Australian Cultural and Creative Activity: A Population and Hotspot Analysis

Cairns

QUT Digital Media Research Centre
Strategic summary

There is a palpable sense that Cairns really believes in the value of aspiring to be the arts and culture capital of Northern Australia and probably already is, given the strongly demand-driven evidence base that underpins the extraordinary levels of investment in civic cultural infrastructure, the leadership and support at all three level of government that underpins this branding, and the innovativeness of many of its assets and initiatives. Outstanding examples include:

- The Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF), innovative as an Indigenous cultural gathering event in itself, a profiling and a branding exercise for Queensland First Nations’ artforms and practices, and a market for authentic Indigenous visual and performance art. (The matter of authenticity was stressed to us as it sits in contrast to some of the downtown street markets which clearly do not subscribe to similar standards of authenticity.) CIAF showcases the diversity of the region’s cultures including many different Aboriginal communities/nations and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

- The Munro Martin Parklands, a triumph of landscape architecture that combines in one integrated space a general civic meeting place, an open-air heritage commemoration, and a botanical gardens showcasing a glorious array of tropical flora endemic to the region. Its success as an open-air civic space is exemplified in the story we were told of a packed-out Munro Martin Parklands featuring a performance by Opera Queensland followed by live State of Origin rugby league projected on a large screen. It has also been a contested space, historically playing the role of being a central meeting place for events and community celebrations, particularly for the Indigenous community. There were protests around the removal of trees for the re-development.

- The Tanks as a very successful ‘alternative space’ acting as both a production and venue/consumption hub that has been core to the level of local ownership of the issue of the health of arts and culture in Cairns.

- Cairns is well served by the new Cairns Performing Arts Centre, the Centre for Contemporary Arts, the Rondo Theatre, the Cairns Art Gallery, and the cultural affordances of Cairns Convention Centre.
The further, equally ambitious, plans for the transformation of the old Cairns Court House, Art Gallery and the Mulgrave Shire Council chambers to create the Cairns Gallery Precinct.

All this is underpinned by a strong grassroots participatory culture that has been deeply investigated and entered into evidence over ten years through the rigorous cultural strategy development processes of Arts Queensland, Screen Queensland and the Cultural Services branch of Cairns Regional Council, which has supported street level practice leveraging the substantial tourist trade as well as strong civic cultural platforms.

A study by Cummings (2018) identifies Cairns SA4 as an overall leader in comparison to the other North Australia centres of Darwin SA4 and Townsville LGA. Cairns leads especially in jewellery manufacturing, magazine and book publishing, architectural services, advertising, professional photography, creative artists, musicians and performers. It lags in newspaper and other publishing, and in free-to-air television broadcasting. Cairns’ cultural and creative activity occurs in the context of it being a significant commercial, industrial, educational, retail and entertainment centre. The overall strategic economic focus is on high quality local business services with a strong exposure to international tourism and other developing strengths in the growing Asia Pacific market with well-developed transport and logistical networks, extensive quality health and education services, a high standard of living, affordable housing and vibrant cultural amenity. The problems posed by its relative isolation (a city of 162,000 servicing a vast region of 37,000 square kilometres, towards the end of the National Highway, air hours away from the capital city and other major population centres) can also be seen as a strength.

Cairns’ cultural success is an outstanding example of state and federal action playing a significant investment role. It also may be arguably an outlier if Daniel, Fleischmann, & Welters’ (2016) research is accurate, which found that, in addition to all 28 of the major arts companies (for example, ballet, opera, orchestras) in Australia being based in the south, only 16 per cent of the 178 multi-year funded arts organisations supported by the Australia Council for the Arts reside in the north. Without any doubt, as we show in Strategic Theme 3 below, Cairns has been a leader amongst the four Queensland case studies in attracting cultural grants.

Crucially, what is the relation of culture to tourism (the industry for which Cairns is a byword)? Cairns Mayor Cr Bob Manning refers to its three great tourism assets as the reef, the rainforest and local Indigenous culture. In the discussion of the relationship of cultural and creative activity to the wider economy, in Strategic Theme 2 below, it is argued that cultural soft and hard infrastructure has to be ‘owned’ (appreciated, engaged in, supported) locally before it can be successfully embedded within tourism strategy. More than 10 years of cultural policy focusing on local ‘ownership’ has led to belief in the ‘arts and cultural capital of North Australia’ culminating in the opening of Cairns Performing Arts Centre in December 2018. The relation of culture to tourism can now be factored prominently into cultural planning going forward.

The proportion of people working in Software and Digital Content occupations in Cairns (0.19 per cent) is not only significantly lower than on the Gold Coast (0.48 per cent) and the Sunshine Coast region (0.44 per cent), it is lower than the average for all of regional Queensland (0.26 percent) (Appendix A.1; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Cairns has a problem developing, attracting and/or retaining talent with these critical creative skills.

With all this as background, we suggest the key challenges and opportunities for Cairns, as a cultural and creative hotspot, would include:

- Linking a very strongly and successfully locally focused cultural development agenda more closely to the tourism agenda.

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• Delivering on the third part of the aspiration, as articulated by the Mayor, Cr Bob Manning, that Cairns’ three great assets for visitors are the reef, the rainforest and local Indigenous culture.
• Exploiting to a greater extent Cairns’ comparative advantage and export opportunities in, for example, tropical architectural services.
• Addressing the significant deficit in digital creative skills by developing, attracting, and retaining creatives with digital skills who can assist in adapting the tourism offer in general—and cultural tourism in particular—to new challenges. This presents a challenge for education and training, and policy makers, to bring STEM and creative industries closer together.
• Supporting freelance creatives, especially those developing creative digital services, through Council procurement, and further development of co-working spaces and gathering places for networking and events.
• Developing brokerage alliances among creatives which can represent them effectively with government, council, business, education and the community.
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Background and context

Situated between the UNESCO-listed World Heritage Daintree Rainforest and Great Barrier Reef, Cairns is the second of Australia’s three largest northern cities—smaller than its closest neighbour Townsville and larger than Darwin. Cairns and Townsville are highly contrasting small city economies. Townsville is a garrison city, the major hub for government services in North Queensland, a railhead and logistics centre for Western mining areas, while both feature the presence of the James Cook and Central Queensland Universities. In arts and culture, Townsville boasts more established SME arts companies (for example, Dance North), and tends to outsource arts and cultural activity (for example, through subsidising independent companies) while Cairns Regional Council tends to invest directly.

Population

Cairns’ population is younger and more highly educated than the rest of regional Queensland. The mean age of a Cairns resident at 37.3 is nearly two years younger than that of the average regional Queensland and a higher proportion of people hold post-school qualifications (Figure 1). Overall, unemployment is higher than the regional Queensland average, although youth unemployment is identical, and its population growth is weak, at an annual average of 0.1 per cent between 2011 and 2016 (Table 1), reflecting a place where young people are not necessarily leaving in search of employment, but older people are moving on to cooler climes in retirement.

