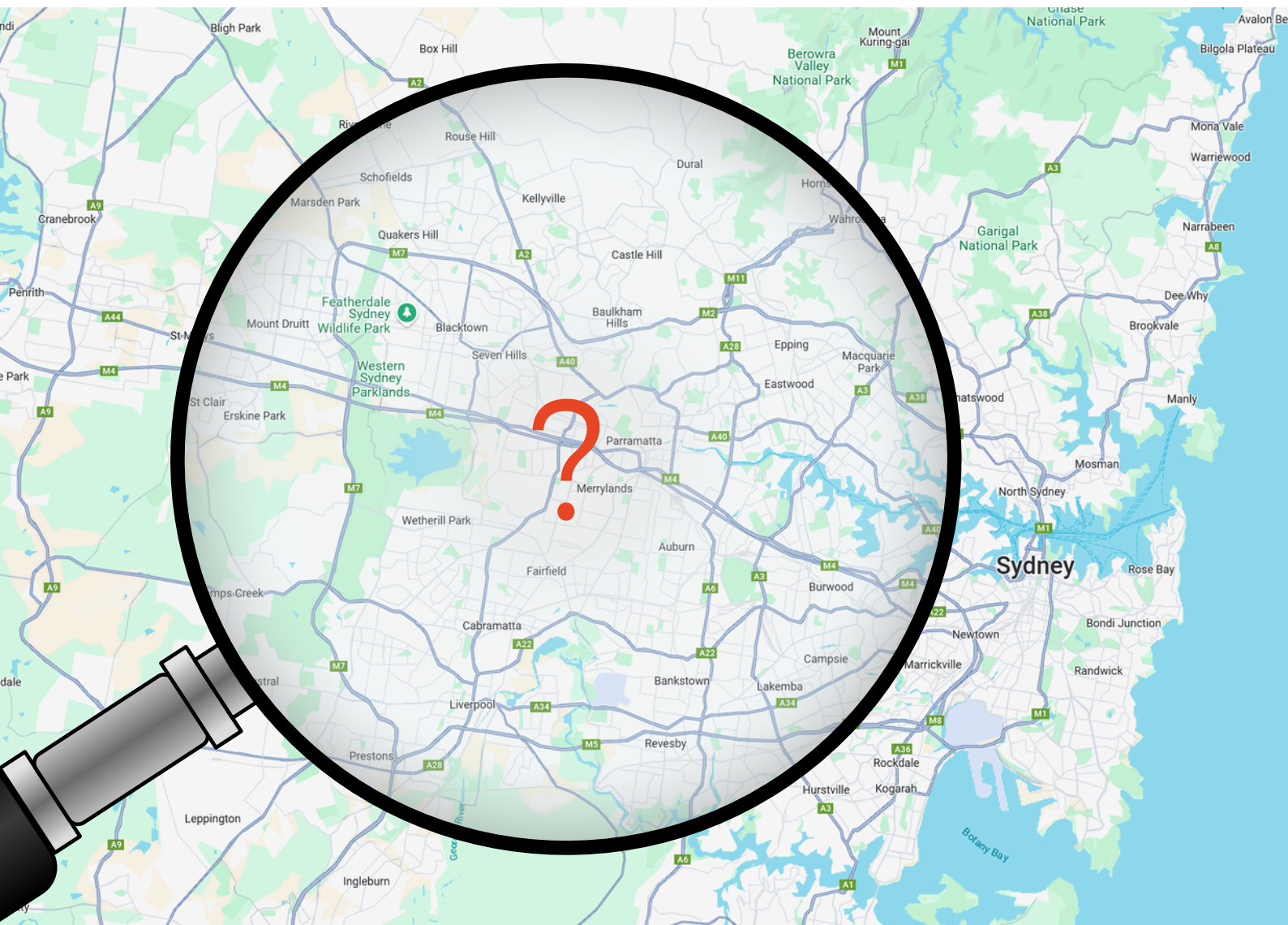


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

“Where in the world is ‘Western Sydney’?”

How identities and boundaries can shape urban inequality and segregation: an empirical experiment



PREPARED BY
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JULY 2025

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Introduction and Purpose

“ How do boundaries reflect or shape urban inequality and segregation?

Introduction

'Western Sydney' has often been described as 'Australia's third largest economy' but also spatially and culturally the 'other' Sydney.

But where exactly is 'Western Sydney' - what suburbs are 'in' or 'out'? What makes 'Western Sydney' what it is and what does it represent in Greater Sydney?

This report looks at boundaries of 'Western Sydney' to investigate relationships between boundaries, urban inequality and segregation.

Purpose

This is a summary report of a research paper written for the University of Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning under the supervision of Associate Professor Somwrita Sarkar.

If you are interested in reading the full research paper or have questions about this report, please send an email to Jodie Vo (jovo3537@uni.sydney.edu.au).

Acknowledgement

This report's examination of boundaries in what is called Australia was completed on unceded Aboriginal land.

Key Findings



1. Multiple 'Western Sydneys' exist and there are significant differences in how much space they cover across Greater Sydney.

2. Greater Sydney residents' boundaries of 'Western Sydney' are more accurate in capturing areas of inequality than institutions, e.g. government bodies or non-government organisations that aim to promote 'Western Sydney'.

3. The existence of multiple 'Western Sydneys' have real implications by potentially masking the location of inequality within Greater Sydney.

4. There is a large portion of Greater Sydney residents who don't socialise with family or friends who live in what they consider 'Western Sydney'.

5. 'Western Sydney' as a place in Greater Sydney is seen by residents as distinctly:

- fluid in borders that are always changing with Greater Sydney's development
- urban, multicultural with specific ethnic enclaves, and a diverse 'melting pot' of people **but**
- 'left behind' or on the wrong side of the 'Latte Line' in terms of socio-economic opportunities, outcomes, and treatment by institutions,

Background

Greater Sydney is Australia's largest urban region and home to approximately five million residents.

In this region, there is 'Western Sydney' and, depending on who you ask or what you read, it can include anywhere from the Blue Mountains, Campbelltown or Strathfield.

'Western Sydney' as a broad and undefined space is typically associated with things ranging from:

- vibrant communities of many languages and cultures
- local industries like manufacturing and logistics
- high levels of structural disadvantage.

Recently, there has been major government investment and activities aiming to address long-term lack of opportunities and supporting infrastructure for 'Western Sydney' and its residents.

But what does it all mean if there are different ideas about where 'Western Sydney' starts and ends on map?



One 'Latte Line', no sugar

“ We talk about the 'Latte Line'...if you are north of that line you are largely a 'have'...if you are south of that line, you are largely a 'have-not'.

(Roberts cited in Saulwick 2016)

When people talk about spatial inequality in Greater Sydney, they often use the term 'Latte Line'. The 'Latte Line' is an imaginary diagonal boundary with areas below it considered more disadvantaged than those above.

Areas below the 'Latte Line' are often associated with 'Western Sydney' in conversations, studies, and policies about employment, education, health, and household income differences across Greater Sydney.

You can see an example of the 'Latte Line' below which shows the spread of people with 'white-collar' office jobs across Greater Sydney. The darker areas represent greater concentration of people with 'white collar' jobs.

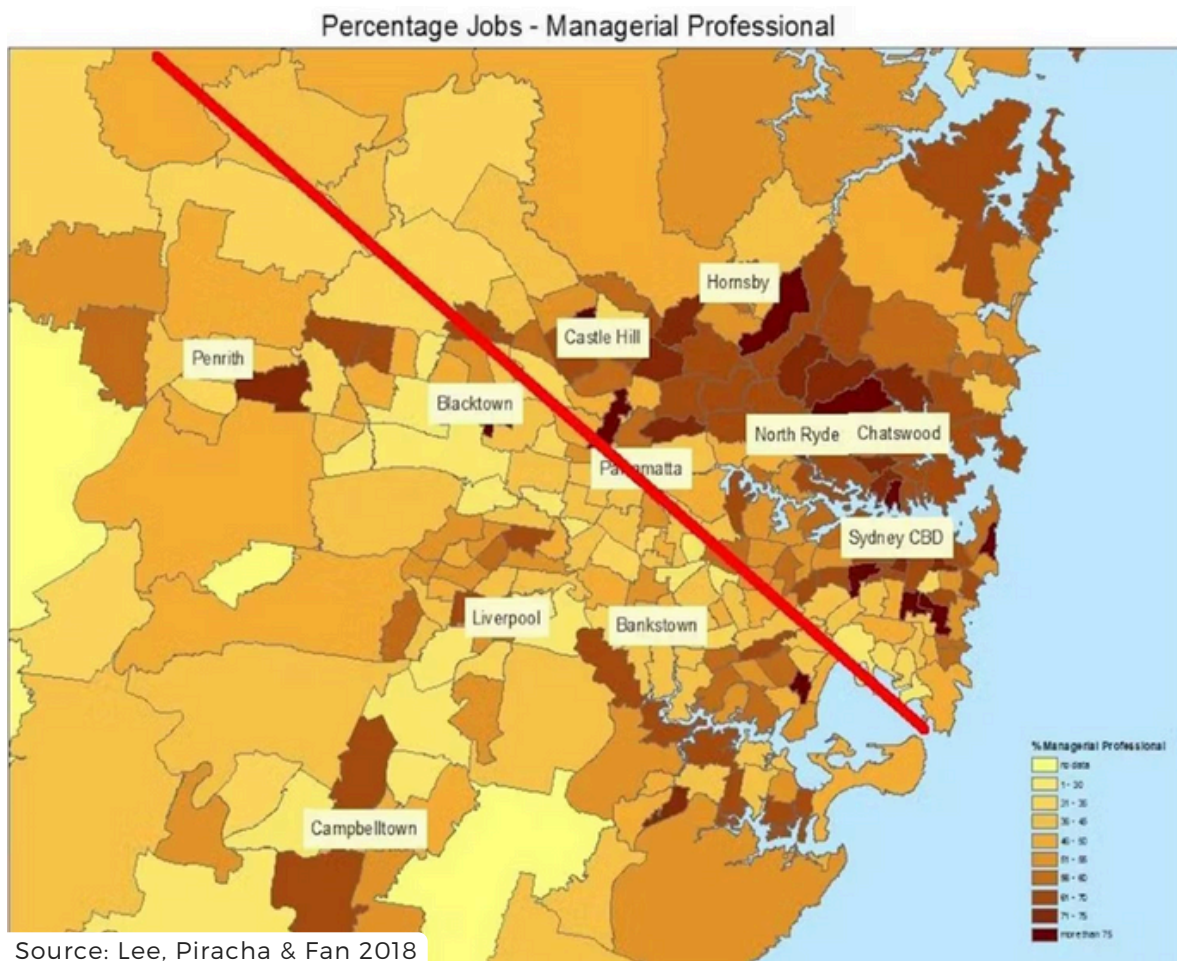


Figure 1: The 'Latte Line' of 'white collar' employment in Greater Sydney

Why does it matter *where* ‘Western Sydney’ is?

