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*Australian Cultural and Creative Activity: A Population and Hotspot Analysis: Geraldton.*

Digital Media Research Centre, Brisbane, Qld.

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# Australian Cultural and Creative Activity: A Population and Hotspot Analysis

Geraldton  
Western Australia



Digital Media  
Research Centre



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE  
AUSTRALIA

# Australian Cultural and Creative Activity: A Population and Hotspot Analysis Geraldton



Australian Government  
Australian Research Council



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## Strategic summary

### Grassroots arts connected to economy through start-up culture

Geraldton is a regional centre in Western Australia, with 39,000 people and a stable, diverse economy that includes a working port, mining services, agriculture, and the rock-lobster fishing industry (see Appendix). Tourism, though small, is growing rapidly. The arts and culture ecosystem of Geraldton is notable for three characteristics:

- a strong publicly-funded arts and cultural strategy, with clear rationales that integrate social, cultural, and economic objectives
- a longstanding, extensive ecosystem of pro-am and volunteer arts and cultural workers
- strong local understanding of arts entrepreneurship, innovative business models for artists, and integrated connection with other small businesses and incubators

The public underwriting of important local arts and cultural institutions comes from a variety of sources, including the City of Greater Geraldton (CGG) and state-funded programs and institutions, notably via Royalties for Regions and other arts and cultural funding mechanisms that are common in that state (Appendix Figures 6 and 7).

These public funds support arts workers and a number of cultural programs and projects, including:

- arts-based community development initiatives
- local arts and cultural institutions and festivals
- arts-led architectural redevelopments that have heritage and public art elements, such as the redeveloped foreshore and local laneway program

The ecosystem of arts and culture in Geraldton is incredibly diverse for a regional centre that is not widely known for arts and culture. There is a depth of community engagement, particularly around locally

organised festivals, local theatre groups, youth arts opportunities, and two small but impressively-run Aboriginal arts enterprises: Yamaji Art Art Centre and Irra Wangga Language Centre.

The link between arts and culture and the innovation ecosystem of this regional centre is nationally-leading because of the work of a local incubator called Pollinators—a mixed-sector start-up facilitator that also led the redevelopment of a heritage section of the high street in Geraldton, including the co-working space City Hive. These initiatives helped stimulate different business models and incorporation structures for arts and culture entities (such as the youth theatre Euphorium, formerly-known as ‘Comedy Emporium’). They also helped grow community connections between arts and culture and different sectors of the local economy. One example of this is the increase in Geraldton tourism in general and specific cultural tourism experiences there. In 2018, tourism was about 3% of the local economy (Figure 5), doubling annually before the COVID-19 outbreak, and the importance of arts and culture to tourism is reflected in emerging strategies and projects.

There are strong local initiatives to increase local cultural amenity, to make that more attractive to tourists, to improve hospitality and accommodation options, and to develop secondary offerings for the primary attractor, which is nature-based tourism focused on the Abrolhos Islands and other Western Australian natural attractions. These secondary offerings include Aboriginal art, silver smithing with pearls, and various festivals such as the recent historical Houtman 400 Festival celebration. The cultural redevelopments in terms of architecture and local cultural amenity are motivated not only by a desire to provide an enhanced tourism experience, but also by an explicit talent-attraction strategy of the local city council and mayor to attract families and workers for the diverse economy of Geraldton.

It is noteworthy that Geraldton was one of the first Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP) sites for the National Broadband Network (NBN) in regional Australia. This was enabled by high-capacity optical fibre backhaul between Perth and Geraldton, installed to supply data capacity to the world-leading Square Kilometre Array radiotelescope project 250km to the NE in the Murchison region. The digital strategy for Geraldton and the Mid West is being spearheaded by the Mid West Development Commission and there is a reasonable digital workforce. Local internet service and infrastructure providers, particularly in the agricultural areas of the Midwest, are using support provided by State Government-funded programs to deliver high-speed digital connectivity to farmers that is well beyond what NBN Skymuster satellite is able to provide (for the same monthly costs) and amongst the fastest anywhere in regional Australia with greater than 100mbs download speeds.

Some of the other challenges for arts and culture in Geraldton include the need to manage generational change in the institutional and leadership structures of this strong community ecosystem, which is currently a work in progress. There is a need to further develop Yamaji Art and recognise its sustained contribution to the region and connection to local Aboriginal communities.

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## Methodology and acknowledgements

It is important to make clear that the intention of this study is not to undertake an exhaustive inventory of arts and culture in Geraldton but rather to understand the key drivers that make Geraldton a notable regional Australian 'creative hotspot'. Pursuant to this aim we provide key statistics, discuss notable 'hotspot' enablers, and their context, and provide mini-cases studies which will be of benefit to the arts and culture sector in Australia. The report draws on socio-economic data<sup>1</sup> compiled for the 'creative hotspots' included in this study, and all Australian local government areas – as well as desk research, and a small but diverse sample of key informant interviews in Geraldton. Comparison with other Australian regions and towns studied, through over 300 interviews, is an important component of how our views have been shaped in this report. The research team gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the following people and organisations for providing the information and insights that made this report possible:

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Cam Fitzgerald, Artist

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<sup>1</sup> <https://research.qut.edu.au/creativehotspots/>

## Strategic theme 1: What are the interrelationships across the sub-sectors of the creative industries?

There are three key elements in the vibrant arts and culture ecosystem of Geraldton:

- a long-term community-led arts and culture scene
- prominent local arts institutions with publicly funded staff
- a spirit of arts entrepreneurship.

### **A long-term community-led arts and culture scene in the process of evolution**

In addition to its arts and cultural production workers, Geraldton has a notably active arts and cultural community sector. The arts and cultural system has a high participation of volunteers and pro-am arts workers, and includes part-time arts workers as well. The local arts ecosystem is rich and varied and includes a number of arts and cultural assets and groups, for example:

#### Maritime, museums, and tourism

- Museum of Geraldton's collection about the *Batavia* shipwreck
- maritime heritage
- Abrolhos Islands
- HMAS *Sydney* (II) Wreck Memorial
- Hamlet Greenough Museum and Gardens
- eco-touring

#### Arts and media

- Yamaji Art
- Irra Wangga Language Centre.
- SCINEMA
- Spirit Radio
- The Geraldton Project - a part of the North Midlands Project
- Mid West art prize
- Queen's Park Theatre
- The Residency
- Film Harvest Midwest

There is a very strong schedule of festivals, such as the Sunshine Festival, the Nukara Music Festival, Outback Bloom – Mullewa's Wildflower Festival, the Wind on Water Festival and Funtavia. Some local work has also been presented in the Perth Fringe World festival.