Cairns is a highly multicultural city, with high proportions of First Nations people and people from neighbouring Papua New Guinea and other Melanesian countries. Nine per cent of the total Cairns population is Indigenous Australian compared with 5.4 per cent in regional Queensland and 2.8 per cent in Australia overall. There are particularly high proportions of Torres Strait Island peoples: 4.4 per cent of the resident population of Cairns compared with 1.3 per cent in regional Queensland and 0.3 per cent across Australia. More people in Cairns claim Torres Strait Islander ancestry that in the Torres Straits themselves: 6833 people compared with 4093. Interviewees also pointed out that there are significant communities of people from Melanesia living in Cairns: the 2016 census identifies that 13.5 per cent of people providing Papua New Guinea as their first response for ancestry are resident in Cairns (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Figure 1 Demographic profile by place of residence, Cairns local government area 2016

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016)
Economy

Despite a steady population count and falls in employment, Cairns’ economy grew by an annual average of 1.8 per cent between the census years of 2011 and 2016 (id, 2019; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Economic growth has since strengthened, with gross regional product increasing by 3.3 per cent in 2018 (Table 1).

Cairns’ businesses service the Asia Pacific as well as the local region. With an international airport, it functions as a central hub for Far North Queensland and is a popular destination for conferences and sporting events (Cairns Regional Council, 2017b, 2017c). Its second-largest industry (after health care and social assistance) is tourism and it functions as the central hub of the Tropical North Queensland region, which is among the top 10 tourism regions in Australia (Tourism Research Australia, 2018). The impact of tourism on Cairns’ economy can be seen in its employment and value-add statistics, with tourism-related industries amongst the top five industries by employment and economic value-add (Figure 2).

Table 1 Economic indicator summary, Cairns local government area, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Gross regional product (2016-17 dollars)</th>
<th>Total employed</th>
<th>Total businesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>156,900</td>
<td>$8,414m</td>
<td>72,404</td>
<td>40,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg annual growth, 2011 to 2016</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of state</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Creative economy

Cairns Regional Council describes Cairns’ cultural landscape as ‘evolving’ (Cairns Regional Council, 2017c). Its evolving nature is apparent in the census employment data, which shows Cairns’ creative economy is highly bifurcated. There are more people employed in business-to-business creative service occupations
than in consumer-focused cultural production occupations, with the majority employed in other industries (Figure 3), and tending to earn higher mean incomes (Appendix A.2 and A.3). For example, in the census year of 2016, the largest creative industries were Architecture & Design and Software & Digital Content, with 382 and 314 workers respectively and earning average annual incomes of $54,100 and $58,200. Embedded Advertising & Marketing professionals were the largest and highest-paid creative occupation sub-group, largely due to the tourism industry, with 209 workers and earning an annual average of $63,800. In comparison, in 2016 the largest cultural production industry was Visual and Performing Arts, with 226 people reporting it as their main source of income, with an average annual income of $36,700. Employment in Music & Performing Arts occupations grew at nearly twice the rate of overall jobs growth in Cairns, 4.6 per cent, in line with recent significant investments in cultural and civic infrastructure (Appendices A.1, A.2 and A.3).

Figure 3 Creative service and cultural production employment by industry and occupation, 2011 and 2016, Cairns local government area

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016)

The high growth creative industry sectors have higher proportions of small businesses, and increasing numbers of small business registrations. The numbers of small Architecture & Design, Software & Digital Content and Visual & Performing Arts businesses registering for Australian business numbers but not GST between 2011 and 2016 grew more strongly than those in other creative sectors (Figure 4). Australian businesses must register for GST once their turnover is greater than $75,000 per annum—not only are there more businesses with turnover less than $75,000 in these sectors, between 2011 and 2016 they experienced stronger growth in employment and total earnings as well.
Government policy and funding context

Cairns Regional Council places a high priority on culture and the arts. Cultural Planner at the Council, Liz Buckley describes it as a facilitator, one small component of a vital cultural ecology, that values the contributions of creative practitioners, commercial producers and the thousands of consumers who engage with, and participate in, the cultural life of Cairns. The Council’s five-year Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2022 is one of the most detailed and ambitious plans in a regional centre, with consultation and development occurring in tandem with its Corporate Plan 2017-2022. The Corporate Plan identifies priority areas as economy, natural assets, liveability, community and culture, and serving the community—tourism is an important component of the economy priority, while the objectives for community and culture aspire to establishing Cairns as the arts and cultural capital of Northern Australia, making it a place attractive to both visitors and residents (Cairns Regional Council, 2017b).

Highlights of the Cairns Regional Council's Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2022 include aligning cultural policy more directly to supporting tourism and cultural tourism, developing a unique point of difference through supporting and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, expanding engagement from a local audience to a broader footprint, and building place identity and the creative economy. It delivers these through focussing on three priority areas:

1. **Infrastructure, resources and skills that support and stimulate the cultural and creative life of our community.** The council was already committed to developing new cultural infrastructure when it was writing its plan, and delivering on its commitments:
   - The new Cairns Performing Arts Centre. Opened in December 2018, CPAC is a $71 million project that replaced the former Cairns Civic Theatre. It includes a 941-seat auditorium, a studio theatre that can seat 400 and improved front-of and back-of-house facilities and storage space (Cairns Regional Council, 2019d)
• Refurbishment to create the Cairns Gallery Precinct. The Cairns Court House, Cairns Arts Gallery and the former Mulgrave Shire Council chambers are being redeveloped as a gallery precinct. All buildings are heritage listed (Cairns Regional Council, 2019c).

• Upgrade of facilities for visitors and performers at the Munro Martin Parklands. A $10 million project to develop it as a lush tropical parkland with an outdoor entertainment space was officially opened in August 2016 (Cairns Regional Council, 2018b).

• $1.6 million upgrade and refurbishment of the Cairns Museum between 2015 and 2017.

• Additional infrastructure investments for the Tanks Arts Centre, a contemporary arts facility located in the Cairns Botanic Gardens and housed in three converted WWII naval oil storage tanks (Tanks Arts Centre, 2015).

• Programs intended to increase the use of Council-owned space and establish new models for collaboration and promotion—an example of the latter is the online Cairns Arts and Culture Map.

2. Cultural heritage and place are valued, shared, celebrated and promoted. Strategies to manage Council assets and create opportunities include developing a plan for use of the Cairns Gallery Precinct, establishing an ongoing dialogue with the local Indigenous community, preserving and protecting local heritage, building and sustaining local art and historical museums and societies, leveraging the Commonwealth Games to showcase the region, and promoting the Cairns cultural experience to drive cultural tourism.

3. A robust cultural economy fuelled by an international reputation as a tropical, cultural and creative hub. The aim here is to support Cairns creative workforce, and to place culture and the arts more firmly as a player in the economy, as a tourism offering and importantly as part of the city’s ‘tourism brand’. Strategies include ensuring the cultural infrastructure is used to host events as good as in any capital city, promoting Cairns as an ‘international creative powerhouse,’ strengthening the regional reputation as a marketplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and creative expression, and advocating for and showcasing local creative talent.

Underpinning the whole strategy and crucial to its implementation is an ongoing evidence-based investigation. Economist Bill Cummings has scoped the creative industries in Cairns, and research partners JCU and CQU are conducting a five-year research project to annually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy, with a final report identifying achieved goals and recommendations for the future. Liz Buckley describes this evidence-based approach as ground-breaking and an important part of the Council’s strategy setting work.

