos or camps, experiencing poor health and worsening education outcomes. “To put it simplistically, Darwin has the characteristics of a classic dual economy: urban rich/rural poor, but with a postcolonial racial element white rich/poor blacks” (Altman, per comm. Sept 2008).

This postcolonial profile affects the style and manner of creative industry policy framings in the north, which have tended to bifurcate along an Indigenous/other binary. While Indigenous creativity is celebrated, some Indigenous practitioners told us they felt a pressure to confine their creativity to reified formats.

“Unless you fit the interpretation of what an Aboriginal urban artist should be then you’re not going to get the opportunity.”

They felt that Indigenous art has to match an image of what Indigenous creativity is meant to look like, before it can be commercially recognised. It seems that while
visual and performing arts have been promoted for Indigenous creative output in the Northern Territory, multi-media (software design, animation), architecture, contemporary music (country, reggae, hip-hop), or commercial design beyond craft products have not been so well supported.

But ironically, it is out of such ostensible straight-jacketing that creativity can flourish. Indigenous creators are experimenting with the liberated forms enjoyed by contemporary non-Indigenous creative industry producers across the world. It will be the boundary-pushing of an engaged CI sector that will resist perceived attempts to lock Aboriginal artists into an a-historical creative existence, allowing unique contemporary and hybrid forms to develop.

The obverse of the complaint of Indigenous producers that they have to perform a certain commoditised version of Aboriginality, one which conforms to tourist expectations and funding formulae, is the counterpoint put forth by some non-Indigenous creators. These feel that, unless they are producing work in partnership with Indigenous people, then their own creative contributions are marginalised. Here, the perception is of a certain heavy-handedness within existing capacity-building funding arrangements which have an unstated bias against the non-ethnically identified producer.

Q: How central is Indigenous art and culture to Darwin’s creative practices?

A: I do think it’s very important but I also think that it’s very separated from non-Indigenous and I find that a big problem.

A: Oh very big, it’s very big. It also connects up with tourism and it’s also connected to the history of the country.

A: You escape the competition of Darwin to encounter a new competition: one ruled by race.
The growth in the economic and social significance of the cultural industries in the latter part of the twentieth century has given rise to an increasing recognition of what has come to be known as the ‘night-time economy’. Best represented in Darwin by Mitchell Street, the night-time economy focuses on the role that bars, clubs, restaurants and ancillary retail plays in both local economies and creative innovation. As a key part of the local economy, all these evening ventures are employers and purchasers of goods and services creating flow-on benefits way beyond the obvious conduct of their business. They are also key sites for the emergence of micro-entrepreneurial creative businesses, for example around music distribution and publicity.

In a city like Darwin, heavily invested as it is in the tourism industry, having an accessible and safe night-time economy, inviting to visitors, is central. Once off the Mitchell Street strip, at present there are few places for travellers to go safely. Taxi drivers warn women travelling alone to avoid the Esplanade at night, and most visitors are reliant on taxis or other forms of transport to get down to the Mindil Beach Markets in the dry season. While locals know of other entertainment options, this containment of the tourist market to specific sites limits the city’s capacity to broaden its creative base and the opportunities to expand retail opportunities in the cool of the evening when both travellers and locals alike are likely to get out for a stroll. For many of our respondents, their ‘day job’, whether or not it was itself in a creative industry, was just one of a number of creative involvements. As a result, and given Darwin’s unique climate and reliance on pro-am labour, evenings are important times for the conduct of our respondents’ creative practice (see Figure 11).

To this end, giving more thought to the provision of safe lighting, especially to seaside sites, and linking them to the Mitchell Street precinct should be a priority; especially for during the peak dry season when after dark is a great time for people to be out and about, rather than in the height of the day’s heat. The first project could be the development of a safe walking path from the CBD to Mindil, which given sufficient Thursday evening foot traffic could organically give rise to small-scale creative business possibilities.