Euphorium, a private company specialising in performing arts, runs a number of programs, notably the Youth Academy, a program based on improv theatre and personal development. Euphorium also emphasises the development of arts producers, in addition to makers, encouraging participation in WA skill development activities (e.g. via Sweet Orange Productions).

Artists report that they are attracted by the lifestyle and the Geraldton area by a supportive culture and by the affordability of living and rent compared to Perth. However, we saw evidence of some disconnection within the local arts and culture system, and the need for more joined-up facilitation.

Discussion during a focus group of local artists during fieldwork for this project illustrates the challenges of local visual artists. The group was composed of two performing-arts practitioners, five visual artists, Chair of the Geraldton Cultural Trust, a CGG representative with cultural responsibilities, and the manager and a staff member from the Geraldton Regional Art Gallery. The opportunity to connect with other artists was welcome but the lack of Aboriginal representatives was noted. The discussion centred on a number of issues:

- pre-existing community cultural groups and the evolution of a new chapter in the functioning of the community arts scene in Geraldton
- access to venues and production spaces and their availability or lack thereof
- the lack of connection and communication between artists and between the different local arts organisations (i.e. the ecosystem comprised many elements, but the connections were lacking)
- audiences, particularly the difference between events and activities that were provided free versus those that required a payment, such as selling art or attending a performance.

There was an extended and passionate discussion about the demise of a long-term community arts organisation, several decades old, called the Arts and Cultural Development Council of Geraldton (ACDC). Local politics around that were discussed and the reasons it closed and the impact that it had. However, there was a sense that a new chapter was beginning and that a new organisation called the Geraldton Project was doing good things to activate the ecosystem. It was evident that many individual artists struggled somewhat with the idea of how to build an audience and some of the basics of working together in order to get more platform opportunities. Another problem was artists' lack of understanding about how to build a coordinated, connected cultural tourist experience, or other kinds of events or festival platforms at scale, which would in the long run enable artists to have a more sustainable set of activities. Artists working by themselves reported struggling at times to find studio space, and gallery spaces were also reported as an issue. However, it was noted there are many public buildings in Geraldton that do have arts activities in them. These include refurbished buildings such as the Geraldton Regional Art Gallery, and The Residency. The discussion concluded with an explanation of a venture called The Residency, which is an arts-based revitalisation of an old hospital conducted by the Geraldton Cultural Trust, a community group. The Cultural Trust works on a membership model and has an exhibition and work space for artists. Membership is not limited to a particular age range, and has some support from the CGG.

### **The important role of local arts and culture institutions and centres**

In Geraldton, local arts entities have a strong strategic purpose and vision, and the CGG has an integrated, well-considered arts and cultural strategy. There are many 'champions of the arts' in the community as well. The full-time arts and culture workers that are employed often have key organising and aggregating roles within the local arts and cultural scene. The Geraldton Regional Art Management Committee meets quarterly, consists of elected members, community reps and agency officers and provides advice to the CGG.

Geraldton has a strategy of activating publicly owned public spaces (e.g. Geraldton Regional Art Gallery, The Residency, and Euphorium in the Old Railway Station). The city has also benefited from innovative models of using privately owned buildings, through entities such as Pollinators, a business and start-ups ecosystem located in the City Hive space in the area known locally as the West End (i.e. the west end of Marine Terrace). A number of well-funded arts centres play a key 'anchoring' role, most notably, the CGG's Geraldton Regional Art Gallery, the Museum of Geraldton - a site of the Western Australian Museum, a WA Government statutory authority, and the CGG's community development programs. The CGG won the prestigious State Heritage Award in 2014 and runs three Community Museums – Bluff Point Lighthouse Keepers Cottage, Walkaway Station Museum and the Greenough Museum and Gardens. Advice of heritage



matters is provided to the Council via the Heritage Advisory Committee which consists of community representatives, City Councillors and Officers and meets three times per year.

### ***Geraldton Regional Art Gallery (<https://artgallery.cgg.wa.gov.au>)***

This A-grade gallery, in operation since 1984, is owned and staffed by CGG and specialises in national and international artists of significance, with some local content where appropriate. The gallery was originally managed by the Art Gallery of Western Australia, a WA Government statutory authority. In 2017, it was taken over by the CGG due to a cut in State Government regional funding. It is currently managed and funded by the CGG with support from the State Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries.

The gallery has had a strong and long history in Geraldton, supported particularly by community art organisations such as the ACDC. The gallery has also survived an attempt to demolish it, through a local campaign to preserve it. The gallery comprises two levels of exhibition space, a production and workshop facility, a small cinema, and reception facilities, all to a very high standard. It focuses on visual arts and films and has a strong recognition of Aboriginal art and issues.

### ***Museum of Geraldton (<http://museum.wa.gov.au/museums/museum-of-geraldton>)***

This museum is one of six sites run by the Western Australian Museum. It was opened in 2001 and comprises three permanent galleries, the Shipwrecks Gallery which includes a *Batavia exhibit*; 'From Great Depths' which includes 2D and 3D 'ocean floor' experiences of the wrecks HMAS *Sydney* (II), and HSK *Kormoran*; and the Mid West Gallery based on the natural and social history of the area including the Yamaji people and their culture. A Yamaji Art exhibition was an installation that made the Aboriginal side of significant historical events evident, including the Aboriginal rescue of Western Australia's first Premier, John Forrest, during a trek from Geraldton to Perth. The museum has between 42,000 and 50,000 visits per year and has 6.2 full-time staff. It features special locally relevant exhibitions, with a strong connection through to school and curriculum, particularly during school holidays.

The museum fosters community and government partnerships - for example, to celebrate the 400-year anniversary of the Dutch explorer Frederick de Houtman or to support the establishment of Pollinators, an organisation that began in the museum's community space, The Wedge. Some other community partnerships include Disability Access Arts, International Art Space SPACED project, the Wajarri Word Adoption art intervention, National Science Week, and some interpretive work for the Square Kilometre Array located at Murchison Observatory. Tourism visitors include Perth families who use Geraldton as a holiday base, grey nomads, eco-tourists, and pilgrims to the HMAS *Sydney* (II) Memorial, which is a nationally recognised significant memorial site.