Awards. Not mentioned in the cultural strategy, Cairns Regional Council hosts the Tropical North Queensland Innovation Awards. According to Cr Bob Manning: ‘We host these awards to recognise and congratulate innovative thinking across our region. Through the Awards, we are able to showcase some of the excellent business ideas that have been implemented in Tropical North Queensland.’ The Awards link up local business people with potential investors, mentors and customers through mentoring and professional services and development packages as well as cash prizes (Industry Queensland, 2018). 2018 winners include PropIntel by Allaro Homes Cairns, a software solution for coordinating and visualising construction projects (Cairns Regional Council, 2019e).

Arts Queensland has a clear focus on developing cultural institutions and opportunities for artists in Far North Queensland, with its sole regional office based in Cairns. It currently has eight staff whose main responsibilities include the management of the Cairns Centre of Contemporary Arts (CoCA) and the Backing Indigenous Arts (BIA) initiative. In 2019 the office commenced interim delivery of the Regional Arts Services Network in Far North Queensland, as part of a state-wide program for cultural service delivery.
Based in the Cairns CBD, **CoCA has played an important role in nurturing and showcasing local creative talent, as well as hosting touring performances and exhibitions.** It closed in August 2018 to undergo a major refurbishment following an Arts Queensland review of the Centre’s role and function given the changing cultural infrastructure landscape of the city. CoCA will reopen in December 2019 with a focus on supporting the region’s thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultural sector. The overall vision is for CoCA to become an iconic destination that champions the development and presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts in Queensland, supports cultural tourism in the region by providing rich arts experiences for local audiences and visitors, and provides a home for local arts companies.

CoCA is also home to Just Us Theatre Ensemble (JUTE) and KickArts, which make significant contributions to the region’s performing and visual arts sectors, including supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and other local artists from across Far North Queensland. JUTE is known for successfully producing and touring locally-derived performances, as well as its development and outreach programs. From 2020, JUTE and KickArts will remain at CoCA and will be joined by other Indigenous owned and led tenant organisations, presenting new opportunities for creative collaborations.

**Funding support.** Cultural institutions and practitioners in Cairns benefit from funding programs offered by all three tiers of government, and particularly from significant grant funds from the Federal and Queensland Governments targeted at supporting the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and theatre (Figure 5). Notably, since 2016, the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair has received $1.1 million from the Australia Council, and UMI Arts $1.5 million from the Australia Council and $1.1 million from the Federal Government’s Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program. Cairns is also a benefits from the secondary effects of grants directed at assisting Indigenous regional arts centres and to assist performing arts companies tour Far North Queensland—for example, in 2017-18 and 2018-19 State Government grant monies that exceeded $2 million as it delivered on its commitment to developing arts and culture in Far North Queensland.

In 2017-18, the Queensland State Government committed $2.1 million to its Backing Indigenous Arts—Performing Arts (BIAPA) program, to assist with core operations, business development, new commissions and early career producer placements in Indigenous performing arts companies. Cairns organisations receiving two-year core funding through BIAPA include Grace Lillian Lee Productions, the Nintiringanyia Cultural Training Centre, On Country Events and Productions, and the Pryce Centre for Culture and Arts. JUTE and UMI Arts receive multi-year funding through Arts Queensland’s Organisations Fund. From a cultural infrastructure perspective, the Queensland Government has committed $15 million to CPAC, and through Arts Queensland, $5.9 million for the refurbishment of CoCA, with additional funding provided by the Queensland Department of Public Works and Housing towards its maintenance and refurbishment costs. The Federal Government contributed $10 million to CPAC through its National Stronger Regions Fund.

Cairns Regional Council provides consistent access to culture and arts funding to the value of nearly $500,000 each year through the Regional Arts Development Fund (delivered in partnership with Arts Queensland, which contributes $100,000 annually), its Arts and Cultural infrastructure Fund and with in-kind assistance. The average RADF grant in 2018-19 was $5,000, with the Council offering grants under categories targeting different groups including youth, disability, eco-arts and professional development. Infrastructure grants for building or material enhancements to premises were more substantial, with a mean grant payment of $28,500. In-kind assistance makes available Council resources to activities ‘that make a positive creative contribution to the region’, generally to events, exhibitions and festivals (Cairns Regional Council, 2019a).
Cairns Museum: Governments working together to revitalise infrastructure. The Cairns Regional Council’s redevelopment of the old School of Arts building included the refurbishment of the award-winning Cairns Museum, which reopened in 2017 following a $1.6 million refit—bringing the council’s total spend on Cairns’ oldest building to $10.3 million (Campbell, 2016). The revitalised museum provides a window onto the social history of Cairns and the tropics and includes displays curated with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It was designed to take account of local community as well as tourism needs. With the arts now seen as both an economic and social driver for Cairns, and Council investing strategically in building the capacity and capability of the museum, it has grown from being a volunteer-run organisation to now employing one full-time and four part-time staff members, with more than 100 volunteers (Wills, 2019). The temporary exhibition space on the ground floor of the Cairns Museum regularly showcases local exhibitions curated by local community groups and local collections. Importantly, Cairns Museum rarely showcases exhibitions from outside the Far North Queensland region due to environmental factors and requirements. The tropical climate, particularly the humidity and moisture levels, influences the museum’s ability to host travelling exhibitions. This, however, means that the Cairns Museum has a major commitment to displaying local and regional content.

The development of the museum sector in Cairns is supported by an annual agreement between Cairns Regional Council and the state-run Queensland Museum, which bases a Museum Development Officer in the Cairns area to service museums across far north Queensland. The incumbent in the role, Dr Jo Wills, explained that this is one of only two Queensland Museum positions that are located outside its main
Strategic theme 1
What are the interrelationships across the sub sectors of the creative industries?

Cairns’ creative economy is led by its vibrant visual and performing arts sectors, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and performance, and professional photography, that simultaneously cater to the local entertainment and regional tourism markets while also being outward looking and exporting talent, troupes and creative products nationally and internationally. The creative industries as a sector are very evident in the Cairn’s cultural DNA and CBD, with live music, museums and galleries all prominently located in central locations. While there are numerous examples of commercial visual arts galleries, arts fairs, live performing arts and music events throughout the year, there has been a pronounced contraction in the traditional media sectors. Newspapers, publishing and large-scale international film production filmed in Cairns—although levels of local independent screen production are increasing—have experienced marked declines in terms of employment and reported total earnings (Appendices A.1 and A.2). Capacity and activity in high-value creative ‘tech’ sectors such as gaming and virtual reality/augmented reality production is significantly limited.