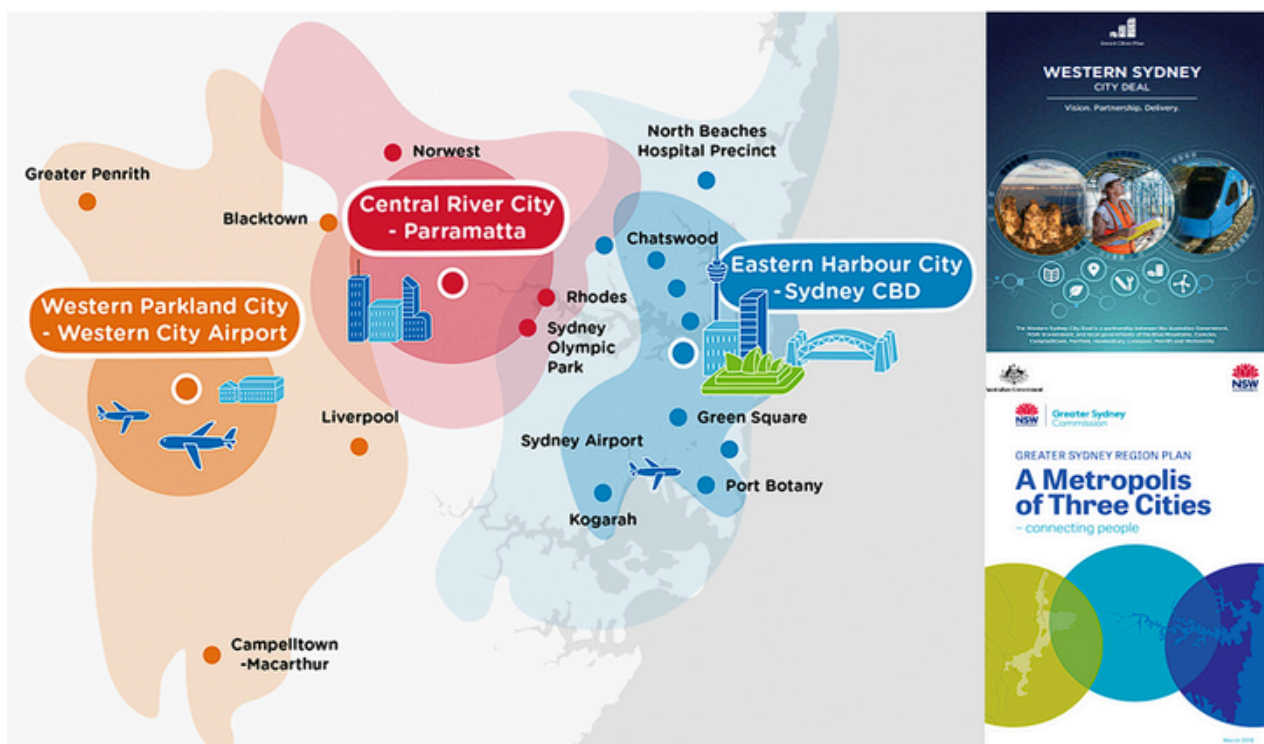
“ Urban inequalities are not only about who gets how much, but also *where* they get it.

(Tonkiss 2020, p.6)

Greater Sydney is currently a collection of 33 Local Government Areas (LGAs) or ‘local council areas’. At the time of writing, a specifically defined ‘Western Sydney’ - consisting of eight LGAs - is one of three cities of ‘Global Sydney’ centred around the Western Sydney International Airport and its opportunities for regional economic development.

The latest Greater Sydney Region Plan published by the NSW Government in 2018 and the multi-government *Western Sydney City Deal* (see Figure 2) are key documents shaping ‘Western Sydney’ (as the ‘Western Parkland City’) as a strong economic core of advanced manufacturing, logistics and freight industries.

Figure 2: A ‘Global Sydney’ of three cities



Source (clockwise from left): GSC 2018c, Commonwealth of Australia 2018, GSC 2018c

Figure 3: Western Sydney International Airport is getting ready for take-off



Source: WSA Co Limited 2025

But there are many ‘Western Sydneys’ out there - for example, geographic ‘Western Sydney’ (set out by the NSW Government’s planning agency), the ‘Western Parkland City’ (used in urban planning discussions), and ‘Greater Western Sydney’ (sometimes used by regional advocacy groups like the Western Sydney University) all shown together in Figure 4 on the next page.

Each of these different ‘Western Sydneys’ cover different council areas, land area, and resident populations as you can see in Table 1 below. So with ongoing efforts to address spatial inequality in Greater Sydney - who’s getting what and *where* in ‘Western Sydney’?

Table 1: Overview of sample ‘Western Sydneys’ within Greater Sydney


| | Geographic ‘Western Sydney’ | ‘Western Parkland City’ | ‘Greater Western Sydney’ |
|--|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Number of Local Government Areas (LGAs) | 10 | 8 | 13 |
| Land Area (km²) | 8,715 | 8,089 | 8,982 |
| Estimated Population Recorded at 2021 National Census | 1,763,370 | 1,154,718 | 2,606,544 |
| 2021 Population Density (Estimated Resident Population / Land Area) | 202.3 | 142.8 | 290.2 |

Source: Refer to ‘References’

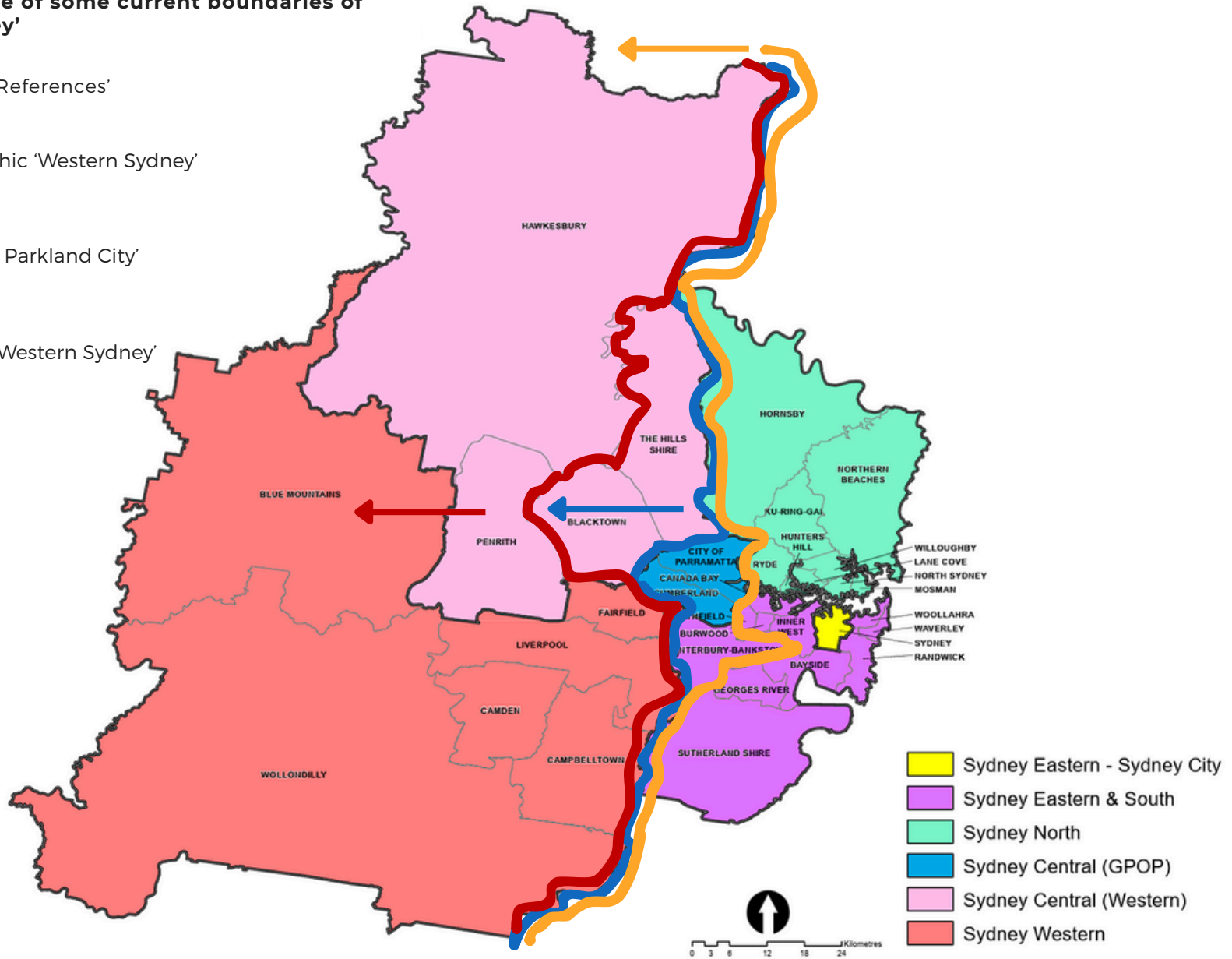
Figure 4: Sample of some current boundaries of 'Western Sydney'

Source: Refer to 'References'

 Geographic 'Western Sydney'

 'Western Parkland City'

 'Greater Western Sydney'



Research Scope

What boundaries did I investigate?

- **‘Formal’**: created by Australian local, state and federal governments for decision-making and to distribute resources, e.g. money, infrastructure.
- **‘Quasi-formal’**: created by organisations which aim to promote ‘Western Sydney’ and influence decision-making.
- **‘Informal’**: created by Greater Sydney residents from personal experiences. These are ‘cultural’ boundaries based on people’s ideas of what makes people, places and things what they are.

What type of boundaries did I look at?

This study looked at boundaries of Local Government Areas (LGAs) as they are commonly used by government and non-government bodies. Most residents of Greater Sydney are familiar with LGAs and the suburbs they contain.

There are other boundaries, such as Statistical Areas created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, but they are too detailed or not well-known by enough people to be used in this study.