### ***Other CGG-operated community programs***

The CGG often takes an arts-led approach to community development and services with a number of programs for young families and seniors. For example, the CGG works with the City Vibrancy Strategy department to offer youth programs (such as midnight basketball run by the Police-Citizens Youth Club) and yoga programs (run by the Geraldton Yoga Club). The seniors centre program is a major plank of the activity. It includes 1,377 members and is underwritten by the CGG annual mystery bus tour, choirs, African drumming, yoga, and a ukulele club. CGG has responsibility of the nearby town Mullewa, which has 450 people and a large Aboriginal population. Greater Geraldton has a relatively large Aboriginal population at approximately 10%- (Appendix Table 1). At times, for example, during the Wildflower Festival, the town's population goes up to anywhere between 12,000 and 15,000. In addition to the Wildflower Festival, which is the town's main claim to fame, there is an annual rodeo. 34% of the population of Mullewa are Aboriginal

and/or Torres Strait Islander. CGG Mayor Shane Van Styn (2019) argues there is room to grow Aboriginal arts and culture despite a complex and challenging history. Tourism WA is assisting with this. From the point of view of mainstream tourism strategy, continuing to grow the capacity to scale up and make sustainable cultural tourism offerings is important. Yamaji Art and Irra Wangga Language Centre are vital local Aboriginal cultural institutions. Preliminary work by David Bowman-Bright via the North Midlands Project in the Mullewa Aboriginal community is a step towards further arts-infused community building interventions. CGG sees the work of the North Midlands Project in Carnamah, a small community in the further south of the Mid West region, as a promising model.

The CGG also manages the Queens Park Theatre and contributes to some programs in the Geraldton Regional Library. The CGG believes that the Geraldton community is attracted to the liveability of Geraldton. There are good educational facilities and the CGG has ensured cultural input in the foreshore redevelopment. The CGG focuses on assets not issues, and the major asset is the strong grassroots in the community. Other assets in the CGG's approach to community development include the library with its oral history programs, (for example, on the *Batavia*). Support of and attendance at the Geraldton Regional Library is strong, with 226,451 customer visits in 2018-19 and running its big Sky Readers and Writers Festival since 2005. The CGG sees its role as *supporting* the community, not *delivering for* the community, and its philosophy is to work collaboratively to develop culture and economy. The CGG also helps to facilitate a number of festivals for example, the Big Sky Readers and Writers Festival.

### **A spirit of arts entrepreneurship**

There is a very strong enterprising spirit evident in arts and culture in Geraldton, manifested in starting new festivals, staging exhibitions, and various small arts entities innovative modes of operation, which include a mix of charitable and private company structures. As discussed below, the interpenetration of arts in the local Pollinators incubator is a nationally notable example of a new approach to of arts entrepreneurship.

A recent example, observed during fieldwork for this report, of the strong grassroots volunteer festival scene in Geraldton is the Houtman 400 Festival. The Dutch history of this area is little known by the Australian tourism market. [The significant wrecks](#) are the *Batavia*, *Gilt Dragon*, *Zuytdorp*, and *Zeewijk*. Dr Howard Gray, an economic historian, was the director of [Houtman 400 Festival](#), which celebrated the 400-year anniversary of Dutch explorer [Frederik de Houtman's discovery of the Abrolhos Islands](#). Gray assembled a large volunteer group and coordinated with a number of significant artistic events (e.g. a large community sculpture of a sea dragon, and various historical and other significant events). The festival confronted the challenging task of integrating the Dutch colonial history of the area and its recorded brutalities, with the history of local Aboriginal people. Gray approached this with a firm belief that people need to understand their own answer to the question, 'Where are you from?'. The Good Yarn story telling event included European and Yamaji perspectives, and the Festival included a Yamaji welcome to country, Yamaji night sky art work and a Yamaji language Culture Circle.

Two leading ongoing examples of this spirit of arts entrepreneurship are Euphorium and Yamaji Art.

### **Case study: Euphorium**

[Euphorium](#), a drama-based community-arts social enterprise, developed when two entities joined together: The Comedy Emporium and Its All Sorted. Euphorium is structured as a private company, not because it has a motive of profit making, but because the founders wanted to avoid the slow pace and the barriers to getting things done that they experienced through community organisations. The staff we interviewed said their commercial entity status was also a better risk-taking strategy.

Originally, Euphorium was a tenant in Pollinators (see below), but is now an ongoing commercial venture with a separate geographical location – in the Old Railway Station. For Euphorium, being in Pollinators as an arts entrepreneur company really helped it to challenge their thinking in relation to the patronage model of the arts. In addition, being with other commercial businesses in Pollinators helped Euphorium to develop its business-planning and business-sustainability skills a great deal. There were a number of different sectoral players in Pollinators, including, for example, eco start-ups, start-ups with marine-related activities, kids' help programs, school programs for kids, bush heritage, an app development company, and a grant writer. The Euphorium interviewees emphasised the value of not having a monoculture in a start-up environment, and said that what really made the difference was having this very diverse mix of businesses.

In addition to providing creative services in Geraldton, Euphorium runs programs in other places, such as Kalgoorlie, Ravensthorpe, and Perth. The company also consults to other locations in Western Australia offering a consultancy service as arts producers, for example, in Narrogin, southern Western Australia, and Ravensthorpe. Typically, the company's work involves performing arts or drama-based projects that have a demonstrated community impact, (for example, the Side Split festival in Cockburn, Perth). The company's client base is 40% arts organisations in other regions, 30% local government, and the rest clients of various kinds seeking arts-led community youth and creative facilitation services.

In Geraldton Euphorium runs a program called the Youth Academy and the Funtavia Festival. They see festivals as platforms to help grow other producers, and to help artists scale up and find venues and audiences that they are not able to access by themselves. Euphorium initially started as a producer of artists' work, helping local artists and young and emerging artists, in other areas. But now they train artists to become producers themselves, in a kind of train-the-trainer model. Some of the examples of those emerging producers are Majek Collective, Jar of Arts, and Mike Panter a local poet. Euphorium also collaborates with David Bowman-Bright through the arts-led community building Geraldton Project ([geraldtonproject.com.au](http://geraldtonproject.com.au)).