Grassroots participation, freelance creatives, film and growing Indigenous cultural capacities

Cairns’ strong grassroots culture has been nurtured by the cultural strategy development processes of the Cultural Services branch of Cairns Regional Council, drawing strength from the participatory culture in the wider region. The Council’s Manager of Cultural Services, Stephen Foster, illustrated this with the example that there are 150-plus dance schools and 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Centres in the Cairns catchment region of 250,000 population (Foster, 2019), which are funded through Arts Queensland’s Backing Indigenous Arts initiative and the Federal Government’s Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program. The Cairns Arts and Cultural Map, developed by the local Council under the auspices of its Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2022, showcases the depth and breadth of the region’s arts and culture in an interactive website that provides lists and locations of creative businesses and cultural organisations. The map’s origins lie in the sophisticated cultural policy planning undertaken by the Council’s Cultural Services officers. The interactive site builds on a mapping exercise during the development of the Council’s culture and arts strategy, and can now be updated by local artists and organisations who create their own entries (Cairns Regional Council, 2019b).

A lot of Cairns culture is street level practice drawing on substantial tourist trade plus strong civic cultural platforms. The Council’s regular markets give local jewellers, photographers, creative artists, musicians and performers opportunities to showcase their work, particularly important for visual and performing artists whose practice is not their main source of income. There are more visual and performing arts businesses not registered for GST—and therefore with turnovers less than $75,000—than any other category of business in
Cairns (Figure 4). For example, in the census year of 2016, there were more small jewellery businesses active in Cairns that would be suggested in the census employment statistics. While in their census returns 14 people listed the jewellery industry as their main source of income, and 18 described themselves as jewellers, there were 39 registered jewellery businesses, two thirds of which were not registered for the GST and can therefore be assumed to be generating revenues of less than $75,000.

A regional hub delivering creative services beyond Far North Queensland.

‘All jobs for the Cape, Torres Strait and even as far as Mt Isa, get distributed from Cairns’ (Fantin, 2019a). While the interviews indicate that a number of creative services or creative inputs, from social media campaigns to digital content and applications, are in some instances outsourced to companies in Brisbane or other major cities (for example Aylward, 2019; Finocchiaro & Aird, 2019; McFarlane, 2019), some creative firms in the region do also provide creative services to the far flung parts of Far North Queensland, Papua New Guinea and into the Pacific Islands as far as Solomon Islands. Gary Aylward, the General Manager of Hot Croc Consulting, a media and advertising services company, has produced news, advertising campaigns, TV programs, training manuals, and media content for a diverse range of clients in Far North Queensland, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. A key example is a television advertisement produced for the Papua New Guinea market using the Imparja Television network footprint that airs in Papua New Guinea. The company also did the advertising campaign for Cooktown’s 200 years celebration.

Architecture and design firms are particularly strongly placed to service the Asia Pacific as well as Far North Queensland. People Oriented Design (POD), ‘a multi-disciplinary architecture, landscape architecture design, design project management, community engagement and research practice,’ has recently completed a commercial building on Thursday Island and has completed projects in the Atherton Tablelands Normanton, Mount Isa, and Doomadgee. Another example is Jim Fitzpatrick Architects, which designed the APEC Haus hosting the 2018 APEC Summit in Port Moresby after being approached by the then-PNG Prime Minister, Peter O’Neill, in 2013 (Jim Fitzpatrick Architects, 2019).

Film, TV and radio

There is a cluster of talented film and television professionals in Cairns, some of whom work on major foreign blockbusters filmed in Australia (for example, Corey O’Connell worked in the art department on Thor: Ragnarok and Aquaman both filmed in the studios on the Gold Coast), even though the sector is fragmented and somewhat disconnected from major screen hubs in the metropolitan cities. While a number of independent feature film productions have filmed in the region in recent years and some Brisbane based production do location shoots in the region, the screen sector in Cairns tends to specialise in television drama (for example, The Pacific 2010 and The Straits 2012), documentary and Indigenous film and television content. The Great Barrier Reef in particular has inspired numerous documentaries, and locally produced content for international documentaries and creates demand for videography work on the Reef for both tourists and tourism operators. According to Jan Aird, the Events Coordinator for the Cairns Regional Council and herself a production manager, many practitioners have stayed in region but travel outside region for film work.

The development of Cairns’ film sector is a specific focus of Screen Queensland, with Screen Culture Manager Rowena Billard present in Cairns two days every month. As Rowena explains, ‘Cairns is unique for Screen Queensland,’ with strong production development potential, in terms of Indigenous content and an engaged local community looking for support and opportunities. This is a unique approach to development for Screen Queensland—in other regional areas, arguably with the exception of Winton, screen culture is largely developed through festivals and networks (Billard, 2019). Local actor and producer Aaron Fa’Aoso, for example, through his Lone Star Company, produces stories about the Torres Straits—documentary series
Blue Water Empire, co-produced with Bunya Productions with a $2.3 million budget including development and production support from Screen Australia and Screen Queensland, was shot in Cairns as well as the Torres Strait (Calcino, 2018).

Greg Maxwell, cameraman and screen producer
Greg Maxwell offers cinematography and screen production services through his company Maxwell Media. For the Cairns market, he produces commercial screen work and videography for advertising, government departments, hospitals and tourism operators including Quicksilver Cruises (a large tourism company that operates ten boats and owns the Green Island Resort). Greg does freelance camera work for Fox Sports in Townsville, Brisbane, and Sydney, and for Queensland Rugby League in Townsville. His website states, ‘He can be contracted as a freelance cameraman/editor anywhere in Australia, with or without equipment’.

News media disrupted
Like the sector nationally and internationally, in recent years the publishing sector in Cairns has faced significant challenges, with employment in the publishing industry nearly halving between 2011 and 2016 (Appendix A.1). Unlike many regional towns the News Corp-owned newspaper, The Cairns Post, has survived and remains the major employer of news professionals in the region. Some of those who lost positions now have their own consultancies. A key example is the case of Liz Inglis, who left The Cairns Post during a downsizing in 2008, after being with the paper for 20 years as a journalist and Tourism and Features editor. Liz now works as an independent communications and public relations consultant for clients including Tourism Tropical North Queensland and Business Events Cairns & Great Barrier Reef Communications (Inglis, 2019).

Tropical architecture and design
Cairns architecture practices emphasise designing housing and public buildings for a tropical climate and encompass residential and commercial, and local and global projects. Cairns is home to an estimated 55 practicing architects, with a large proportion of architectural firms owned by women (Mainwood, 2019). Shaneen Fantin, co-director of People Oriented Design (POD) and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Queensland and James Cook University, has written about why there are so many women who own architectural practices in the region (Fantin, 2015) and a number of really useful articles about tropical design in Cairns (Fantin, 2005, 2017, 2019b).

Possessing a nuanced understanding of the diverse issues at play in particular location, small regional practices often need to collaborate with larger firms to upskill and upscale to work on large and significant infrastructure projects (Norrie, 2019). Principal of CA Architects, Carlo Amerio (2019) described how he partnered with Cox Architects in Brisbane on a number of signature Cairns projects, including the Salthouse harbourside restaurant precinct, the Cairns Performing Arts Centre, and the Munro Martin Park Development, and was also commissioned by Crystalbrook Collection for several hotel design projects.
People Oriented Design, architects

POD’s company logo, a depiction of the black bean pod speaks to the landscape, country, and environment that are key priorities for the company. For co-director Shaneen Fantin, ‘The seed is a tough plant, it’s a good rainforest rehabilitation plant and it’s a beautiful seed pod and its local, native and pioneering and its useful’.