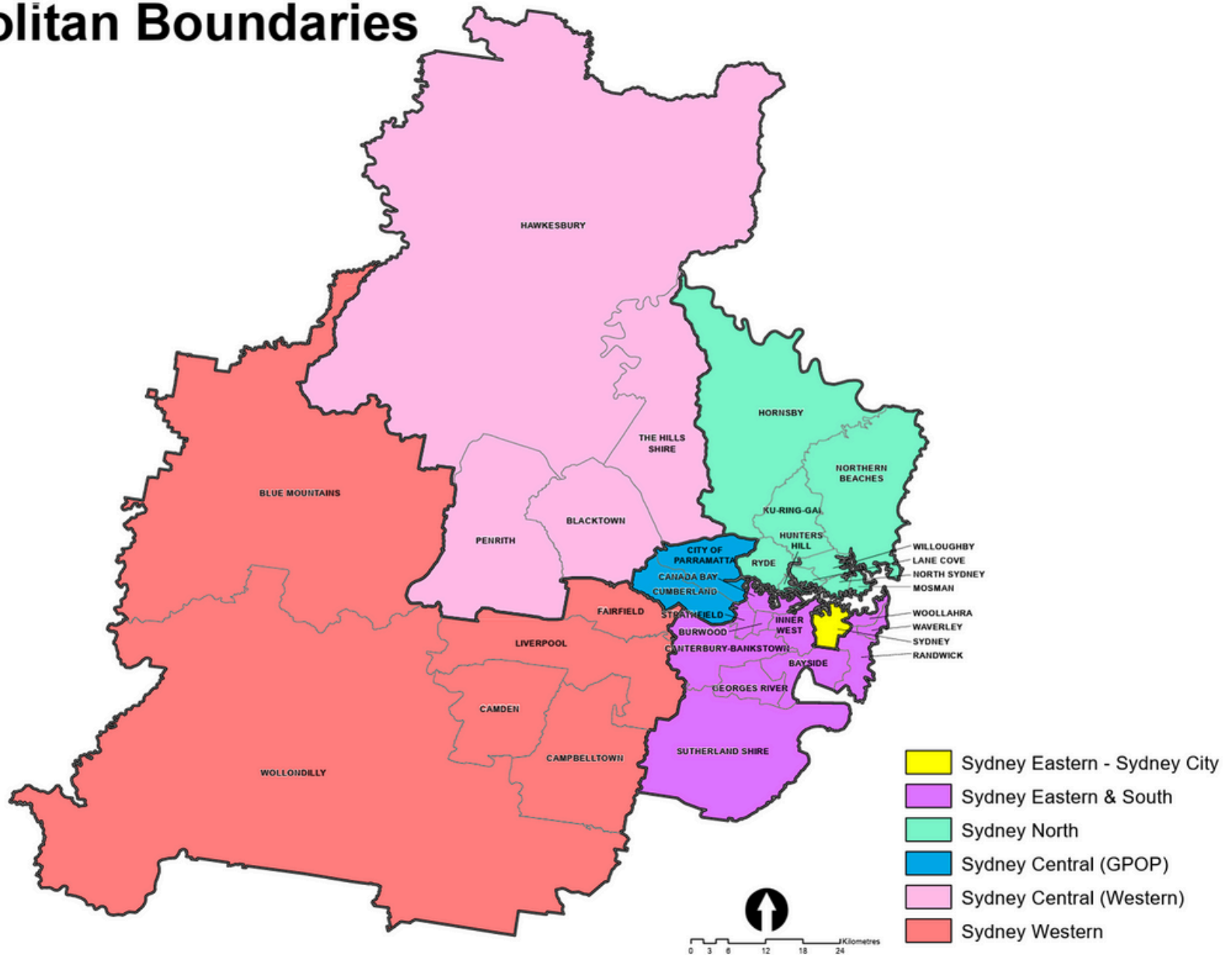
What is ‘Greater Sydney’ in this study?

Greater Sydney covers the 33 LGAs on the map over the next page published by the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (now NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure) in 2023.

Figure 5: Metropolitan Boundaries of Sydney

Source: NSW Government 2023

Metropolitan Boundaries



Method

How did I collect data?

All activities were approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 2024/HE001479) before data was collected.

Table 2: Summary of data collection activities

| Data Collection Activity | Features |
|--|---|
| Online survey Responses: 782 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10 minute survey in Qualtrics XM• Anonymous survey results• Optional gift card raffle for people who completed it |
| Semi-structured interviews Responses: 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volunteers from online survey• Volunteers drew their personal map of 'Western Sydney'• Online and four physical in-person options |
| 'Grey literature' review | Review of publicly available documents from government and non-government bodies, e.g. policies, programs and reports |

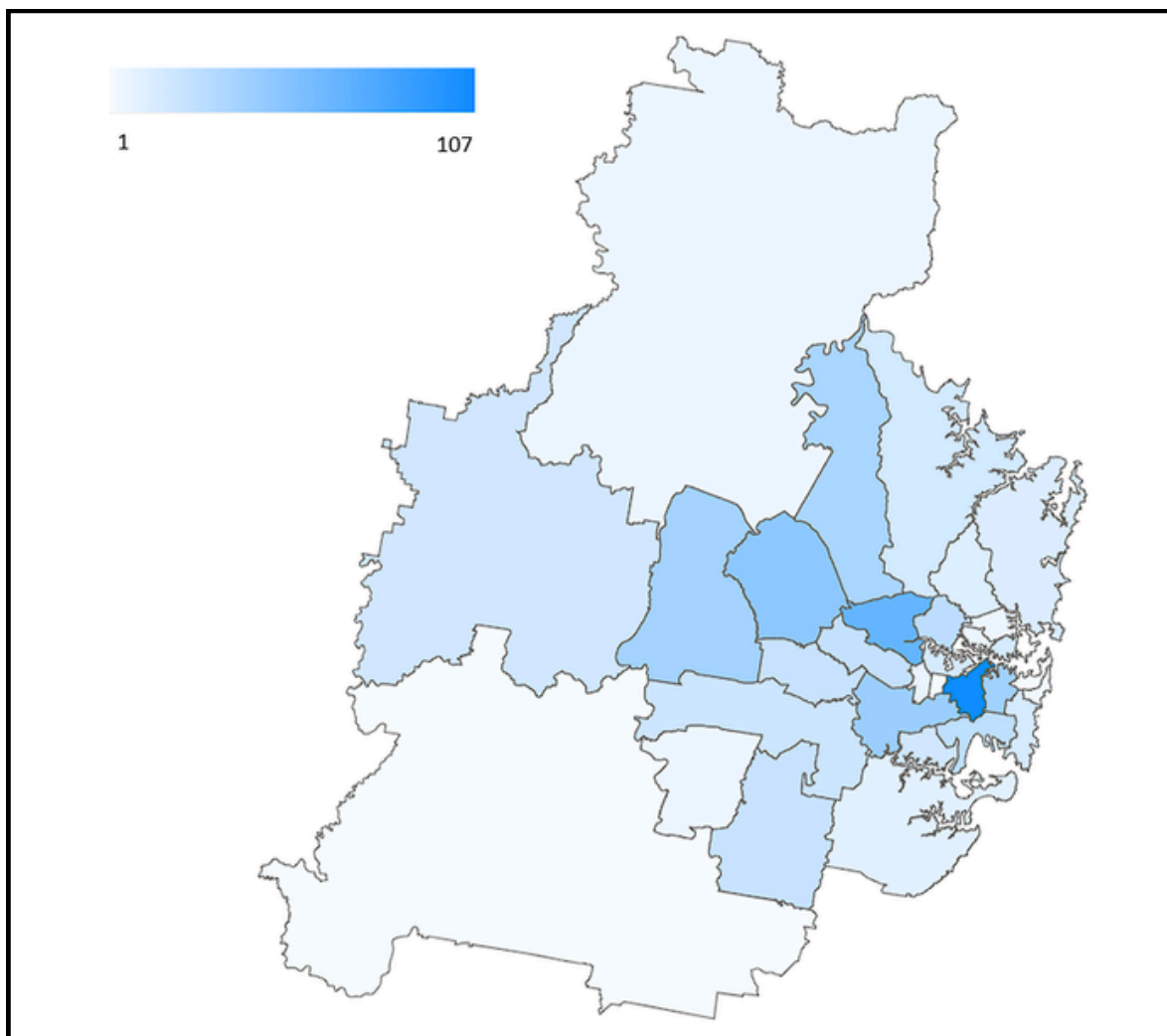
When did I collect data?

Data from the online survey and interviews was collected over two months starting from 1 February 2025 and ending on 1 April 2025.

Who were the study participants and where in Greater Sydney did they come from?

All participants were current residents of 'Greater Sydney' as defined in the research scope. The map below shows the spread of the study's 782 participants by the Greater Sydney LGA they live in.

Figure 6: Distribution of study participants by Greater Sydney LGA of residence



Source: Author's collected data

How did I advertise this study?

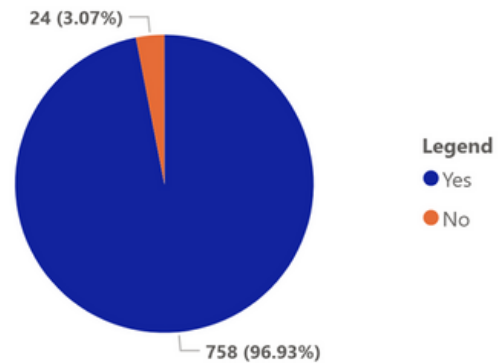
The study was advertised in print and online through social media using approved text and documents.

Some organisations, like local councils and non-government bodies, were directly approached due to their professional interest or relevance of the research with what they do.

What did I do with the collected data?

Survey data collected from Qualtrics XM was turned into maps, graphs and tables in Microsoft Power BI (a data visualisation and analysis software application) and other software applications.

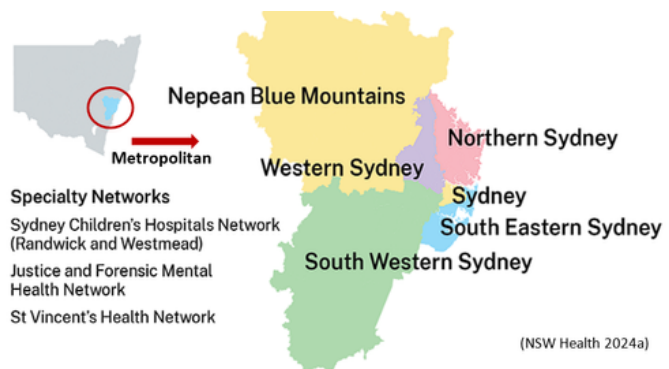
Q1. Does 'Western Sydney' exist as a region of Sydney?



Interview data was refined in NVivo 14 (a qualitative data analysis software application) to create images and to extract views of 'Western Sydney'.



'Grey literature' review collected maps and definitions of 'Western Sydney' which were added to the maps created in the study, e.g. Western Sydney Local Health District.



Results

‘Formal’ boundaries of ‘Western Sydney’

To locate these boundaries, all strategic metropolitan plans of Greater Sydney published to date (see below) were investigated to find spatial definitions of ‘Western Sydney’ used in urban planning.