Other examples of Euphorium's work include building on the achievements of the Give Me Geraldton Any Day Campaign, and the Academy of Youth Theatre Program, which is an improvisational theatre program targeting teachers and drama students. The aim was to develop better links between education and the street culture of young, cool visual and performing artists in Geraldton. There are four youth arts companies locally. Euphorium's development of a local work called *An Incompetent Life* was taken to the Perth Fringe Festival. The interviewees said they saw Geraldton as an arts ecosystem comprising freelance artists, platform organisations such as the Funtavia festival, and producers who make things happen. According to the interviewees, the healthy degree of competition is a good thing in the ecosystem. It was not easy for artists to access space in Geraldton, however, not because of a lack of space, but because of town-planning regulations and health and safety requirements. One space Euphorium had in the West End, which the interviewees described as being ideal for what they were looking for, was going to cost \$250,000 for the upgrades required just to accommodate the re-classification of use to entertainment. The interviewees said town-planning barriers were more of a problem for commercial long-term companies such as Euphorium than for pop-up companies because pop-ups can get away with certain relaxations of planning space. At the time of the interviews, Euphorium had just moved into a new space in the old railway station, which included an administration office space, as well as a space they were developing into a black box for local work.

**Case Study: Yamaji Art (<http://www.yamajiart.com>)**

Roni Jones, manager of Yamaji Art Centre, explained that the initiative was started in 1998 by Aboriginal TAFE graduate artists who felt the need for some way to connect and support each other in their career. A key person in the development of the initiative was Aboriginal artist Charmaine Green (<http://www.yamajiart.com/artists/charmaine-green/>). They formed the Mara Arts Aboriginal Corporation,

which is the current company structure, and is 100% Aboriginal owned. Yamaji Art Centre has been in its current location on Marine Tce in the West End of Geraldton for 12 months. The current Yamaji Art operation involves retail, production space, professional development, workshop services, and marketing activities. Even though the leadership of Yamaji Art's activities is perceived to be family based, this is really very common in Aboriginal culture and does not stop others being involved. The broader Aboriginal community is welcome to be involved.

Yamaji Art is partly funded through Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (**IVAIS**) which is a federal Office for the Arts funding program. This funds two positions. Yamaji Art also has project funding, which is grant dependent. This dependence constitutes a large and challenging part of Roni's work because she submits around 10 large grant applications per year. In 2016-17 Mara Arts received around \$700,000 in funding through IVAIS programs, and Yamaji \$24,000 from the Australia Council (Appendix). There is some limitation in the kind of grants available to fulfil the vision that Yamaji Art has for its activities and aspirations for projects. This is partly about the kind of entity that it is, but is also a function of eligibility requirements for certain types of funding. For example, Yamaji Art needs professional-development funding, but this is hard to get in its circumstances. Yamaji Art comprises 97 registered members, with 20 practising and 12 core artists. Roni distinguishes between career artists and artists who paint casually for immediate economic benefit.

Yamaji Art is experimenting with or creating using a range of artifacts and methods, for example, textiles, cultural fashion ware, digital design, and ceramic ware. Some of the art projects that it has participated in, supported in some way, or collaborated with, are Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation, which is a dance group, Ilgarijiri sky stories ([www.yamajiart.com/projects/ilgarijiri/](http://www.yamajiart.com/projects/ilgarijiri/)) and the Irra Wangga Language Centre.

One international project, the Shared Sky art project, in collaboration with the Square Kilometre Array, was led by Steven Tingay and Aboriginal artists, and involved the traditional owners. Fremantle based Prospero Productions is working with Yamaji Art to animate the sky stories, and has already created a three-minute animated version, called Star Dreaming, which has been seen by 5,000 people online. Yamaji Arts received funding and support from the Minderoo Foundation to collaborate with the Museum of Geraldton to create Aboriginal stories and record Aboriginal involvement in the famous trek by the first Governor of Western Australia, John Forrest. Yamaji Art's success with CCG grants has not been strong. Clearer feedback from these and other grant bodies about how to improve future applications has been hard to obtain.

There has been significant activity at Yamaji Art to develop a young group of women who are aged between 17 and 25, and have been put through a certificate in leadership through the local TAFE. And there is the desire to continue this professional-development objective and develop more programs to involve and upskill the local Aboriginal community. This could include work with tourism guides, for example. Although pursuing a self-determination model and having amazing success for a two-person venture, there is still a lack of scale in the capacity, despite the long and capable experience of the people involved. The leadership team wants to access more grants to further develop Yamaji Art's ability to deliver on their strong creative vision for the future, and its aspirations for many projects that would support the local Aboriginal arts and cultural community.

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

### Overview

Our respondents explained that the economy of Geraldton is a resilient, diverse economy in which no sector comprises more than approximately 16%. The main economic activities are port services (primarily the iron ore industry, but with cruise ships recently added), agriculture (mainly wheat and lucerne, but also small crops), fishing (mainly rock lobsters, 98% of which are exported to China), mining services (which includes 'fly-in, fly-out' or FIFO labour provision), manufacturing (which is mainly a large mining equipment manufacturer), and the local retail sector (which is in somewhat of a downturn). In 2018, tourism accounted for 3% of the economy, having grown from 2% over the last 12 months. (Van Styn 2019; see also Appendix A: Table 1, Figures 2 and 5).

This resilient economic base means that local government support for arts and culture is relatively robust. That is, the resilient wider economy creates an economic climate that allows local government to underwrite a number of important arts administration positions. These include the manager of the Geraldton Regional Art Gallery, and a community and cultural worker in CGG who services arts-led senior-citizens culture activity. There is also some staffing related to the Queens Park Theatre performing arts venue. The CGG also provides financial support to various festivals, events, and heritage facilities, as well as project funding for spatial revitalisation projects, which include artistic elements, and spatial revitalisation for the arts and venues for festivals.

The motivation for this investment in arts and culture is a combination of a desire to grow the tourism industry, as well as a recognition of the community development outcomes that arts and culture bring more broadly. Investment in the arts and culture is seen as helping to redefine Geraldton's self-perception, from a second-class cultural destination, and a town that focuses on other economic activity, to one that can be proud of its unique cultural attributes and attract workers for all industries.