One of the things POD is known for is its ‘intercultural design practice’— bringing together anthropology and design. In its design process, POD aims to bring a project’s cultural imperatives and the world view, values and identity of its clients to the fore. The company partners with Indigenous people and Aboriginal organisations and does two pro bono/pro rata projects per year. POD has strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and land trusts and it offers free advice to communities. POD also offers office space to Indigenous Elders, including painters, who work from the POD office space.

The influence of Cairns’ architects and landscape designers can be seen throughout its streetscapes and parks. For example, CA Architects designed the highly-regarded and award-winning tropical gardens of the Munro Martin Parklands, the Cairns Foreshore redevelopment and the JCU Rainforest Observatory, while TPG Architects has participated in large projects including the upgrade of the Centre for Contemporary Arts, in collaboration with dancer and choreographer Pauline Lampton and visual artist Brian Robinson (Wivell, 2018). JCU’s Tropical Urbanism and Design Lab attracts and trains planners and landscape designers who work locally and globally. Andrew Prowse, for example, has taught at the centre since 1994, while also working on townscape improvements, resorts, housing, and garden projects in Cairns, Queensland, PNG, Thailand and China. He established his business 20 year ago, because it seemed like a good time to open a landscape architecture business and because it is easy to fly to most places from Cairns: “If anyone has a tropical project that is remote, hard to get to, or difficult to do, they come to us.” (Horticulture, 2018; Young, 2019).

Francoise Lane of Indij Design, Indigenous artist and designer

Francoise Lane and her husband Andrew run a small interior design architecture and cultural consultation practice, Indij Design, and Francoise is an artistic practitioner. Francoise is a graduate of the QUT School of the Built Environment, her homeland is Kereri island (Hammond Island) in the Torres Strait. Her artistic practice has been spurred through the Indigenous design network of Australia and the Accelerate Program run by the British Council. Indij Designs specializes in indigenous cultural engagement, integrating Indigenous themes into its design work in response to engagement outcomes from Indigenous stakeholders in project locations. Their clients include regional and Indigenous Shire Councils, Indigenous health agencies, state government and James Cook University, with projects including housing in Arnhem Land and the Cape. As well as competitive processes, Indij Design secures work through word of mouth. They also contribute expert cultural engagement and design review to large-scale projects.

Strategic theme 2: The relationship of cultural and creative activity to the wider economy

The presence of creative practitioners, cultural institutions and government program delivery in Cairns undoubtedly have a positive effect on its economy, generating income opportunities and social benefits for the community as a whole. Given the extent of the three tiers of government’s investment in soft and hard cultural infrastructure in Cairns, strategies to maximise that infrastructure’s value to the wider economy will be crucial going forward.
Evidence supporting this includes James Cook University and Central Queensland University being significant exporters of creative education services, with 38 per cent of 2018 enrolments in creative arts, information technology, and society and culture courses from overseas, (Department of Education and Training, 2019), and Cairns’ residents are 20 per cent more likely to have participated in a cultural activity than people in the rest of the state of Queensland (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

With the vision and funding in place to redevelop Cairns’ cultural infrastructure, not only does its cultural precinct provide new opportunities for locals to consume and produce content, it is providing local businesses and the greater economy with significant economic benefits. The rejuvenation of the Cairns Museum and School of Arts Building, for example, was overseen by local architects Roger Mainwood and Edi Piagno (TPG Architects), with the contracts for $6.45 million building redevelopment and the $1.6 million museum refit awarded to local construction firm Hutchison Builders, providing economic and social benefits that extend beyond the creative industries themselves (Campbell, 2016; "Major work draws duo in," 2018; "Start on arts building," 2015)

**Tourism and cultural policy**

**Tourism is critical to Cairns’ history, identity and future** but it is significantly more challenged than in other Queensland hotspots and elsewhere in the country. The most recent industry statistics show that tourism spending in Cairns in 2017 exceeded $2.1 billion—nearly two-thirds of tourism expenditure for all of Far North Queensland—with 2.8 million visitors contributing 8.2 per cent of its economic value add and tourism-related industries employing 9,000 people (Figure 6).

*Figure 6  Tourism activity, Cairns*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Output (£m)</th>
<th>1,157.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of region output</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value add (£m)</td>
<td>615.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of region value add</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>9,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of region emp</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Businesses by number of employees</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 4</td>
<td>702</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 19</td>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 or more</td>
<td>485</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-employing</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: dCommunity (2019), Tourism Research Australia (2018)*

After 30 years of growth, local tourism operators are concerned about the future. Infrastructure bottlenecks, limited numbers of flights into Cairns, withdrawal of services of Cathay Pacific, a major carrier, in 2019, natural disasters and outdated marketing strategies have seen Cairns’ share of the tourism market fall over the last ten years (Davie, 2019; Jones, 2019). Writing in *The Cairns Post* in early 2018, the CEO of Tourism Tropical North Queensland Pip Close responded to these challenges: ‘we must be nimble enough to move with it so we can compete with marketing organisations whose funds are far greater than ours,’ and describing how Tourism Tropical North Queensland was shifting its marketing strategies from big events for travel agents to a focus on public relations and influencers, which they believed would provide a better return on investment. They were now attending international travel events, educating travel writers,
influencers and broadcasters (who were not aware of Cairns’ dual World Heritage status or the diversity of experiences) and had appointed a Sydney digital marketing firm, Klick Communications, to increase awareness of the Cairns region with fast-growing traveller demographics in southern domestic markets (Close, 2018; "Increased tourism publicity a Klick away," 2018). The Queensland State Government has also signalled its commitment to facilitating economic growth through tourism by partnering with Ports North to reinvigorate the Cairns waterfront by creating a new entertainment and recreation precinct, the Tropical North Global Tourism Hub, and a $176 million expansion and refurbishment of the Cairns Convention Centre (Queensland Government, 2019).

There is also widespread concern about the future of the Great Barrier Reef, as it impacts directly the health of Cairns tourism: ‘if the Reef dies, Cairns (or at least its economy) dies’. This is now a critical issue, with the reputable independent science organisation Australian Institute for Marine Science pointing to the most recent coral bleaching events as ‘unprecedented’ (Australian Institute of Marine Science, 2019). Perceptions of the dangers of cyclone activity—which are becoming more active outside of the expected late summer period, more regular and more intense according to climate science—and the 2019 withdrawal of direct airline services from growing Asian markets (for example, Cathay Pacific in 2019), have potentially major effects on what is an inherently volatile industry. The hard truths of science clash with the significantly increased dangers of ‘over-hyped reporting’ (Lloyd 2019)—interviewees with tourism connections reacted very negatively to ‘outsider thinking’ on these recurrent natural disasters. Small, isolated, regional economies like those in Far North Queensland also cannot afford to over rely on what is a low wage service industry often compared unfavourably with higher skill traditional jobs in manufacturing and mining. In the light of the collapse of the Palmer nickel refinery and the delays on the Adani development, which have hit employment prospects in central and north Queensland hard, one acerbic journalist has commented that ‘Handing out leaflets to the Daintree is hardly a replacement for a full-time mining job’ (Rodan, 2019).