Other LGA-based boundaries like the NSW Ministry of Health’s Local Health Districts, used to manage public health services and infrastructure, were included to provide a different perspective.

Figure 7: Regional Plans for Greater Sydney from 1948 to present

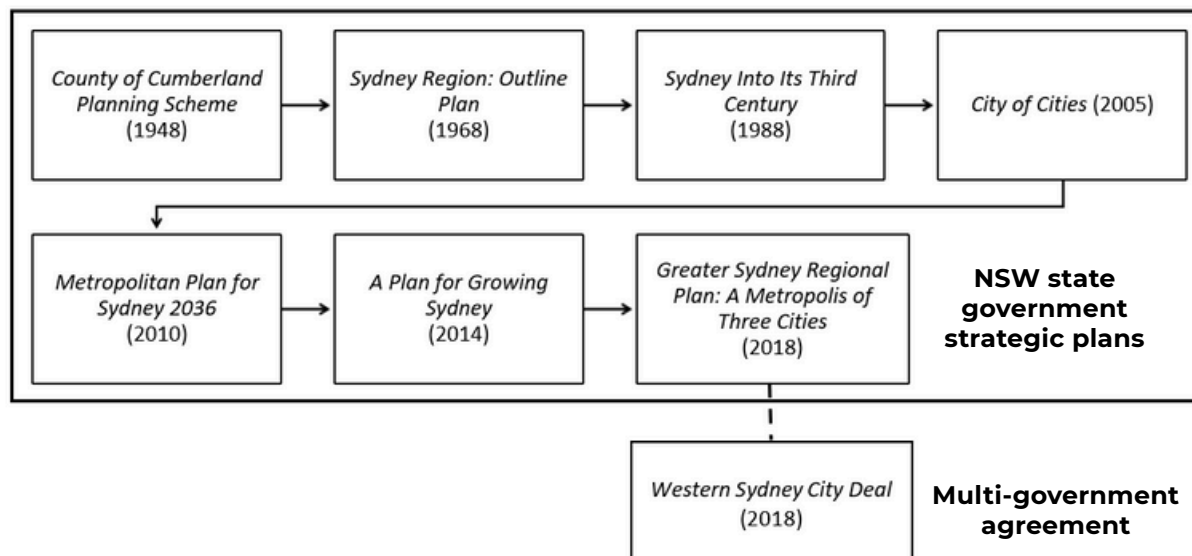


Figure 8 shows old and current definitions of 'Western Sydney' used by NSW Government bodies as LGAs used before changes to local council boundaries from 2016.

Figure 8: Formal Boundaries of 'Western Sydney (Pre-2016 LGAs)

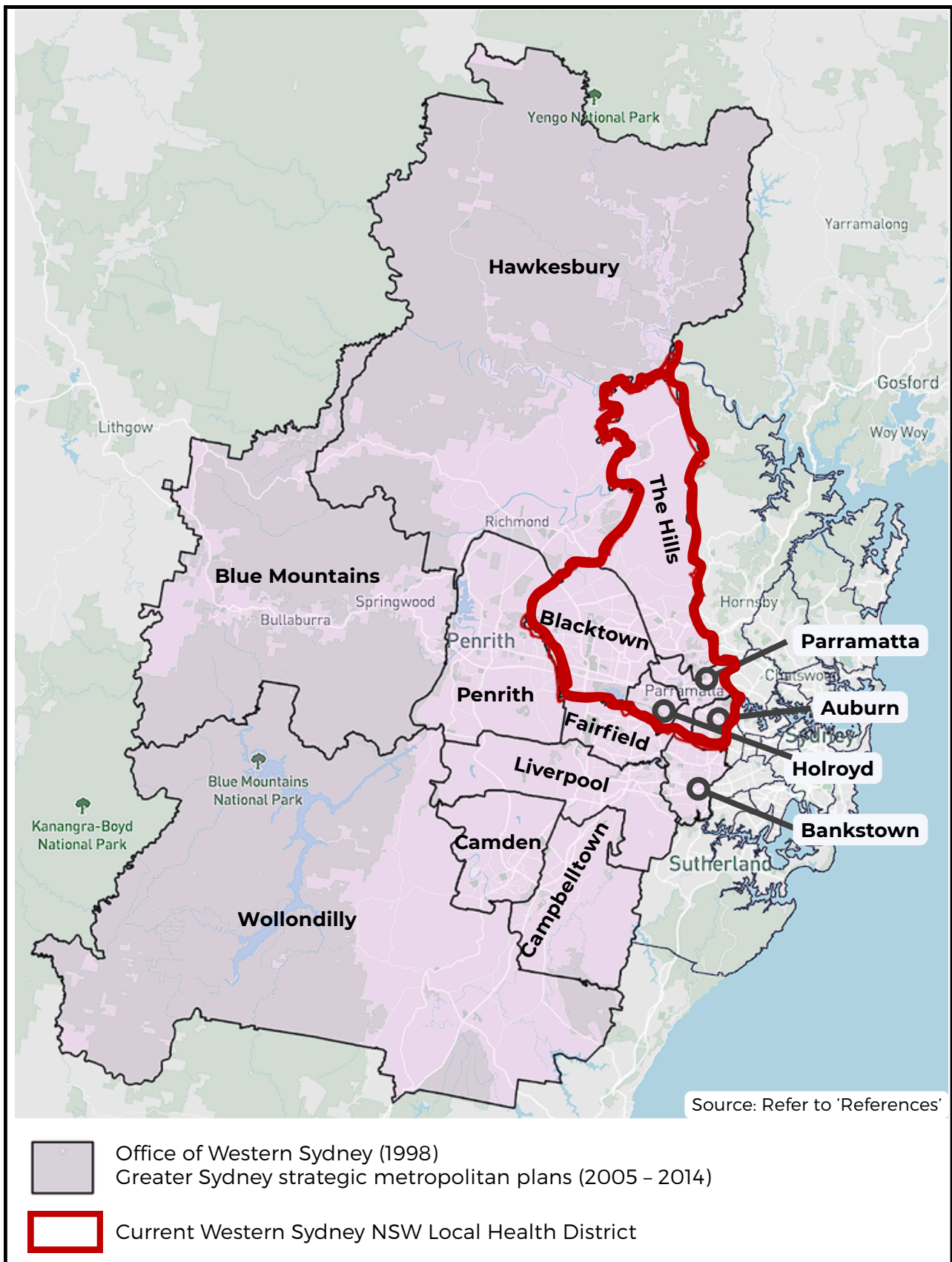
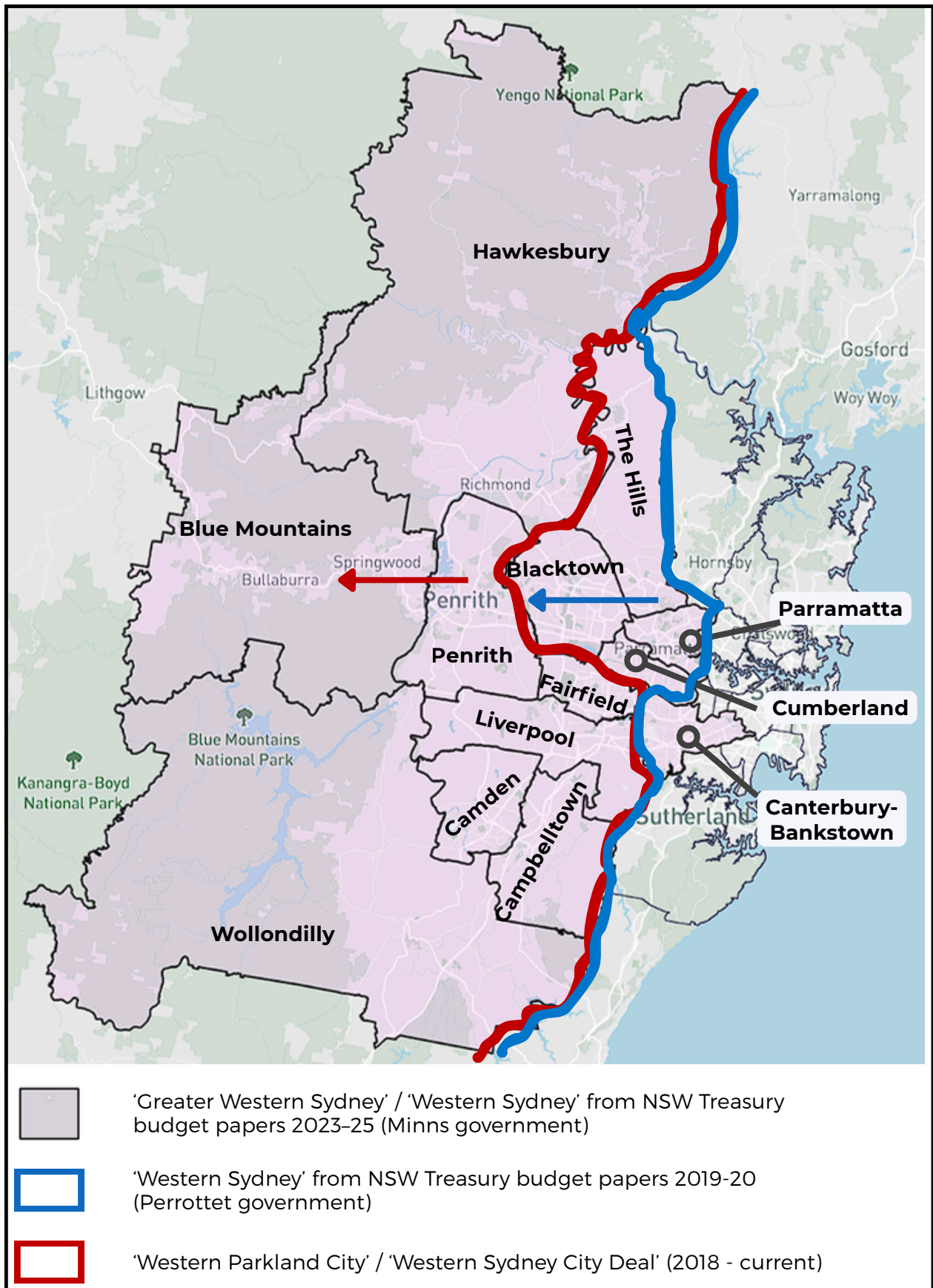


Figure 9 shows old and current definitions of 'Western Sydney' used by NSW Government bodies with LGA boundaries in use after 2016.

Source: Refer to 'References'

Figure 9: Formal Boundaries of 'Western Sydney (Current LGAs)



‘Quasi-formal’ boundaries of ‘Western Sydney’

‘Western Sydney’ is associated with many non-government bodies which aim to promote the interests of its residents and its economic development.