The revitalisation of one section of the old central business district (CBD) in the West End has created a vibrant cultural, entertainment, and dining precinct, which is based on similar philosophies to the well-known Renew Newcastle program. This revitalisation included the development of Pollinators, with associated co-working space City Hive, and this has been home to some for-profit arts start-ups (e.g. Euphorium) and other arts-influenced social enterprises. Yamaji Art is located in the West End, along with other tourist offerings, such as black pearl bespoke jewellery designers and galleries, and various eateries. The redevelopment included a multi-purpose event centre with funding in 2015-16 by Regional Development Australia (\$4.75M, CGG (\$1.08), and Lotterywest \$500K (CGG – nd) . The participation of arts and culture through activation and festivals has been important to this redevelopment.

There are relatively low numbers of creative services workers, with the majority being in architecture followed by advertising and marketing, and digital content and software (Appendix A: Figure 4, Appendix B.1.). Photography and videography are a growing form of for-profit creative services focusing on tourism. Our fieldwork found it hard to identify respondents for their creative services, perhaps reflecting the fact that most creative services workers are found in other sectors of the economy in Geraldton, with the exception of architecture.

Architect respondent Bruce Sherwood suggested that local design services had struggled with competition from larger Perth firms. In general terms, for the creative services, there is no longer much procurement of local services. This is also perhaps exacerbated by the shift to major retail operators moving into town, which

has seen local retail-sector diversity reduce and family-owned businesses that have been long-term anchor tenants abandon the city centre. There has also been a reduction in discretionary spending over some periods of drought-driven economic contraction.

Geraldton is just at the beginning of trying to grow its cultural tourism sector. The HMAS *Sydney* (II) Memorial, Museum of Geraldton exhibits, and some festivals do attract domestic tourists. Geraldton has some fledging success with the Chinese market due to Instagram influencers, Chinese supermodels doing a fashion shoot at the nearby Pink Lake (Hutt Lagoon, Port Gregory). Geraldton has a very significant nature-tourism strategy, driven by the Mid West Development Commission, and these tourists do add to the viability of local cultural tourism. The local Aboriginal community has strong aspirations to continue to grow its offerings.

In summary, Geraldton is at an economic and social paradigm tipping point, with strong aspirations for the future, driven by a resilient, diverse economy, a strong community involvement in arts and cultural activity, and a growing reputation outside of its local base. The major drivers for Geraldton's future creative economy are:

- CGG leaderships through creative and cultural strategy
- Mid West Development Commission initiatives
- grassroots creative-economy enterprises.

### **CGG leadership in cultural and creative activity**

According to Shane Van Styn (2019), the current Mayor of Geraldton, local council investment in arts and culture is primarily an investment in public sentiment, self-belief, and self-worth. Apart from the direct community benefits of civic pride and vibrancy, this would support a prosperous economy that would grow a sustainable tourism industry. A vibrant cultural landscape will also have the added advantage of attracting professionals and increasing the population. Both are important for the long-term sustainability of Geraldton.

A leading driver of the investment in the arts and culture is infrastructure projects and public place development, such as the new Rocks Laneway that connects the foreshore through to the Geraldton Regional Art Gallery and has a public art program. Space activation prioritises people and place over cars. The Vibrancy Strategy within CGG is really about community development, with the key point of leverage being strategic planning and design.

The investment in the arts is undergirded by a diverse economic portfolio, which is resilient because it is not crucially dependent on any one sector. At the moment, tourism is about 2% of the economy, growing to 3% in the last 12 months. And it is part of the growth plan of the CGG to grow this to 10% over the next 5 to 10 years (Van Styn, 2019). The port is essential to the economy and the landscape of Geraldton, and it services the mining industry, and attracts cruise ships and iron ore shipping. In addition to iron ore, Geraldton is a potential pipeline for the new Karara magnetite mine, lead and talc mines as well, a commercial pipeline which is roughly a \$4 billion investment for the mines (Van Styn, 2019).

According to Van Styn, the basis of the tourism strategy, which would take it to 10% within a decade, includes the Abrolhos Island tourism strategy, the Pink Lakes development, further development of hotels, expansion of the Museum of Geraldton, improving in-town experience to get more stopovers, continued support for the HMAS *Sydney* (II) Memorial, and finding ways to leverage off the Dutch historical connection. The Geraldton lighthouse is a popular picture-postcard spot and events such as the Wind on Water Festival and Sunshine Festival are all part of the Geraldton offering.

## Regional economic development perspective<sup>2</sup>

The Mid West Development Commission works with CGG in various ways. In total, the Mid West area/population covered by the Commission is 472,000 km square and 53,000 people. [It extends from](#) Kalbarri to Greenhead, through to Coorow and Meekatharra, including the entire Murchison subregion. The key elements of the shared Mid West Development Commission / CGG growth plan for Geraldton are these four pillars:

- developing an export economy out of the region
- revitalising the city centre through galleries and laneways
- stopping the leak in procurement and money out of the region
- developing infrastructure

The key challenge with tourism is to try to increase overnight stays. Currently, this is not strong. There is some interesting potential around the current international fascination with the [Pink Lake](#) (Hutt Lagoon) through the Chinese supermodel photo shoot and a Chinese actor. Aboriginal interests in the lake are captured within the Southern Yamatji Native Title Claim. German chemical producer BASF leases part of Hutt Lagoon for the harvesting and production of natural beta carotene.

The Mid West Development Commission has a tourism strategy which highlights six infrastructure priorities for investment:

- The Kalbarri Gorge Sky Walk. This is located about one hour north of Geraldton and has a target of 160,000 visitors. The sky walk has received a \$20 million boost grant.
- [The Abrolhos Islands](#) Tourism strategy. This strategy includes achieving national park status and has received \$10 million in funding. A proposed second stage aims to activate tourism across the wider archipelago.
- A camping nodes network building on the [Camping with Custodians](#) Tourism WA project and opening up popular nodes along the Mid West coastline for public use.
- Geo-tourism and geo-parks. A geo-park is a UNESCO category, which is not the same as world heritage, but it is an international recognition of the significance of the site. The geo-tourism strategy is targeting the Murchison area to the west of Geraldton.
- Kalbarri to Shark Bay 4WD track (the next Gibb River Road).
- Rangelands Parks Activation (rangers and tourism). Establishment of new conservation parks in the Rangelands and optimizing tourism outcomes in joint management with traditional owners, helping to realise Aboriginal tourism outcomes and mobilise investment from the tourism industry. To provide improved access and visitor facilities across a range of the rangelands properties.