This is why Cairns Mayor Cr Bob Manning was clear in interview that, while tourism remains a defining industry for the city, there are now well-established diversification strategies which include marine industries, aviation, health, agriculture and international education. The marine sector is large and includes a major fishing fleet, reef tourism, military marine infrastructure, and high-end super yachts. There is economic activity across the value chain in Cairns for the marine industry. Because it has specialist sectors, Cairns also hosts a marine college specialist training facility. His vision is for commercial and civic development that is clean, green and future- and people-oriented.

It is also why Cairns seeks to position itself as the cultural centre of Northern Australia. Cairns’ civic cultural infrastructure is in the process of being massively remodelled and upgraded to deliver on its positioning of itself as the cultural centre of Northern Australia. It includes the Cairns Performing Arts Centre, the Munro Martin Parklands, the Cairns Art Gallery, Cairns Library, the Tanks Arts Centre, Cairns Centre of Contemporary Arts and the new Cultural Precinct incorporating Cairns Art Gallery, the old Cairns Court House building on the former Mulgrave Shire building. In a compact, readily navigated, gridded downtown, cultural infrastructure is hard to miss and easy to come across as a street tourist as well as being very accessible as the suburban sprawl from the central core is as even-sided as any city on the east coast of Australia can be. This is dramatically different to the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast. However, it is significant that the stand-alone commercial dedicated cultural and (city-based) nature tourism attractions are all grouped elsewhere, in the inner northern suburb of Smithfield, where (rainforest) nature dramatically meets culture.

The cultural infrastructural renaissance is for the locals, avers Mayor Cr Bob Manning; it is source of great civic pride and has been strongly favoured with local attendance and participation. For Manning, the logic of the arts and culture investment is that it is a recognition of ‘who and what we are’ and not simply a ‘replication of external, tourism success stories such as creating Disneyland like experiences’. One anecdote
sums this up well: a packed out Munro Martin Parklands featured a performance by Opera Queensland followed by live State of Origin Rugby League projected on a large screen (Manning, 2019).

So, given some doubts expressed about the preparedness of cultural tourism to participate fully in mainstream tourism offer (that culture is not productised enough, allowing it to be booked years in advance, and seasonally consistent year-round), what is the relation of culture to tourism? (Or culture for the visitors as distinct from the locals?)

**Relative to its nature-tourism history, culture is a more recent tourism drawcard in Cairns.** Cairns Regional Council Cultural Services Manager, Stephen Foster (2019), offered an important analysis of the history of the relationship between tourism and culture. When he started in 2007, there were few pieces of infrastructure (a civic theatre, an art gallery and the Tanks Arts Centre), and a regional arts festival that was contracted out. There were 25,000 tourists a day in the city, of which a few percent could fill all venues—however, tourists were not there for culture but for the reef and rainforest and to escape the southern winters. ‘We spent a lot of ratepayers money working with the tourism industry, paying their commissions to have them promote our tickets and offers. In a six-month period, we sold three tickets to tourists! So we really concentrated on the local. We had to turn around the festival, which was determinedly of the view that it was for tourists. In 2009, we were successful in bringing the festival back under the Council, at the end of a phase of Tourism Events Queensland funding’.

The learnings were based on Malcolm Blaylock and the Adelaide Festival: signature events had to start local, with investments in festival, program, marketing, engagement products, in short, local place making. Now, after ten years of localisation and selling the vision (a grassroots vision, underneath the cultural capital of a North Australia strapline), they had the attendance rates and engagement figures, and could do real economic impact analysis. With the opening of CPAC in December 2018, the ‘arts and cultural capital of North Australia’ got the politicians’ blessing. With all that on board, says Stephen Foster, the relation of culture to tourism can now be factored prominently into the city’s very detailed cultural planning.

**Creative Tourism: The Reef Casino**
Art, performance and live music are a large part of the offerings of The Reef Casino (and Accor Hotel) in Cairns. The Reef Casino aims to be ‘the premier entertainment hub in Cairns,’ with live entertainment six nights of the week, a dinner theatre and a wildlife dome on the top of the building. The Reef Casino is also a strong supporter of local art. It is the patron of various exhibitions and auctions—the Casino buys the winning art prizes. It has displayed and showcased artists whose work has been shown in Cairns Arts Gallery, Cairns Museum, Tjapukai, Cairns Indigenous Art Fair. The hotel practices its patronage by displaying and selling local art works, hosting temporary exhibitions of local artists, buying paintings as decoration for the hotel.

**Outstanding Indigenous cultural tourism**

Mayor Bob Manning refers to Cairns’ three great tourism assets as the Reef, the rainforest and local Indigenous culture: Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and to an extent Melanesia cultural influences are evident in the city as well as the region’s cultural and creative production and output (Aylward, 2019). Significant investments in infrastructure and organisations by all three tiers of government have seen growth in the capacity and reach of local Indigenous visual and performing artists, with increased access to tourism and export markets providing economic and social benefits to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Cairns and the Far North Queensland region.

An outstanding success story, Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park has over three decades has taken Indigenous tourism in Queensland from ‘virtually unheard of’ to ‘a cultural tourism icon’ (Archibald-Binge 2018). Owned by Indigenous Business Australia, the ‘vast majority’ of staff at Tjapukai are Australian
Indigenous people, with most identifying as Djabugay (Hollingsworth, 2019). The enterprise’s cultural content/messaging/Dreamtime stories are the intellectual property of the Djabugay people from the rainforest of tropical north Queensland and it is tightly controlled under Indigenous protocol. Manager Shirley Hollingsworth was very clear: this is authentic local culture. Much knowledge is not productised; Elders are the arbiters of what content becomes available, and constant attention is paid to control over intellectual property for artists, given widespread fake Indigenous art practices in the Cairns tourism market—as elsewhere. Tjapukai’s messaging is hard-hitting as well as being informative, welcoming and inclusive. Like other major Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism ventures in Queensland, such as Dreamworld Corroboree and Jellurgal Aboriginal Cultural Centre on the Gold Coast, some of its performance and static display material is unapologetically anticolonial. Feedback from one interviewee (not, of course, at Tjapukai) was that he had heard non-Indigenous attendees come away feeling quite confronted by the strength of the anticolonial messaging.

Arts Queensland’s Backing Indigenous Arts (BIA) Initiative has been key to the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic and cultural expression in Far North Queensland—and its appeal as a tourism attraction. Launched in 2007, BIA is a $12.6 million investment delivered in four-year funding cycles, supporting the development of a sustainable and ethical Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts industry in Queensland. BIA represents a pipeline approach to supporting Indigenous artists from creation to market through an investment cycle that begins with art centres and individual grants and follows through with support for the Indigenous Art Centres Alliance and CIAF. The BIA 2019-20 to 2022-23 funding cycle, for example, currently supports the following:

- **Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF).** CIAF’s main purpose is to provide a platform for market exposure and income generation. Initially managed through Arts Queensland, CIAF as a BIA funded independent organisation celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2019. It now has the support of both the Queensland State Government and the Cairns Regional Council, with the Mayor sitting on the CIAF board. While its main focus has been on visual arts and crafts, the event now includes performance, fashion and design elements, as well as community and industry forums and events and opportunities for cultural exchange. Over its 10-year history, CIAF has generated $7.6 million in art sales which has been returned to the artistic community and used to further develop their practice, and given recognition to Queensland’s diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and their associated art movements. According to CIAF General Manager Vanessa Gillens and Artistic Director Janina Harding (2019), the Fair is the ‘most successful tourism product born locally and paraded its local participation’. In keeping with its ‘first local’ reputation, local buying support is critical. In the early days of CIAF, institution (government and art galleries) and private collector acquisition was critical, representing most of its revenue and sales targets. According to Gillens and Harding, institutional and collector sales have stabilised, while local purchasing continues to grow.