Table 2 below shows a sample of these bodies and their main purpose.

Table 2: Sample of self-identified ‘Western Sydney’ regional advocacy groups

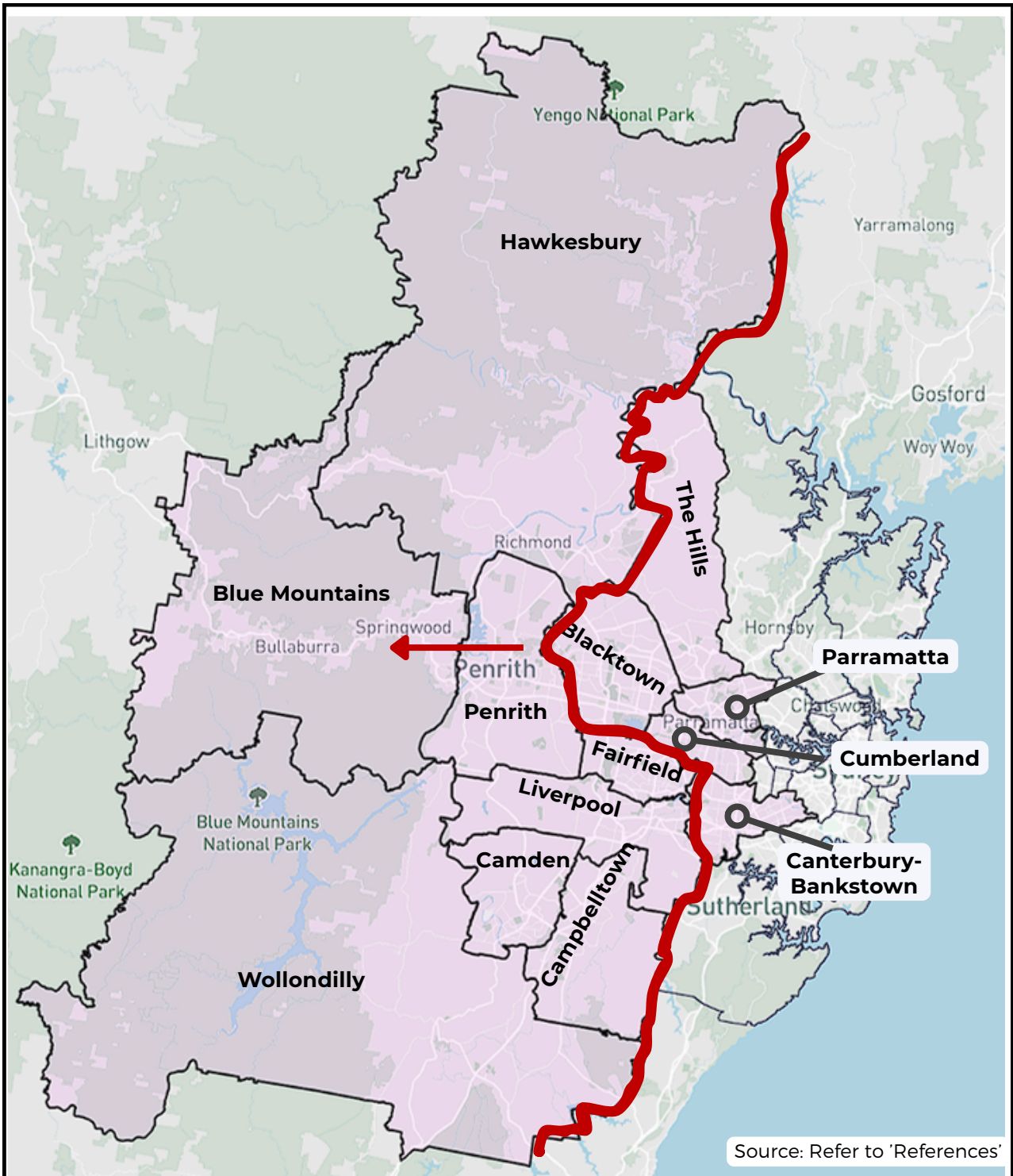
| Organisation | Purpose |
|--|--|
| Business Western Sydney* * Previously ‘Western Sydney Business Chamber’ | A network of businesses, government agencies and non-government bodies that promote ‘Greater Western Sydney’ / ‘Western Sydney’ as an economic region. |
| Western Sydney Community Forum | A collection of local councils and non-government organisations that aim to influence social policy and service delivery in ‘Greater Western Sydney’. |
| Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue | Created in 2015 as a non-government ‘think tank’ to influence regional investment, governance and policy. |
| Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils | Created in 1973 by a group of local councils to promote issues relevant to ‘Greater Western Sydney’. |
| Western Sydney University* * Previously ‘University of Western Sydney’ | Created by the NSW Government in 1988 to address a lack of access to tertiary education and opportunities in ‘western Sydney’. The university produces research relating to issues impacting ‘Western Sydney’. |
| The Parks | A partnership of the eight local councils that make up the ‘Western Parkland City’ involved in the <i>Western Sydney City Deal</i> . |

Source: Refer to ‘References’

As you will see in Figure 10 on the next page, even though these bodies have different purposes, they mostly use the same boundary.

This boundary suggests these organisations have a common regional consciousness - that is, common awareness and ideas about what makes ‘Western Sydney’ a distinct and separate part of Greater Sydney.

Figure 10: Quasi-formal Boundaries of 'Western Sydney (Current LGAs)



'Western Sydney' / 'Greater Western Sydney'
 Business Western Sydney
 Western Sydney Community Forum
 Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue
 Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils
 Western Sydney University

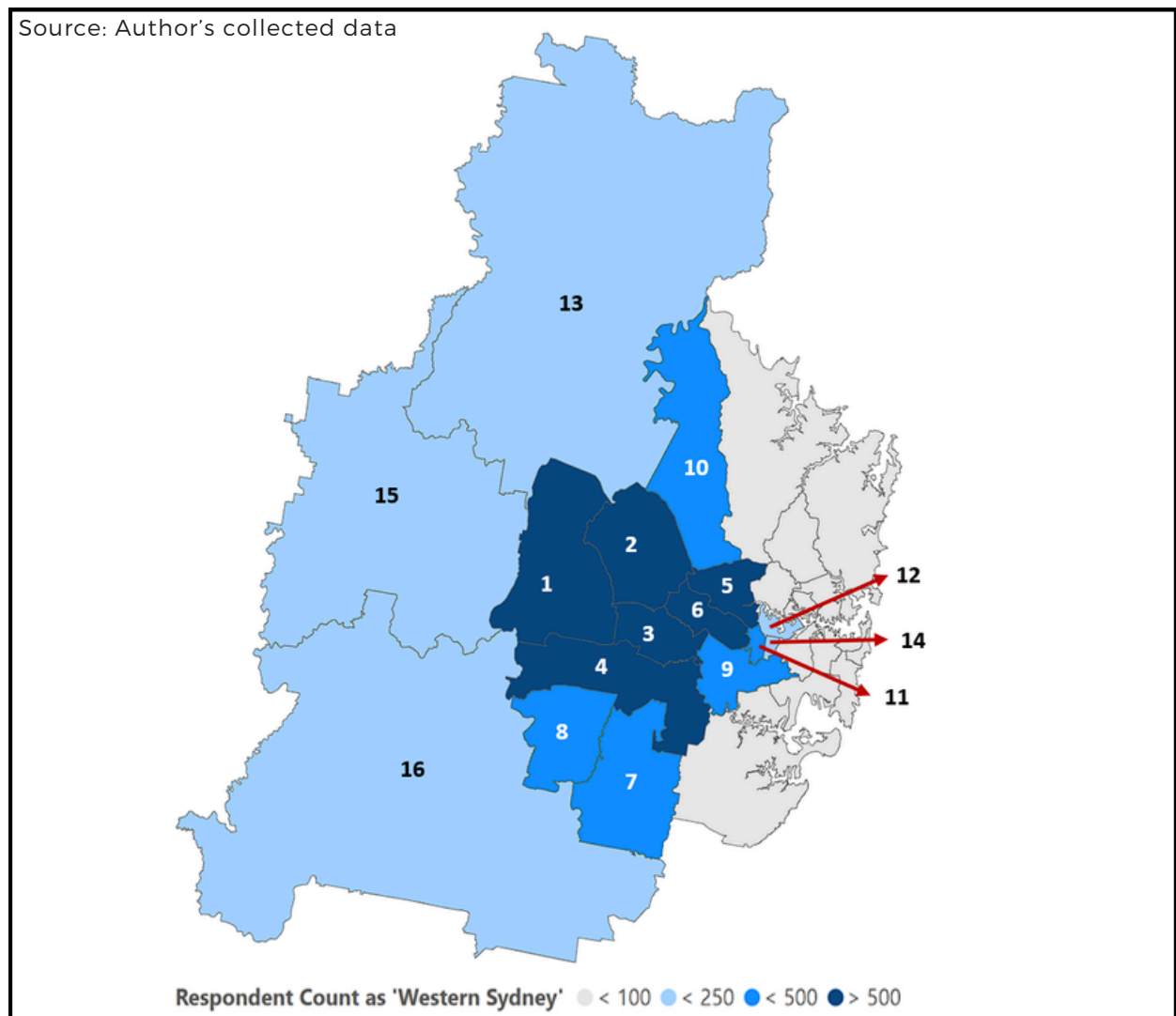


'Western Parkland City' / 'Western Sydney City Deal'
 The Parks

'Informal' boundaries of 'Western Sydney'

'Western Sydney' as seen by 758 study participants as a collection of ranked LGAs is shown in Figure 11. See Table 3 on the next page for the LGA ranking.

Figure 11: Informal Boundaries of 'Western Sydney (Current LGAs)



This report considers Greater Sydney residents' 'Western Sydney' as three different parts:

- **Central Core (LGA #1 – 6):** essential parts of 'Western Sydney' today.
- **Secondary / Contended Frontiers (LGA #7 – 11):** areas transitioning in or out of consideration as core 'Western Sydney'.
- **Marginal Fringes (LGA #12 – 16):** areas with very low consideration as core or secondary 'Western Sydney'.