Some of the other local developments have been some foreshore redevelopment of specifically the Beresford foreshore, which was funded by Royalties for Regions. Geraldton has a tourism cluster comprised of industry, business, and government, and has had an open investment approach to new ideas brought to them and seeks to work with those investors. For example, there are some Chinese investors interested in hotel developments to support a bigger tourism capability in the town.

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<sup>2</sup> Summary of interview conducted with, Rob Smallwood (2019), Digital [Mid West Development Commission](#), Fiona Shallcross (2019), Tourism Project Manager Midwest Development Commission, Pieter Vorster Economic Development GGCC (2019).

Some of the other tourism-related assets include a meteoroid crater and a [red ochre mine at Wilgie Mia](#). The Screenwest Regional Program (Western Australia Regional Film Friendly Resources or WARFFR) has led to a number of WA films being filmed partly in this region. This includes the current Western Australian Regional Film Fund (WARFF), a \$16 million State Government initiative to incentivise film production in regional WA. This adds another set of attractive film location experiences for tourists. There are also photography tours, popular with Chinese tourists, which capture the Milky Way, as well as night guide tours. Geraldton has sister-city relationships with two Chinese cities: Linfen (Shanxi Province) and Zhanjiang (Guangdong Province). The Square Kilometre Array is a very significant Western Australian development in scientific endeavour, which has also had artistic spin-offs. For example, the Shared Sky project (<https://www.skatelescope.org/shared-sky/>) brought together Australian Aboriginal and South African artists in an exhibition celebrating ancient cultural wisdom and cosmologies inspired by the night sky. The installation of shore tension units at the Geraldton Port in 2017 by the Mid West Ports Authority (cost \$2 million dollars) greatly increased the ports capacity to accommodate cruise vessels from this time onwards. The Cruise Geraldton Meet and Greet Volunteers play an important role in the welcoming of ships, along with the Geraldton Voluntary Tour Guides who began operating in 2005 and who also offer tours of the HMAS Sydney II Memorial.

**Digital infrastructure access is an important challenge for Geraldton's future development.** Geraldton was the one of the first regional Australian sites for NBN Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP) technology. Each residence and business in urbanised areas of Geraldton is connected directly to an optical fibre which then connects back to the local telecoms exchange to access the high-capacity digital backhaul which deliver connectivity to the internet. This technology provides access to download speeds of a minimum of 100 megabits per second to every premise. The NBN FTTP in Geraldton has delivered a fast, reliable and affordable service to every occupiable premise from Drummond Cove in the north to Tarcoola Beach in the south. Residences and businesses on the outskirts of Geraldton in areas such as White Peak, Moresby, and Cape Burney receive NBN Fixed Wireless services, which to date, has been generally disappointing, subject to congestion, resulting in slow speeds.

An alternative technical model of Fixed Wireless service, run by a local wholesale and retail suppliers [LogicIT Solutions](#) and [NodeOne Network](#), which use a private fixed-wireless network, has been operational for since 2009. In contrast to the NBN towers, which cost roughly \$1 million per tower to build, this technology costs approximately \$50,000 per tower, and achieves greater speeds and is able to be upgraded much more cost-effectively.

This private fixed-wireless network design has been used very effectively in a State Government initiative for farmers, the Digital Farm Grants Program, which was designed to increase export competitiveness for the wheatbelt—enabling access to real-time information, bidding in export markets, real-time solutions for logistical issues, as well as the internet pipe for high-speed internet, Internet of Things and high definition camera monitoring of conditions around farms. Five projects in the WA Wheatbelt between Northampton in the Mid West and SW WA in the Great Southern area were co-funded by the WA State Government—two of which are being delivered by LogicIT/NodeOne in Chapman Valley/Northampton with the second in the North Midlands areas serving the shires of Irwin, Carnamah, Perenjori, Three Springs, Morawa and Coorow. The Chapman Valley/ Northampton project was completed in April 2020 and the North Midlands project is due for completion in July 2020, with 27 fixed wireless tower sites delivering high-speed internet services to more than 14,000 square km of farmland for around \$100 per month for each customer. In parallel, a State Government initiative, the Grainbelt Digital Enhancement Project, is funding the construction of a 4,000 km network of optical fibre along rail corridors to increase the backhaul capacity for service providers in the WA Wheatbelt (Smallwood, 2019).



## Grassroots creative-economy enterprises

### **Case study: Pollinators (<https://pollinators.org.au>)**

The link between arts and culture and the innovation ecosystem in Geraldton is nationally leading, thanks to the work of Pollinators, a company started by Andrew Outhwaite (2019). He lived in Geraldton from 2003 to 2005, then went to Sweden to study global sustainability, before returning to Geraldton from 2009 to 2017.

Although aspirations for start-ups existed in Geraldton, it lacked a sustainable business model to support the facilitation process. Pollinators adopted such a model within its own start-up approach, meaning that it carefully conducted prototyping of its business model to test where the various elements such as market demand could be realised once it scaled up and launched. Outhwaite said that given the size of Pollinators' vision and the problems that the planet and Geraldton were facing, creative and engaged people were essential to success. Around 2011 a first 'prototype' of Pollinators was started at a space owned by the [Museum of Geraldton](#), which was called The Wedge.

A second version of Pollinators was started 12 months later in a laneway in the CBD, in Marine Terrace. The West End was chosen after a careful audit of every available space in the CBD. There were very high rents because people were land banking and 50% of the street was boarded up. However, there were two boutiques and two cafes and a Men's Shed operating in that end of Marine Terrace when Pollinators first started. The building that Pollinators ultimately chose had been empty for a decade. However, the landlord was open to having a conversation about the experiment. This led to Pollinators getting Lotterywest funding to clean up the building and make it suitable. The building itself was branded as [City Hive](#) and Pollinators ran City Hive.