Importantly too, creative industries approaches have provided evidence to policy makers about the ‘research and development’ role these kinds of outlets play in the local economy. This is vital given the law and order issues, health and noise problems sometimes associated with late-night venues serving alcohol. The case for the key role to be played by the night-time scene as a site of innovation is most clearly evident in the case of live music performers. Local pubs, clubs and other venue sites have a long history as the places where performers earn their stripes, and learn their trade. In terms of the music industry business model, they are integral to the creative
economy in terms of developing a fan base, being a focus for promotion (flow-on effects to design, printing and media production industries), and as sites where new acts are unearthed or 'discovered'. Successful venues are anchor tenants on recreation strips (and are thus also at threat when processes of gentrification raise rents); and where performers learn 'stage-craft', how they relate to their audience.

Interstate, these debates have played out around the issue of live music and concerns over noise pollution as gentrification and the development of inner-city and/or mixed zoning high and medium density housing bring residential and commercial premises into closer proximity. Mistakes have been made that have killed off venues, squeezing opportunities for local artists. As Darwin moves through its current development boom, largely bound by the city's present footprint, these lessons from elsewhere are best kept in mind, especially given the relative absence of low-cost appropriate building stock for community-run live performance venues. The successful maintenance of a lively local music scene cannot purely be left to the market or intermittent visits to and from remote communities to sort out, especially in a city dependent upon a seasonal tourist market. When tourist numbers drop during the build-up and wet season, the Mitchell Street venues do not bring in the money of the peak season and live music acts become too expensive to hire. This is just one reason why local venues with a focus on a local audience, such as Happy Yess, are vital to a healthy creative milieu.

Among the initiatives local government should consider to help protect this section of the local creative sector:

- Develop 'Prior occupancy'/First occupancy' rights, and enshrine these in legislation. What these bring into effect is a sense of 'buyer beware' when it comes to purchasing residential property close to pre-existing venues.
- This can also be backed up by a requirement for developers and venues to work together to cover the cost of double-glazing of any residential premises built with a particularly acute exposure to possible noise from an existing venue.
- Subsidise the development of the marketability of local performers by working with existing training programs and organisations (such as AusMusic) to develop business and performance skills.
CI, TOURISM AND VISITOR PERCEPTIONS
The unique natural beauty of the surrounding geographical environment of Darwin has been marketed as an asset to attract visitors, with the result that the city of Darwin is often simply a convenient base to transit to the national parks of Litchfield, Kakadu and Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge).

Efforts to elevate the profile and status of Darwin city from a mere stopover to one worthy of exploration and to extend the average tourist length of stay coincides with marketing strategies for the new waterfront precinct and convention centre that are targeted at attracting conferences and business travellers from the external markets internationally and interstate. To date, the emphasis has been on creating tourist attractions within the CBD, which have been somewhat balkanised along Mitchell Street. There has been less of an emphasis on creating opportunities for easy interaction with locals who work outside the service sector, yet paradoxically this is often a key aspiration for tourists: gaining local intelligence about where to eat and what to do can lend excitement and a sense of authenticity to a journey, but this kind of knowledge is not necessarily available from café workers along the tourist strip, who are often also sojourners themselves.

Darwin city’s lack of iconic landmarks reaffirms the necessity to develop local knowledge as a cultural competitive advantage in the marketing of creative sites for tourist consumption and assist in the creation of a distinct image of Darwin. The tourism sector is recognised as one of the largest revenue contributors to Darwin and the Northern Territory economy with an estimated 1.5 million annual visitors. Tourism NT has identified specific target market sectors. The domestic market is described as ‘The Spirited Traveller’; and the international market as ‘The Experience Seeker’. The profiles of these markets are characterised as tourists who seek authentic personal experiences, social interactions and the opportunity to meet and interact with locals. A key motivation is the desire to have exposure to unique experiences and participate in the lifestyle and culture rather than just simply observing.

These tourist motivations were reinforced in discussions with local tourism operators during the Creative Tropical City Project. Tourists deliberately sought information about places in the city that provided the opportunity to interact with locals and engage fully with the destination in an effort to experience ‘the real Darwin’.