Table 3: Ranking of Greater Sydney LGAs selected as 'Western Sydney' by more than 100 study participants

| | | # | Greater Sydney LGA | Number of participants that selected LGA as 'Western Sydney' | % of Study Participants (758)* |
|---------------------------------|----|----------------------|--------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Central Core | 1 | Blacktown | 739 | 97% | |
| | 2 | Penrith | 726 | 96% | |
| | 3 | Fairfield | 693 | 91% | |
| | 4 | Liverpool | 663 | 87% | |
| | 5 | Parramatta | 623 | 82% | |
| Secondary / Contended Frontiers | 6 | Cumberland | 527 | 70% | |
| | 7 | Campbelltown | 499 | 66% | |
| | 8 | Camden | 479 | 63% | |
| | 9 | Canterbury-Bankstown | 368 | 49% | |
| | 10 | The Hills | 308 | 41% | |
| Marginal Fringes | 11 | Strathfield | 257 | 34% | |
| | 12 | Canada Bay | 243 | 32% | |
| | 13 | Hawkesbury | 190 | 25% | |
| | 14 | Burwood | 186 | 25% | |
| | 15 | Blue Mountains | 177 | 23% | |
| | 16 | Wollondilly | 145 | 19% | |

*24 participants did not answer this question.

Source: Author's collected data

Discussion

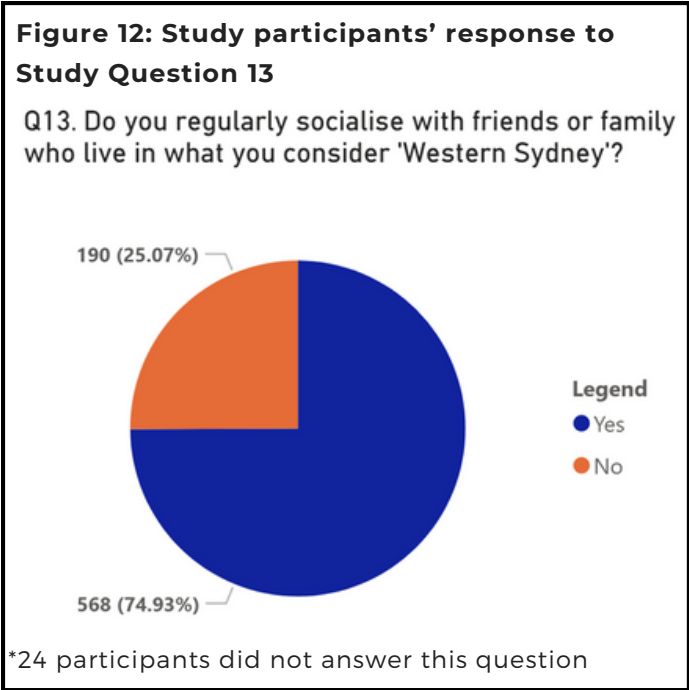
“They’re not us”: social segregation in Greater Sydney

“ Always get the feeling that those from further east have less of an understanding of what it’s like having to travel into the city, what that means for work or study and the social opportunities that come. (Study participant)

There is social segregation (or spatial separation of people and groups in specific areas) in Greater Sydney when it comes to ‘Western Sydney’.

As you can see in Figure 12, at least 25% of study participants don’t regularly socialise with people who live in what they say is ‘Western Sydney’.

Figures 13 and 14 over the next two pages show where these study participants live, work, study and socialise by Greater Sydney LGA.



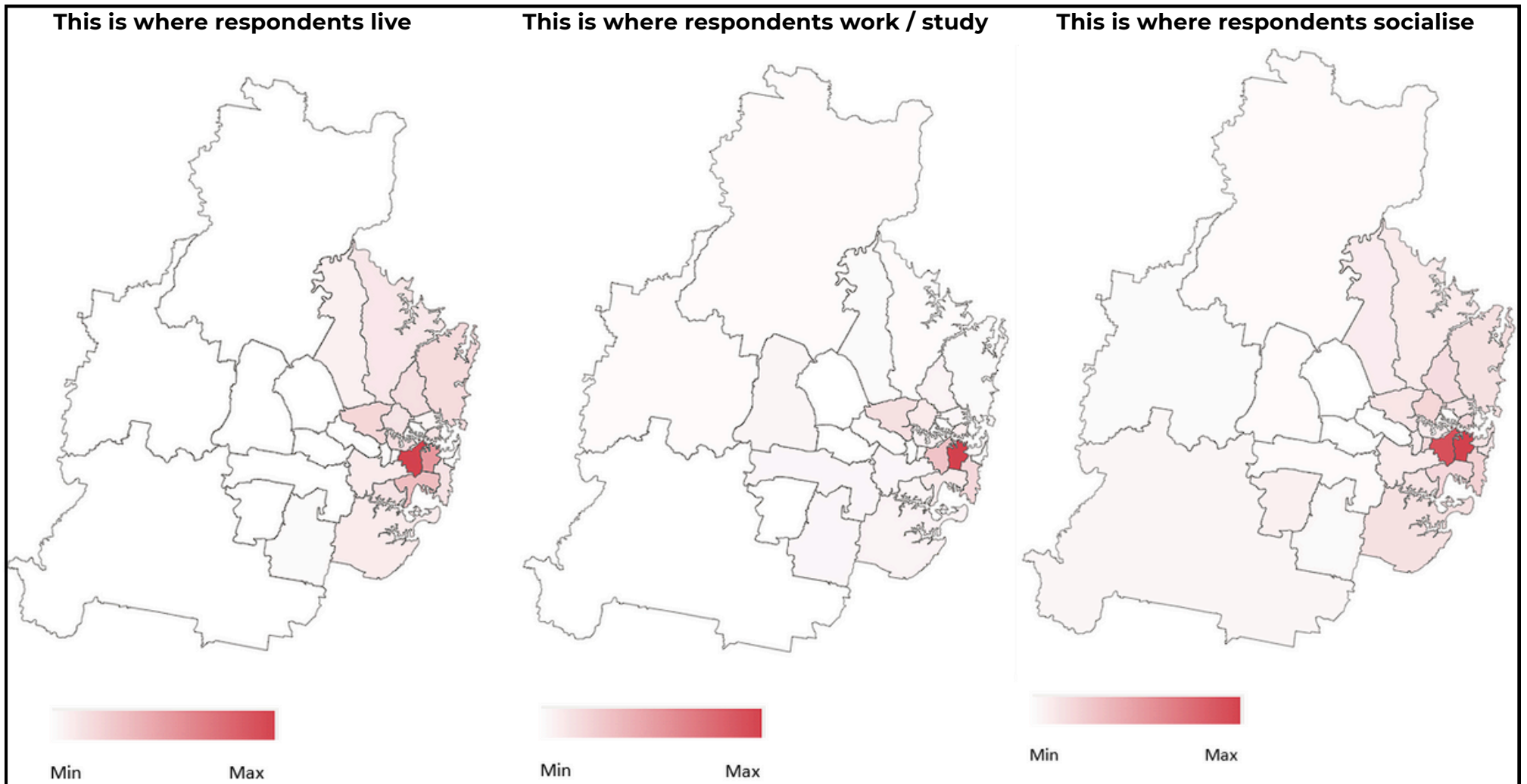
Source: Author’s collected data

Respondents who said 'No'...

These residents tend to live, work, study, and socialise exclusively in the city's wealthier eastern and northern sections with a large proportion living in the Inner West LGA.

Figure 13: Key characteristics of study participants who selected 'No' to Study Question 13

Source: Author's collected data

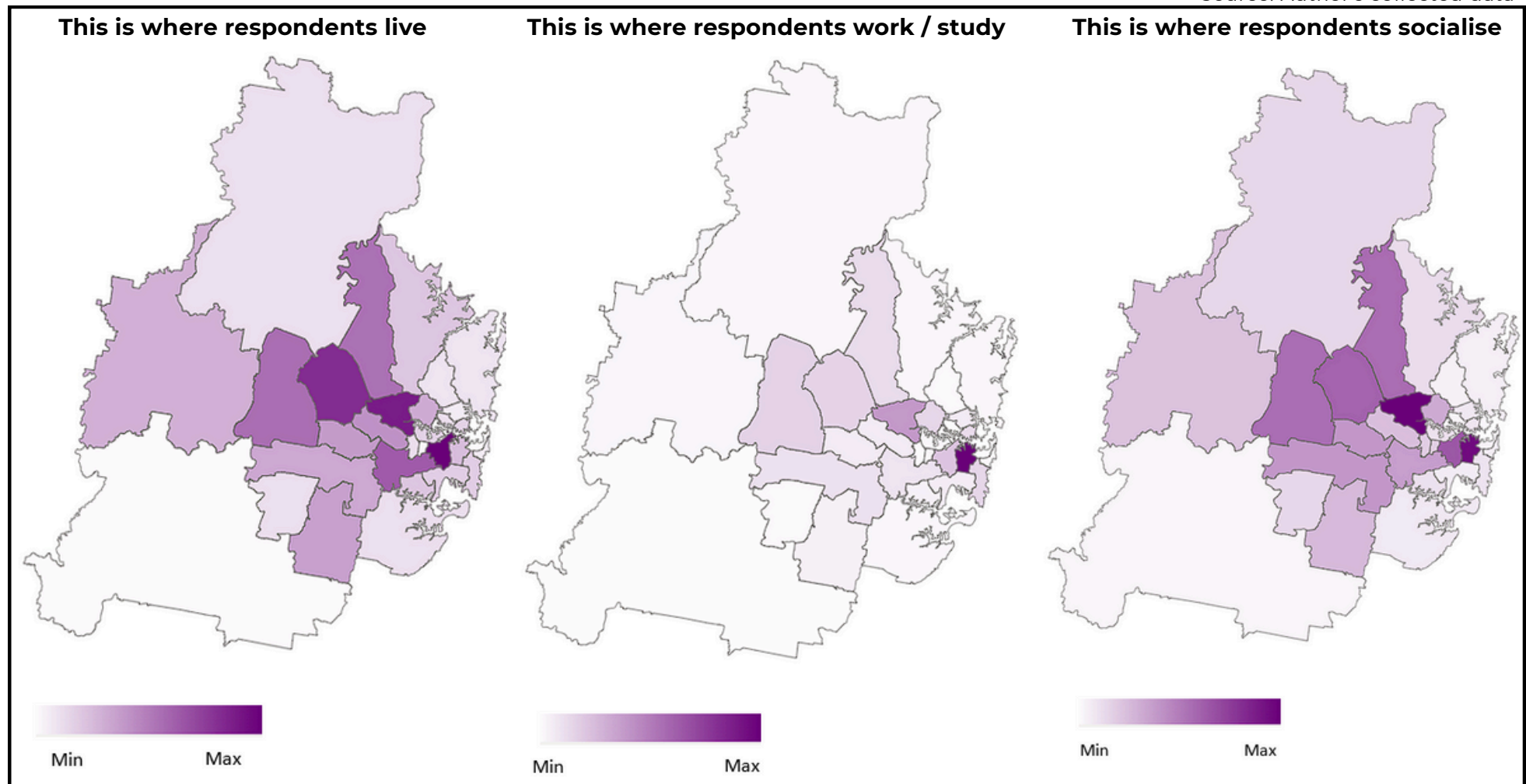


Respondents who said 'Yes'...