- **Indigenous Art Centre network.** There are 14 funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Centres across Far North Queensland including the Torres Strait, along with their representative body the Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA) which is based in Cairns. These centres provide much of the product showcased and sold through CIAF, as well as other markets throughout the year including online sales, retail outlets, commercial galleries, collecting institutions, private collectors and commissions.

- **Backing Indigenous Arts - Performing Arts (BIAPA).** This initiative supports the development of new works through commissions to build the Indigenous performing arts sector in Far North Queensland and increase career opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers. Funding streams include Producer Placements, Next Stage and New Commissions. Proposals for new contemporary Indigenous performing arts initiatives are appraised for development and presentation at CoCA in 2019-20.
• **Other support offered through BIA.** While Cairns acts as the hub for FNQ’s First Nations artists and creatives, maintaining strong community connections to culture and country across the whole region is critical to the success of the BIA pipeline model. Other support includes:
  
  - **Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival.** A biennial gathering in Cape York Peninsula, highlighting the many diverse communities, language, song, dance and stories and showcasing the strength, pride and uniqueness of Aboriginal people
  
  - **Winds of Zenadth Cultural Festival.** A biennial four-day festival to celebrate and preserve Torres Strait Islander language, art, song and dance held on Thursday Island
  
  - **Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund (IRADF).** A partnership between Arts Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities represented by 16 participating councils and host organisations
  
  - **Indigenous Art Centre Infrastructure Fund (IACIF).** a two-year (2017/18-2018/19) fund which supported upgrades to artist studios, rehearsal, performance and exhibition spaces.

• **Support offered through other Arts Queensland funding programs:** Funding is also available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander projects, touring and professional development activities through Arts Queensland’s Queensland Arts Showcase Program, Individuals Fund and Playing Queensland Fund.

**Notable arts, cultural and creative industry players in Cairns’ Indigenous creative sector**

- **UMI Arts** is a leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultural organisation for Far North Queensland.

- **Gimuy Fish Festival.** Owned and operated by one of Cairns’ Traditional Owner groups, the Yidinji Gimuy people, the festival is an annual event including presentations, performances and cultural forums grounded in the social and cultural history, and contemporary expressions of Gimuy communities.

- **Lone Star Company.** A small screen production company led by Aaron Fa’Aso and Jimi Bani, which produces screen content and film development skills with participants in remote and regional communities – and while the company is largely situated on Thursday Island, it has strong connections to Cairns as do other Torres Strait Island practitioners.

- **AppOriginee.** A new initiative by local Traditional Owner Gudju Gudju and partners, which converges the region’s Indigenous cultural products and experiences with the cultural tourism market

- **Marilya Choir.** An offshoot of the Gondwana Children’s Choir, this Cairns based choir comprised of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women has recorded the critically acclaimed ‘Spinifex Gum’ album and regularly tours within Australia and overseas. Choir members were actively involved in the Garma Festival’s Youth Manifesto.

- **Yidinji Gallery.** A fledgling community owned and operated gallery in the CBD focussed on showcasing the work of Yidinji artists

- **Professor Henrietta Marrie AM.** A Traditional Owner and academic based at CQU, Professor Marrie continues to be a powerful advocate for the return of cultural property to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the region, and a strong supporter of local Indigenous cultural maintenance and education.

**Digital issues and opportunities**

The theme of creative digital deficit is evident in most hotspots studied, but it is critical in Cairns. The proportion of people working in Software and Digital Content occupations in Cairns (0.47 per cent) is lower than the average for all of regional Queensland (0.49 percent), and significantly below the Gold Coast (0.90 per cent) and the Sunshine Coast region (0.81 per cent). Venues and businesses requiring high end creative digital services typically source them from outside the region. The Reef Hotel Casino, for example, has a large animated, interactive digital content screen depicting a reef in its hotel foyer. The interactive feature cost $1 million to produce and was developed in Germany (McFarlane, 2019). Similarly, the Cairns Museum has a large interactive video installation created by Sydney firm Mental Media.
This relative lack of capacity presents challenges and opportunities:

1) Brain drain of young digital talent (very marked with JCU Innovation Centre’s first graduates from its Australia-first Internet of Things degree program)
2) Lack of value-adding to the tourism and other industries through creative digital experiences
3) Lack of full exploitation of local start-up and innovation system
4) Under-exploitation of local procurement opportunities
5) Constraining opportunities for collaboration across the creative industries

An active brokerage network such as the Sunshine Coast’s #SCRIPT and Creative Arts Alliance is distinctly lacking in Cairns. There are few opportunities for new graduates and the economy does not have the scale or scope for tech professionals wanting to build a business. Foundation Professor and Head of Discipline, Electronic Systems and Internet of Things Engineering at JCU, Wei Xiang (2019), noted the lack of investor presence and opportunities for high-tech jobs in regional Australia and predicted that most of the 15 first-cohort graduates from his Internet of Things engineering program will leave on graduation. Troy Haines (2019), who was based in Cairns for 20 years and set up theSpace incubator to specialise in human centred technology for mental health and human thriving, has left Cairns due to a failure of its start-up culture and is now based on the Gold Coast.

Despite the limited opportunities, however, there is some evidence of an emerging younger generation of creative digital entrepreneurs:

- 2bitstudios, founded by James Cook University PhD candidate Aidan Possemiers (2019) and other graduate students, which creates business-to-business applications, data visualization, virtual reality for education, GIS and sensor networks. An example of 2bitstudios’ work includes an augmented reality rainforest world at the Malanda Falls Visitor Centre that educates visitors about tree kangaroos.
- Founded five years ago, Ben Farkas’s Think VR was originally conceived in order to offer virtual reality products. With the market for VR lagging, it has since moved into education, including educational and staff training applications for local councils and Education Queensland, and consulting about the potential of virtual reality. This pivot was necessary because few organizations in Cairns understood virtual reality or how it could be used. Farkas believes VR could have a role value-adding on tourist attractions (for example, VR content of a Reef dive) and sees other sales opportunities in marketing, trade shows, entertainment and experience marketing, adding capacity to Cairns’ business conventions sector.