Creative cities make use of a destination’s assets to offer unique tourism experiences. But for the curious tourist who in Darwin gets off the beaten path and away from souvenir shops, in search of the creative buzz or a glimpse of a CI practitioner ‘doing their stuff’, lack of existing signage, content and public transport systems let them down. There is a mismatch between what tourists potentially want and the vernacular creativity which exists in Darwin.

As revealed through our mapping, the majority of Darwin’s creative industries are located and operate centrally around the CBD zone. This provides the scope for urban initiatives to anchor the creative resources in Darwin city and satisfy the experiential element so keenly sought by tourists. Greater promotion of the existing hubs of creative activity located at Brown’s Mart, Happy Yess and Frog Hollow Centre for the Arts, through the provision of specific tourist information regarding activities and performances do not quite fill the vacuum but are important.

There needs to be accidental and purchase-free encounters, not just ones which require prior booking and prior knowledge, for visitors to feel they have encountered a vibrant scene and to be talking about it with animation long after. For the grass roots CI organisations struggling to get their concerns heard within government, stronger arguments need to be mounted about the need to connect tourist Darwin to its local creative scenes, outside of festivals and markets.

© Dennis Shoesmith
In order to harness the identified CI attributes of Darwin, the city needs to bring the whole of community on board and to establish a clear set of priority goals.

Darwin is northern Australia’s iconic capital city. Above and beyond the meridian drawn from the mining and tourism boom towns of Broome and Cairns it sits in the ‘far north’ as Australia’s only equivalent of a border city. It is defined by its place and position at the palpable and permeable edge of the Australian/Asian divide. Like other ‘border’ cities, Darwin is steeped in hybridity, its atmosphere one of cultural pluralism, with Australia’s largest proportionate urban Indigenous population and a rich ethnic community of diverse migrant populations. Some communities, like those from the Indonesian archipelago, have ancient connection to the Indigenous peoples of the north; others like the Chinese and Greeks have old and established histories entwined with the growth and development of the city. More recently the Timorese and the Filipino communities have established large communities in Darwin.

‘Darwin’s a really unique city, it’s not like anywhere else in Australia, in the sense of there’s really no minority or majority groups here, you know. The population is small, there are only about 100,000 in Darwin and another 100,000 in the whole territory, so 200,000 is not very many people for such a large area. But out of all that you have everyone represented here, the Sri Lankans, the Thais, the Greeks, the Italians, the Chinese, the Indigenous people, Indian people. That’s really wonderful, I think. It would be really great if we could embrace that more.’

This rich cultural and linguistic mix gives Darwin its pivotal place in Australia’s urban landscape and represents the city’s intellectual capital from which to generate sustainable economic development. The future of the city requires a clear determination to grow these cultural assets, transforming them into values that are explicitly incorporated into all elements of planning and policy. Ready-made examples from elsewhere will not fill the perceived void in the image of the city. Darwin will not be a Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta or a ‘New Singapore’. It will be itself. Its unique attributes are the key values from which to drive its future development. In order to achieve this realisation the city will need to adhere existing and future planned developments to a comprehensive and cohesive city plan.

Citizens should be increasingly aware of the identified key attributes of the city and be able to see that those attributes are added to all elements of the city plan. The solutions to urban planning and design, transport and signage, recreation and entertainment should be drawn from these identified attributes as unique models of difference. Branding of a tropical savannah if not sub-equatorial concept of design could then proliferate throughout the city, contributing to its global perception and differentiation and resulting in the accelerated growth of the city’s creative workforce.

In terms of CI, it is important that cities play to their existing strengths. Regions need to have a critical appreciation of their actual attributes and values, understood without nostalgia or mythology. Strategically the established presence of specific industries and government agencies could be combined to form substantial platforms representative of the unique values of the city. The permanent presence of the armed forces, customs and fisheries represent tangible values that could be aggregated together with the city’s other employers. For example, the university could be merged with these entities to establish Australia’s premier institution for strategic and policy research as well as Defence Force analysis and training.
Where possible the university should be merged with the community as a whole, contributing to the social and economic life of the northern suburbs and of the city. Darwin is a university town, with an important primary industry, resource extraction and defence profile. These elements, as much as its multiculturalism, need to be integrated into CI thinking to enable Darwin’s truthful core distinctions to emerge.