There had been some preliminary projects in Geraldton such as laneway projects that were funded by local government and involved artworks. And this was part of the reason that engagement with the arts was considered by Pollinators as a kind of makeover strategy and a branding and marketing strategy. The refurbishment of Pollinators' City Hive building was done by a builder who was valued based on his approach and its alignment with what Pollinators wanted to do. The builder and Pollinators had to be very creative and very hands-on to come up with a creative problem-solving approach to many building-code issues that had to be fixed or negotiated. Pollinators paid commercial rent, so it was entrepreneurially risky. Outhwaite's risk-management strategy included, for example, pre-selling the office space even before the refurbishment.

Eventually, this led to the success of City Hive and Pollinators, inaugurating around 2013 or 2014. The businesses and start-ups renting office space were polycultural rather than monocultural. In 2019, the kinds of businesses there included eco-businesses, marine businesses, performing arts and community services, youth work, business planners, and grant writers. The reason for Pollinators' polycultural philosophy was to make long-term sustainable change for Geraldton, and in conceptual and philosophical terms, Pollinators sits in the middle of all of the economic sectors that comprise any community.

But, for Geraldton in particular, Pollinators' philosophy is that co-working should be at the centre of all of the activities in all relevant sectors. The co-working space should be located centrally, both spatially, because this is really efficient for connecting the various stakeholders, and also conceptually and culturally, because it is very easy for particular cultures such as arts, technology, or environmental organisations to take over and edge out other participants, leading to a monoculture.

Outhwaite said he thought that social enterprise was inherently complex because it is multi-sectoral and has more layers and stakeholders. Pollinators' polycultural model is necessary for regional innovation because the smaller population base means greater collaboration is necessary to make anything sustainable. In cities,

and in urban incubators, a monoculture is possible because of the scale of the market that is reachable through digital technology. This is harder to do in regions.

Pollinators' revenue base was designed at the start to be 30% from grants and 70% from actual business revenue, and to transition to 100% business revenue to be in a strong position. Dependence on grants was to be phased out because it could make the organisation dependent on the granting agencies for policy and direction, and to insulate Pollinators from commercial realities and connection in the commercial environment. Pollinators was not seeking funding to keep the business sustainable; instead, Pollinators' strategy enabled it to approach fund-granting agencies for money to scale up the company's social impact. This philosophy has influenced Euphorium as discussed above.

## Appendix A

**Table 1: Western Australia hotspot comparisons**

	Fremantle & East Fremantle	Greater Geraldton	Busselton	Albany & Denmark
ASGS remoteness category	Major cities of Australia	Remote Australia	Inner regional Australia	Outer regional Australia
RAI region type	Major metropolitan	Industry & service hub	Industry & service hub	Industry & service hub
Resident population, 2016 <sup>a</sup>	36,268	38,632	36,688	42,435
Average annual growth 2011-2016	1.6%	1.2%	3.9%	1.8%
% of state	1.5%	1.6%	1.5%	1.7%
Employed persons, 2016 <sup>b</sup>	26,662	15,702	13,638	16,491
Average annual growth 2011-2016	0.04%	-0.3%	3.1%	3.2%
% of state	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%
Total creative employment, 2016 <sup>b</sup>	1,045	231	288	331
Total earnings from creative employment, 2016 <sup>b</sup>	\$63.6 million	\$13.6 million	\$14.9 million	\$15.3 million
Total businesses, 2016	17,044	8,946	10,884	10,490
Average annual growth	1.7%	0.7%	2.9%	
% of state	2.3%	1.2%	1.5%	1.9%
Total creative businesses, 2016	1,891	369	611	582
Proportion of all businesses registered for GST, 2016	51.1%	53.3%	52.7%	53.9%
Proportion of creative businesses registered for GST, 2016	40.3%	37.9%	41.7%	37.8%
Regional domestic product, 2017-18	\$4,995 million	\$2,396 million	\$2,222 million	\$2,491 million
Average annual growth	9.4%	-7.0%	11.0%	6.9%
% of state	2.1%	1.0%	0.9%	1.0%
Unemployment rate <sup>a</sup>	7.5%	9.6%	6.1%	5.3%
Youth unemployment rate <sup>a</sup>	13.6%	15.8%	11.1%	10.8%
Youth unemployment ratio <sup>a</sup>	44.1%	48.7%	42.3%	45.3%
Aboriginal <sup>a</sup>	1.4%	9.7%	1.7%	3.0%
Volunteer <sup>a</sup>	19.0%	16.2%	19.7%	20.3%

Note: Statistics with 'a' are provided by place of residence, and those with 'b' are by place of work.

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), ABR (2019), .id (2019), Regional Australia Institute (2014)

**Table 2: Participation in cultural activities 2018, Western Australia**

	Participated in at least one cultural activity in the last 12 mths	Received income from at least one cultural activity in the last 12 mths
Perth – Inner	39.7%	5.6%
Perth – North East	26.7%	3.0%
Perth – North West	28.3%	1.9%
Perth – South East	28.4%	2.3%
Perth – South West	34.0%	3.7%
Western Australia – Outback	25.8%	1.9%
Western Australia – Wheatbelt	38.2%	1.9%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019)

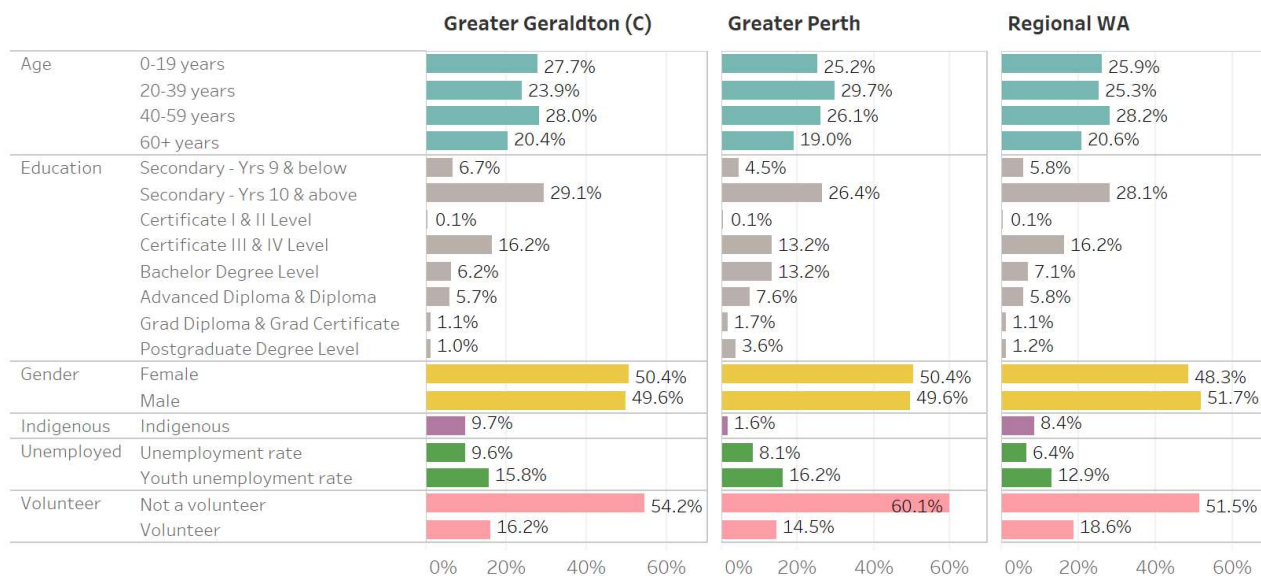
**Table 3: Employment in creative occupations by ANZSCO category, WA hotspots**