In terms of start-up culture, Mayor Bob Manning does see that this can, to some degree, be driven through council procurement and that there is a support role for the Chamber of Commerce and similar organisations. The problem is possibly more prevalent in commercial services procurement, though local architecture firms have to some extent solved this through joint ventures with bigger firms in Brisbane. Cairns Regional Council itself does not provide direct support, but provides a lot of goodwill, for example, through introductions and refurbishment of public facilities as creative spaces. Cairns has the beginnings of a start-up community that is supported by laneway developments, cafes and wine bars, for example. He believes that Cairns has an attractive and exotic lifestyle which attracts people and that the Council helps facilitate that lifestyle. This is the start of what could be a more flourishing innovation and start-up system for digital services.
Strategic theme 3: Hotspot Comparisons

The cultural geography of Cairns is very different to that of the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast. The latter two are strip cities whose North-to-South boundaries cover very considerable distances and make for potential disconnected villages. Cairns’ population, of course, is considerably smaller, and while its geography shares strip characteristics, it also benefits from a gridded, easy to navigate and unequivocally central CBD (both the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast have indistinct and still-developing CBDs). Cairns’ CBD acts as an attractor for classic civic cultural consumption, while Smithfield is a well-defined suburban locality for commercial cultural, wildlife and heritage tourism (Tjapukai Cultural Park, Skyrail, Artillery and Armour Museum, Hartley’s Crocodile Adventures) while other cultural venues (for example, the Tank Arts Centre) are alternative and are easily reached. It speaks to the highly integrated, and very attractive, cityscape of Cairns that the Tanks cultural precinct has historical and military significance and sits within the wildly tropical Botanical Gardens, and is where the city’s cultural planners and policy officers are based.

This can be seen as part of the distinct place identity of Cairns. ‘Wet tropical’ Cairns is different from subtropical and temperate southern centres as well as from ‘dry tropical’ Townsville and from the other Queensland cases studied. Culturally, Cairns celebrates what Arnold (1998) calls “tropicality” (a place that is defined by its environmental difference from the more European climates of southern Australia) and its tropical exoticism (Thorp 2007), and this makes the culture-nature connection so important for strategies around cultural and creative activity.

Cairns’ emphasis on developing its cultural infrastructure is clear in its success in accessing State and Federal Government grant funding. With a population and creative industry presence less than half those of in the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast regions, its artists, festivals and creative administrators punch well above their weight, and have done do for some time (Figure 7). The most recent investments in CoCA, CPAC and the Tropical North Global Tourism Hub build on a long-standing commitment to developing culture and the arts in Cairns at all levels of government, illustrated by the list of projects TPG Architects Director Roger Mainword told us he had been involved with since the 1990s:

- Cairns Art Gallery. 1996 council, state and patron triparty support, $2.4 million.
- Tanks Arts Centre. 1994, 2013 Tank 4 council gallery space conversion and upgrade $500k and 2017 council investment in Tank 5 performance space, $2.9m
- School of Arts Cairns Museum. 2017 council, $9.5m
- CoCA. Redevelopment by Arts Queensland 2019 $5.9m.
- Master planning of the new extended arts precinct for council, lead architects in partnership with CA Architects. Indicative budget of $38m.
- Cairns and District Chinese Association (CADCAI) Community Centre and Museum concept plan. 2019, $4m.
Figure 7  State and Federal cultural and infrastructure grant funding, Queensland hotspots, 2015-16 to 2018-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
<th>2018-19</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cairns</td>
<td>$2.1M</td>
<td>$0.3M</td>
<td>$10.7M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noosa &amp; Sunshine</td>
<td>$3.2M</td>
<td>$0.3M</td>
<td>$10.5M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Coast</td>
<td>$0.3M</td>
<td>$0.8M</td>
<td>$0.5M</td>
<td>$0.3M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central West Old</td>
<td>$0.3M</td>
<td>$0.8M</td>
<td>$8.3M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Chart is a work in progress while the project team locates different sources of infrastructure funding. Grants are allocated to the local government area in which the receiving organisation or person is located.

Sources: Arts Queensland (2019); Australia Council (2019); Department of Communications and the Arts (2017a, 2017b, 2017c); Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development (2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c); Queensland Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019)

The ‘arts and culture capital of Northern Australia’. It is intriguing that Cairns—to the wider world, and in the national (and international?) imagination—is well known for its rainforest and reef World Heritage tourist attractions, but has potentially as strong a claim to be as strategically focused on the benefits to the local population of civic cultural infrastructure as any city or region in Australia. This has become feasible because of the substantial presence of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, some of the strongest regional influences of Melanesian cultures in the country, and the strength of broad local support for, and participation in, cultural and creative activity.
Table 2  Queensland hotspot comparisons, local government areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAI region type</th>
<th>Cairns</th>
<th>Gold Coast</th>
<th>Noosa &amp; Sunshine Coast</th>
<th>Central West Queensland</th>
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<tr>
<td>ASGS remoteness category</td>
<td>Outer regional Australia</td>
<td>Major city of Australia</td>
<td>Inner regional Australia</td>
<td>Very remote Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Industry and service hub</td>
<td>Regional city</td>
<td>Regional city</td>
<td>Heartland region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident population, 2016(^a)</td>
<td>156,900</td>
<td>555,724</td>
<td>346,512</td>
<td>13,388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed persons, 2016(^b)</td>
<td>67,460</td>
<td>235,526</td>
<td>130,978</td>
<td>3,351</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total creative employment, 2016(^b)</td>
<td>1,827</td>
<td>11,666</td>
<td>5,664</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total earnings from creative employment, 2016(^b)</td>
<td>$99.5m</td>
<td>$698.8m</td>
<td>$314.2m</td>
<td>$2.4m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total businesses, 2016</td>
<td>40,281</td>
<td>218,450</td>
<td>121,592</td>
<td>1,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total creative businesses, 2016</td>
<td>2,703</td>
<td>16,113</td>
<td>8,705</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of all businesses registered for GST, 2016</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of creative businesses registered for GST, 2016</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional domestic product, 2017-18</td>
<td>$8,830m</td>
<td>$35,241m</td>
<td>$18,553m</td>
<td>$454.0m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age(^a)</td>
<td>37.3 years</td>
<td>39.1 years</td>
<td>42.1 years</td>
<td>41.3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate(^a)</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth unemployment rate(^a)</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth unemployment ratio(^a)</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous(^a)</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer(^a)</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note  a. These statistics are provided by place of residence, and b. are by place of work
References

Davie, M. (2019, 25 March). Problems have been identified, goals set now let’s act. *Cairns Post*.


Foster, S. (2019, 8 May) Personal communication/Interviewer: S. Cunningham.
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Appendices

Data tables and heat maps are available via the following hyperlinks:

**Appendix A  Census data**

**Appendix A.1**  Creative employment: counts, growth rates, intensities and heat maps

**Appendix A.2**  Creative earnings: total earnings, growth rates, intensities and heat maps

**Appendix A.3**  Creative incomes: mean incomes, growth rates, intensities and heat maps

**Appendix A.4**  Creative employment by sector, heat maps

**Appendix A.5**  Creative employment by ANZSIC4 industry category, state comparisons

**Appendix A.6**  Creative employment by ANZCO4 occupation category, state comparisons

**Appendix B  Australian Business Register data**

**Appendix B.1** Creative businesses: counts, growth rates, intensities and heat maps (forthcoming)