The history of the city is a further cultural asset that could be effectively exploited for its commercial value. In attempting to harness and capitalise on these historical associations, thought could be given to creative partnerships which give life to historical associations. The military conflicts of Darwin’s past represent an excellent opportunity to co-develop recording of the experience of World War II from the perspective of Australia, with Japan and the United States who were both active participants in the conflict and who have both assumed dominating and determining roles in Australia’s future since that conflict. Such a model would not only help defray costs through partnership but would also guarantee an international focus is brought to bear on local projects, enjoining domestic memories to those of the wider global community in new and exciting ways, and ensuring efforts to memorialise the past do not reduce to encased bits of shrapnel and solemn homage to surviving artefacts. The planned large-scale investment at East Point Military Museum has the opportunity to innovatively develop the present cherished display for both locals and visitors alike. Clever branding and marketing of Darwin’s other wartime/historic sites and attractions would further aid this link to the past – both for local advantage and future tourism opportunities. CI practitioners have utilised many of these sites for one-off artistic ventures over the years, and an integrated Darwin history circuit would better highlight this aspect of the city’s creative and narrative profile.

The central CBD of Darwin has its own unique history, which is under threat of being buried under a desperate attempt to replicate a vision of the city as ‘somewhere else’. Contributors to the research are concerned it is being surrounded and suffocated by ad hoc harbour developments and a profusion of high rise apartments that do not factor in how space should be used, how walkability matters, how zones and precincts are created, and the vulnerability of the few CI archipelagos in the CBD. A whole of community approach would take into consideration how those identified values associated with the city could be applied to all forms of urban design and practice from the provision of public transport, shade and lighting to appropriate architecture and streetscape design.
This section addresses a provocative question put to the research team in response to our promotion of the need to support the vernacular strengths of Darwin’s creative industries: “If there is so much potential then why hasn’t this been tapped already?”

The simple answer is it has never been the subject of serious policy and industry intent. In the Territory, CI generates substantial income levels but remains unrecognised as a discrete sector. It is bracketed off from the more seriously attended industries of mining, primary industries, transport, real estate and defence in government agenda setting. Instead, being associated with the arts and performance in most people’s minds, it tends to be treated as a grants distribution or deficit funding exercise; and not a regional investment and economic development opportunity. It also has the disadvantage of consisting of mostly sole-operator or SMEs which are far more difficult to organise and measure policy around than stand-alone large businesses.

The creative industries simultaneously pose a challenge to and are besieged by the many conflicting forces that are shaping Darwin’s identity and development today. For example, where we say that strategies to capitalise on Darwin’s unique geography and demography are needed, authorities clearly want to smarten up the CBD and create venues that look like those from established centres, thus risking loss of what creates local authenticity and difference. Given the CI are driven on a global scale by innovation, differentiation and the quest for new ideas, this risks throwing the ‘baby out with the bathwater’. Where we say diversity matters, many new urban projects are promoted around the creation of retail and leisure activities that produce attractive and safe spaces – inarguably a good thing – which displaces the marginal and rebellious, which has more equivocal CI consequences. CI participants talked of the values that drew them to Darwin and the threats to the very ingredients which attract knowledge workers and creatives to a place. Affordability of accommodation, good public transport and access to venues, a relaxed attitude to cultural and sexual diversity create CI dynamism; while over-active targeting of visible signs of disorder, the exclusion of young people and their concerns from planning decisions, and the creation of anonymous gated residential communities are repellents.

Enabling frameworks for Darwin’s CI sector, then, require a policy methodology capable of treating these as interconnected issues. Hence, what we suggest here are questions for policy, rather than prescriptions. Throughout we have stressed that developing uniqueness around points of local distinction is best done in conjunction with local creatives. It is in this spirit that the following précis of key questions for policy is made.

How to make creative pursuits more viable?