These residents live and socialise across Greater Sydney. However, these residents still largely work and study in the eastern CBD in line with the current locations of Greater Sydney's major employment and education hubs.

Figure 14: Key characteristics of study participants who selected 'Yes' to Study Question 13

Source: Author's collected data

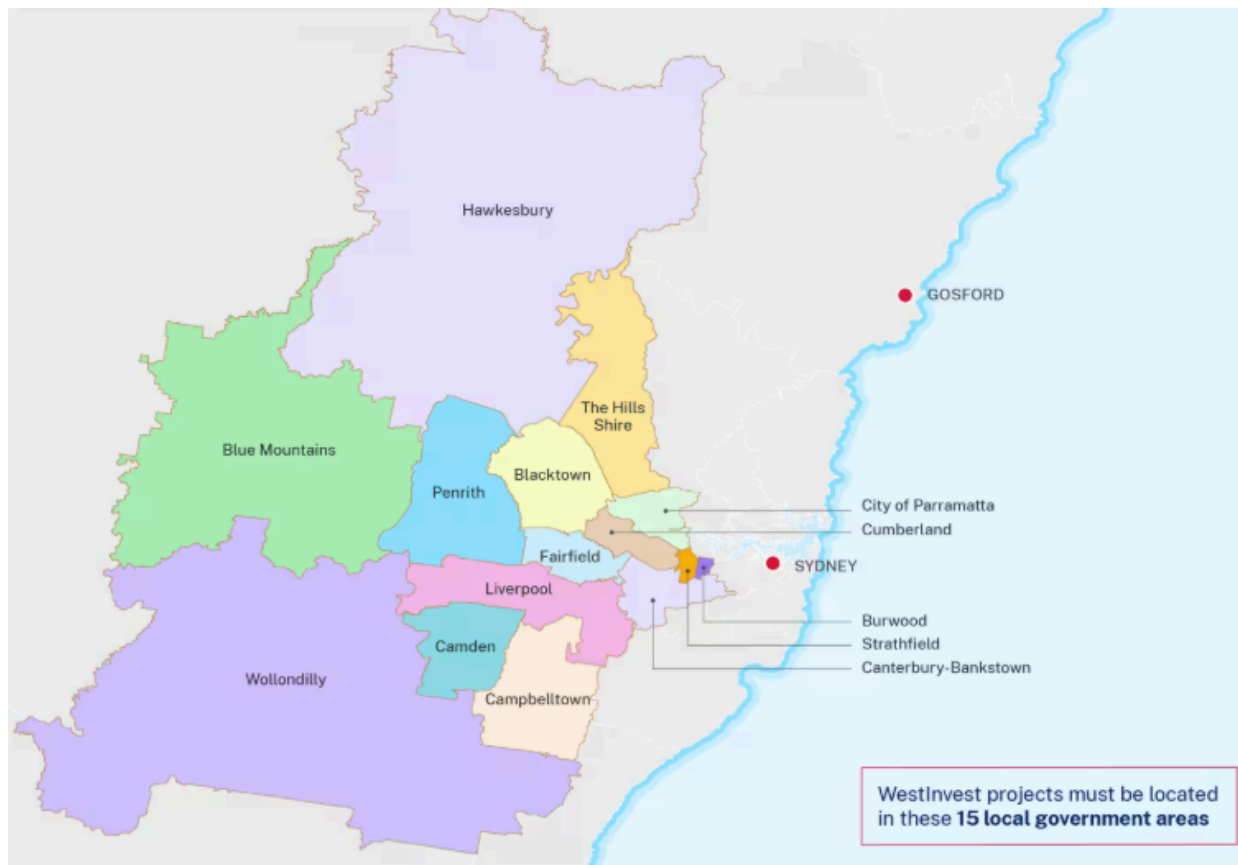


Who gets what and *where* in 'Western Sydney'?

'Western Sydney' is the subject of a great number of government policies and programs aimed at addressing difference in its residents' access to infrastructure and services compared to other parts of Greater Sydney.

A recent example is the NSW Government's Western Sydney Infrastructure Grants Program which gave \$2 billion to councils and community groups in 15 LGAs for local infrastructure projects.

Figure 15: Eligible LGAs for the Western Sydney Infrastructure Grants Program



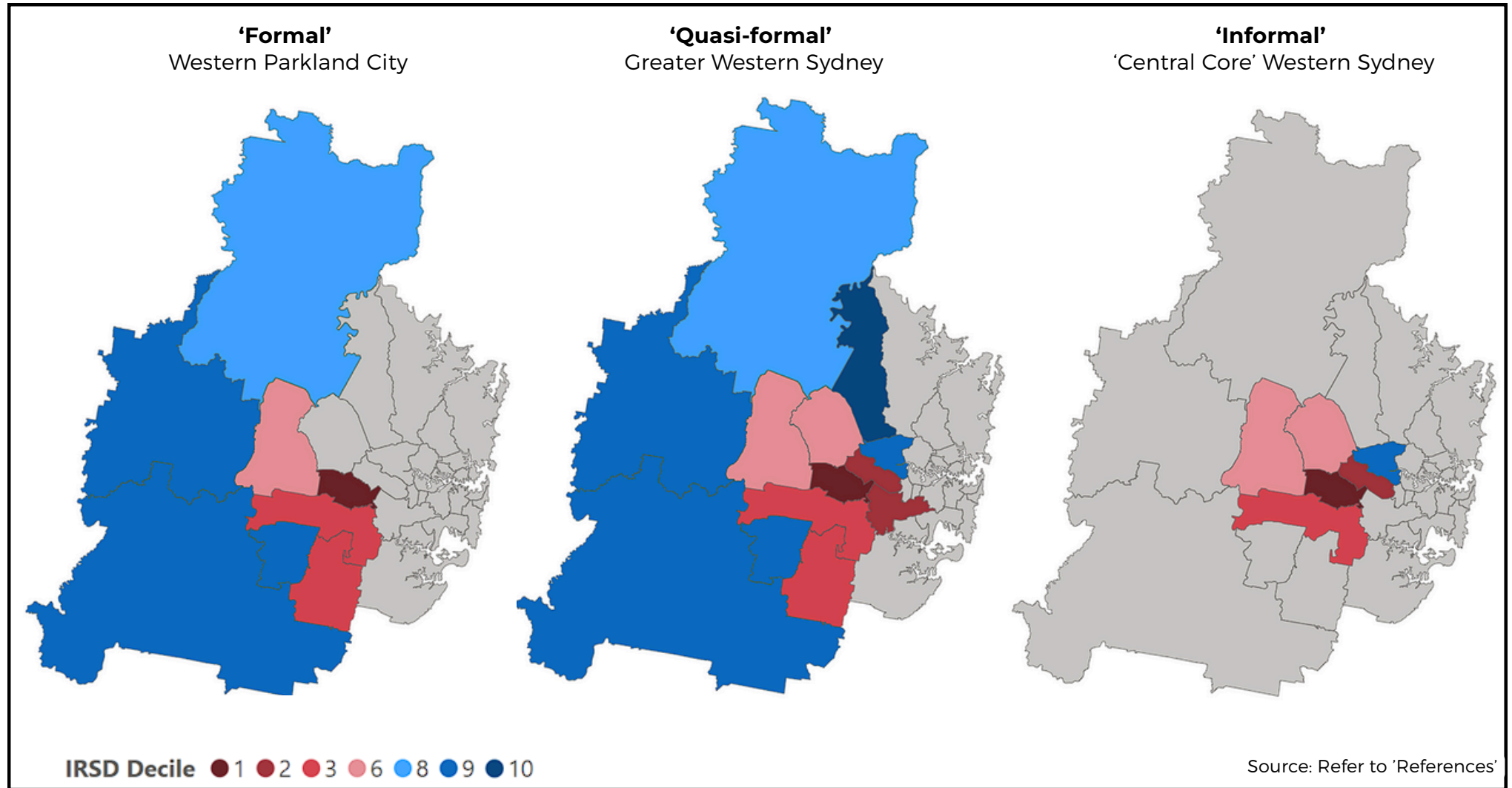
Source: Premier's Department 2022

As you will see in Figures 16 and 17 (next two pages), applying this study's boundaries of 'Western Sydney' and comparing the funding of this program with the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage produces different maps showing 'who gets what and *where*'.

Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD)

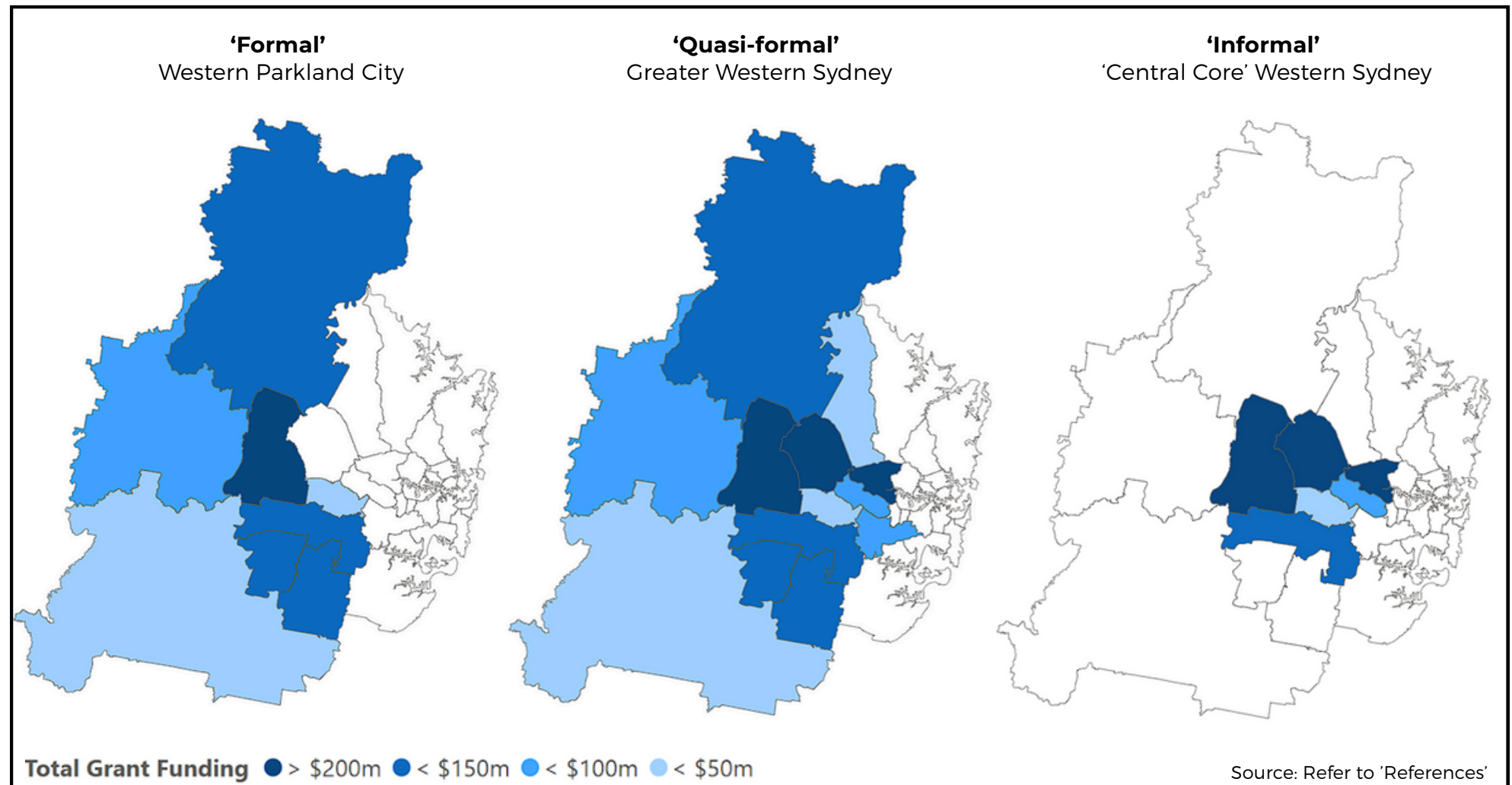
The IRSD is a general measure of the proportion of relatively disadvantaged households in areas by population features, e.g. household incomes, residents' qualifications. A low decile score indicates relative greater disadvantage and a high score indicates a relative lack of disadvantage.