It needs to be said: Darwin does not currently have a financially robust, sustainable, independent creative industry sector. What it does have is a highly active grass roots creative community, with all the camaraderie and vulnerability that attends such a scene. Without forcing the grass roots into suits, there is a role for government and private venture capital to support those needing to transition to full professionalism, to combat the scale issues that creative industries in Darwin are currently disadvantaged by. This in turn requires incentives for strategic and venture investors. Collaborations are essential; likewise a concept of training and support for professionalisation and commercial success.

How? It is very similar to business venture supports enjoyed by other targeted and coveted sectors. Trade missions, expos, fairs and tours are subsidised; discounted training is provided; professional advisors are brought in who can help. Investments are made to enable CI enterprises to attract and provide skills and experienced staff to enable creative excellence and commercial growth.

To build capacity, small-to-medium enterprise employment, education and development supports that are currently in existence for other sectors could be reoriented to CI specific needs. Mandating business training and creating effective mentoring connections for potential recipients of incubation grants might assist. Help for budding creative workers to access national management services and representation is desperately sought. This could be done, for example, by sponsoring producers and directors to come to Darwin and Alice Springs as a collective to hear product pitches from media creators, with professional assistance given to help make the pitch as compelling as it can be.

What should be in a regional economic development policy framework?

A public valuing of creativity needs to be realised along multiple platforms. To the frequent suggestion that private property developers be legislatively obliged to dedicate a proportion of the money spent on residential and commercial buildings towards public art, supporting creative businesses and emerging artists, we would agree – whilst insisting it would still be insufficient. The most familiar aspect of the creative industries might be made
visible by performing and visual arts, but the subtending infrastructure and nurturing environment required for Darwin to attain a vibrant CI status are not reducible to arts funding and promotion.

Government needs to set itself specific industry targets to achieve regarding (but not limited to) such essential infrastructure as connectivity for new media, a more accessible public transport system, supported accommodation, and venue options. This should tie in with visitor information which encourages niche visitors to sites beyond the obvious tourism attractions. The use of the internet was repeatedly highlighted in our research as an enabler of networking and the lack of fast connections as an inhibitor to growth. Broad-banding for regional centres arguably has favourable cost returns if it enables people to live and work competitively. Positioning the creative sector to take full advantage of opportunities in the digital environment is a key investment priority for government.

**Does Darwin need a “master plan”**?

Contributors to the research frequently referenced their concerns about the damaging nature of, and the unsatisfactory processes surrounding, decision making for town planning in the CBD. Investigating the connections here, we found there have been many past and current attempts to create a master plan for the city. These have been thwarted by lack of follow-through and inability to progress past the demarcation disputes operating between different arms of government. This affects Darwin’s CI sector in two related ways.

First, our mapping clearly revealed archipelagos of creative business evolving in Darwin, which are very important yet acutely vulnerable. Darwin’s small size and lack of a clear policy framework for CI incubation means that when a pocket of creativity is dismantled, whether deliberately or as the unintended collateral damage of other development initiatives, a disproportionately large setback is experienced within the sector. Loss of key places that are vital to CI networking is disastrous in small places and can mean all the difference between places having a reputation for creativity or being discarded. Spatial planning which takes account of hubs of creativity and attempts to develop these as the city matures will create ‘character areas’ of interest to residents and visitors alike. Hence the importance of mapping the hotspots in a place which people organically associate with creativity and working with these, not demolishing or upgrading with artificial precincts.

Second, the mix of nature and built environment, leisure and recreational spaces were standout features underpinning Darwin’s points of distinction for creatives. These distinctive patterns to what people treasure about the Darwin environment are critical to heed: without these, creativity can dissolve. This means that connectivity between Darwin’s metropolitan green spaces, suburban and regional hinterland assumes a unique importance in CI development. Where usually creative industries develop in post-industrial areas, where former factories or warehouses are converted for creative use, due to Darwin’s multiple demolitions, most recently Cyclone Tracey in 1974, few pre-cyclone buildings remain, and there is no ex-industrial inner-city architecture. Cluster strategies typically adopted elsewhere don’t neatly transfer to Darwin. A different urban policy is required. Instead of having empty shopping precincts or warehouses, these could be purchased by government and rented at reduced rates, or zoning amendments built into existing legislation to enable conversion into low-cost creative space. A policy on primary occupancy rights should be looked in to, a factor which is again relevant to forming ‘character areas’ that become recognisable to outsiders and insiders alike.