Figure 16: IRSD Decile Scores across a sample of this study's 'Western Sydneys'



When we look at how different 'Western Sydneys' are treated by place-based policies and programs aimed at addressing spatial inequality, the question of 'who gets what and *where*' becomes 'who gets what and *where and is this fair*'.

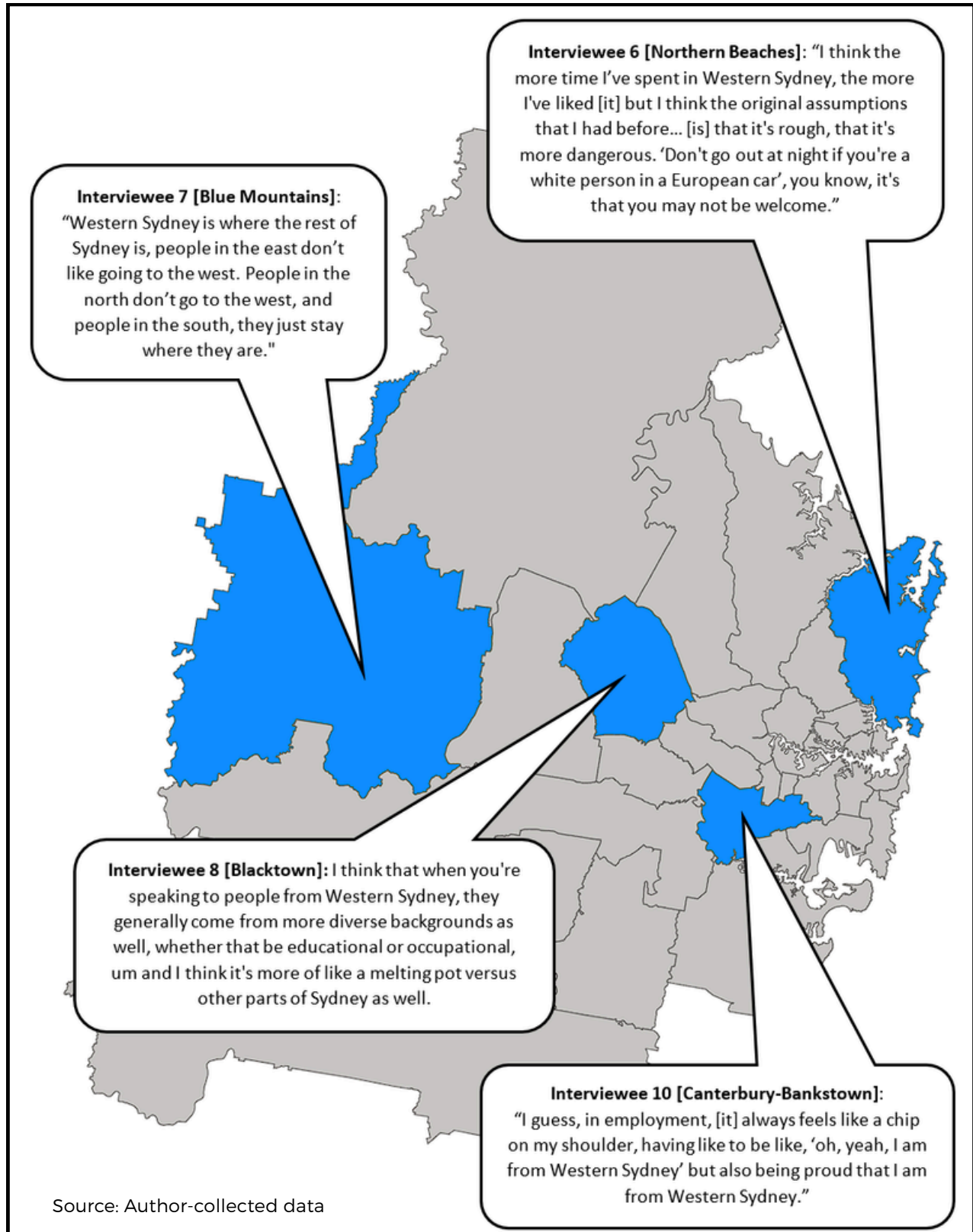
Figure 17: Funding distribution of the 'Western Sydney Infrastructure Grants Program' across a sample of this study's 'Western Sydneys'



Differences in IRSD decile scores and 'Western Sydney Infrastructure Grants Program' funding (as a resource distribution example) show that not all 'Western Sydneys' are equal or the same when it comes to socio-economic disadvantage. These differences also show how definitions of 'Western Sydney' may mask spatial inequality in Greater Sydney by excluding areas that have greater or more complex resource needs than others.

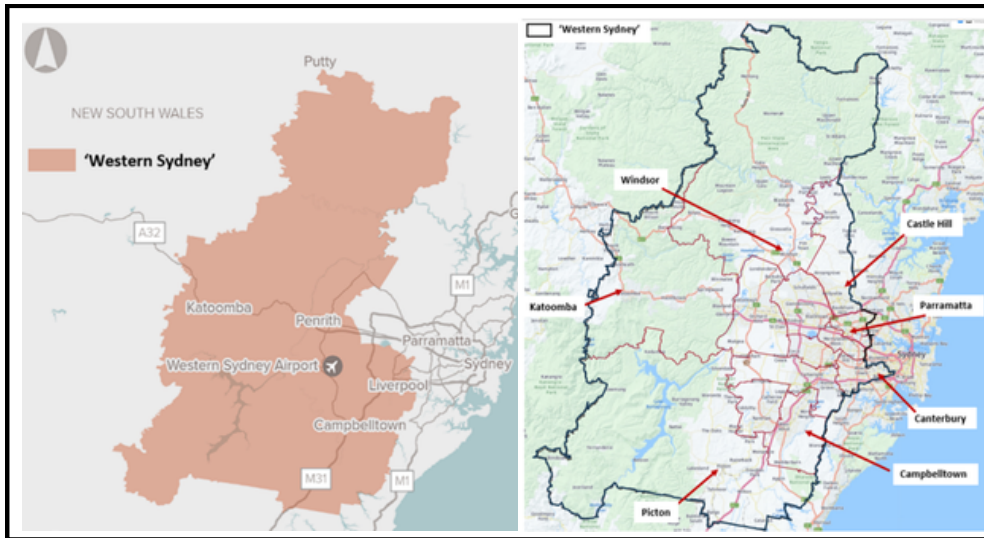
What do Greater Sydney residents think of 'Western Sydney'?

Figure 18: Sample views of 'Western Sydney' from study participants



Views on different 'Western Sydneys' today

Figure 19: Image 1 (left) and Image 2 (right)



Sources: Refer to 'References'

Table 4: Study participant comment samples on Image 1 and Image 2

| Image 1 | Image 2 |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Most of that area isn't even Sydney.' • 'Both Bankstown and Parramatta are the culture core of Western Sydney and should be included.' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Canterbury-Bankstown is a tricky one as the Canterbury part should be Inner West.' • 'Way too broad. The eastern border is pretty accurate but it goes way too far north and south.' |

Source: Author's collected data

Image 1 shows 'Western Sydney' as the formal 'Western Parkland City'. Image 2 shows it as the quasi-formal 'Greater Western Sydney'.

Study participants were shown these images without any information and asked how accurate and complete they were in showing 'Western Sydney' on a map today.

Table 5: Study participants' views on Image 1 and Image 2 as accurate and complete images of 'Western Sydney' today

| | Image 1 | Image 2 |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| No Response | 24 | 24 |
| Strongly Disagree | 218 | 134 |
| Moderately Disagree | 209 | 185 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 146 | 143 |
| Somewhat Agree | 97 | 125 |
| Moderately Agree | 73 | 124 |
| Strongly Agree | 15 | 47 |
| TOTAL | 782 | 782 |

Source: Author's collected data

Changes over time...

“ There was no ‘Inner West’ when I was growing up [in the 1960s], it was just ‘Western Sydney’, which was west of the Harbour Bridge, and then about the ‘90s or so...there was a divide between probably Strathfield as the border of the ‘Inner West’ and then out.

(Study participant)

...and associations both good and bad

Figure 20: Positive (top) and negative (bottom) associations of ‘Western Sydney’



Source: Author-collected data

Conclusion

As this report shows, it actually does matter *where* 'Western Sydney' is when we look at resource distribution, Greater Sydney residents' social patterns, and the differences in its boundaries formed by residents and institutions.

While this report's focus on LGAs as a boundary type doesn't allow for detailed spatial analysis, it lets us see broad (and sometimes inconsistent) boundaries and its impacts when we look at resource distribution and social segregation.

When looking at resource distribution through boundaries and regional identity of spaces - specifically those associated with socio-economic disadvantage like 'Western Sydney' - perhaps we need a different way to address spatial inequalities in cities?

I hope you enjoyed reading this report and its critical perspectives of 'Western Sydney' with its fluid boundaries, complex regional identity, and its place in Greater Sydney.



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Figure 1

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Figure 3

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Figure 4 & Table 1

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Figure 5

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Figure 8

Base map (by author)

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Image 1 (with legend annotation by author)

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