There is a risk of creating cultural deserts by enforcing creative precincts that lack the required organic buzz. But shared administration facilities would reduce CI practitioner costs both in time and money. A commercial gallery or retail space and a public performance area could bring in capital, with other costs shared within the many users. Such a venue, if carefully located within the CBD, would also satisfy many tourists’ wishes to interact with the local creative scene.

‘...the irony being that we don’t actually have an arts or cultural centre here [which] is pretty stupid, because it has disabled the potential for the arts economy to grow and basically keeps everyone fractionalised and expending a lot of energy on self management as well as not being able to network properly and be centralised as an industry of colleagues’

We have suggested that Darwin City Council or the Northern Territory Government could provide lease incentives to occupy a suitable existing building or commission the design and construction of a unique tropical venue suitable for Darwin’s creative needs within a CBD master plan. At the very least, an asset mapping exercise should be undertaken and shared with the community about best use of space and money.

**What next?**

We hope it is clear that creative industry policy is not the responsibility of the arts portfolio alone. It is a whole community concern, and requires integrated policy consideration together with more imaginative and explicit investment. The resolutions are simple to suggest and at the same time sum the challenges posed in this report:

- A vibrant CI scene needs to be sponsored to be
free range, modelled more on the British Council’s system of investing in creative enterprise within and without the UK, literally with the open-ended view that nurturing the sector requires porosity between countries and cultures.

- Equally, the British Council creative economy policy formulators are reflexive about the ways that policy can aid but also hinder the sector’s development if it is too rigid. They consider that CI policy needs constant refreshing, through robust debate and fluid exchange between academics and practitioners working with senior policy formulators to ensure policy remains agile and cutting edge, not fossilised into the proceduralism of a static committee and granting service. This latter (more common) approach risks being a key obstacle for innovation and take-off in the sector; not an enabler.

- This relates to the challenge faced by the CI sector in having a dedicated means of informing the suite of policies which affect CI viability. We are aware of numerous committees and advisory groups criss-crossing NGO, business and government agencies. Each has some role in the CI policy context, but there is no driving force that is mandated to intensify Darwin’s CI potential. Creating assured pathways for CI practitioners across the sector to direct CI policy and investment decisions, calling on the most senior industry, corporate and government influencers, is required.

- Such liberation of funding rules and direction setting may require an intensified involvement of the private sector as it can be hard for a small-budget government to move further than community expectation permits. The CI industry itself needs to be more inventive in how and with whom it attracts resources, moving beyond the blinkers of current government policy to an assertive vision of CI’s place in Darwin’s development and identity.

- Such a mandate would inform the preparation of blueprints for a sustainable independent industry, including new definitions of Darwin’s CI purpose and importance to a diversified economic strategy.

- New relationships between federal, Territory and local government agencies, private capital and creative practitioners/enterprises to support the realisation of Darwin’s role as a border city with a creative interface with Asia should be forged. This includes building accord with national and international CI sectors, accompanied by incentive packages (taxation and other) for private sector involvement and collaborative ventures, including with the university sector.

- On this last point, a clear whole-of-community commitment to re-orienting Darwin as a university city is a ‘low hanging fruit’ policy option.

Naturally, to make creative pursuits more viable economically bolder investment from government is required – but first the Northern Territory must seek to position this sector as a priority for its cultural and economic future. To repeat a key refrain of this report, in whatever steps that are taken to further develop the city’s creative economy potential, the unique qualities enabling Darwin’s creativity must be protected, nurtured and placed at the centre.

It is our hope that our research findings provide material that can be used in cross-sector policy setting exercises that are profoundly directed by Darwin’s CI practitioners, operating with an empowered sense of their contribution and potential.