Occupation	Sector	ANZSCO category	Albany & Denmark	Busseiton	Greater Geraldton	East Fremantle & Fremantle	Greater Perth	Rest of WA	Western Australia	
Creative Services	Advertising and Marketing	Advertising and Marketing Professionals	31	66	46	220	6,359	432	6,927	
		Public Relations Professionals	18	18	32	78	2,469	279	2,797	
	Architecture and Design	Architects and Landscape Architects	34	27	13	300	3,219	185	3,451	
		Architects, Designers, Planners and Surveyors, nfd	3	0	0	12	383	20	413	
		Fashion, Industrial and Jewellery Designers	8	18	3	83	792	77	891	
		Graphic and Web Designers, and Illustrators	59	67	45	200	4,409	408	4,905	
		Interior Designers	10	8	11	71	1,404	61	1,497	
		Photographers	29	41	14	72	1,564	245	1,985	
	Software and Digital Content	Business and Systems Analysts, and Programmers, nfd	0	0	0	0	56	0	61	
		ICT Business and Systems Analysts	4	0	3	42	2,922	57	3,025	
		Multimedia Specialists and Web Developers	16	11	15	36	1,006	54	1,077	
		Software and Applications Programmers	31	18	8	135	8,817	204	9,166	
	Cultural Production	Film, TV and Radio	Artistic Directors, and Media Producers and Presenters	13	7	10	68	923	172	1,165
			Film, Television, Radio and Stage Directors	13	0	13	50	866	119	1,019
Media Professionals nfd			0	0	0	7	110	11	119	
Music and Performing Arts		Actors, Dancers and Other Entertainers	0	5	7	43	723	51	1,007	
		Arts Professionals, nfd	0	4	8	37	206	50	276	
		Arts and Media Professionals, nfd	0	0	0	0	27	0	35	
		Media Professionals, nfd	0	0	0	6	123	15	135	
		Music Professionals	6	6	3	50	887	81	1,256	
		Performing Arts Technicians	6	12	10	57	1,365	107	1,705	
Publishing		Archivists, Curators and Records Managers	7	4	21	46	1,087	146	1,248	
		Authors, and Book and Script Editors	8	0	0	32	399	47	462	
		Journalists and Other Writers	38	21	35	64	2,425	405	2,901	
		Librarians	27	16	27	52	1,590	244	1,849	
Visual Arts		Jewellers	8	28	13	8	552	147	712	
	Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals	50	33	7	88	667	329	1,024		
<b>Creative occupations</b>		434	425	327	1,935	45,947	3,993	51,855		

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016)

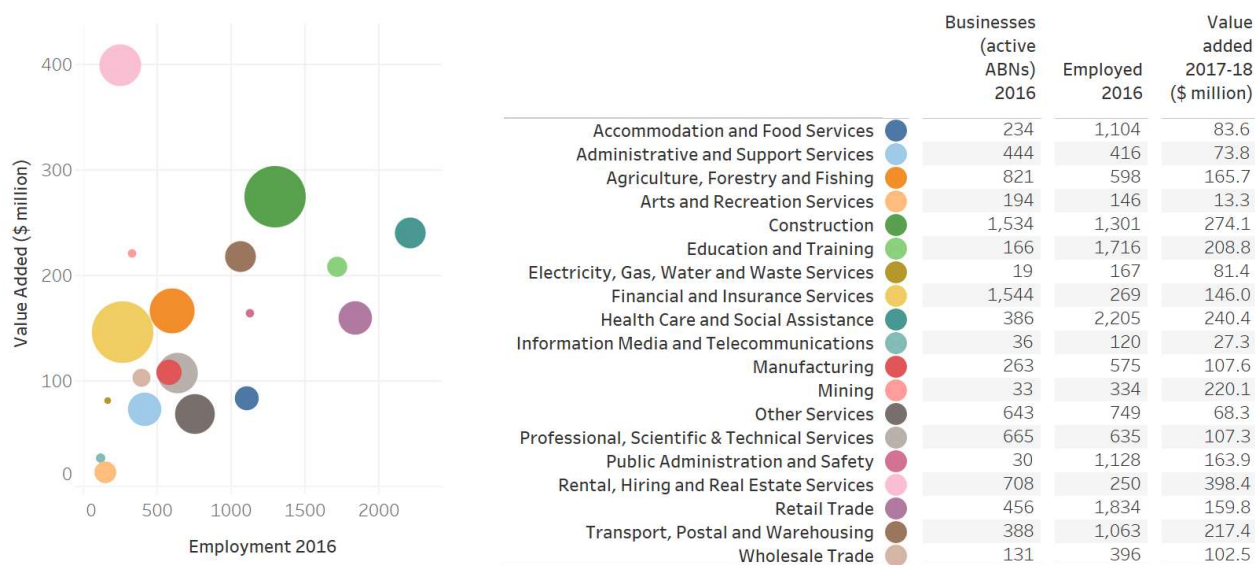
Geraldton is demographically similar to the rest of regional Western Australia except that it has a slightly higher unemployment rate (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Demographic profile by place of residence, Greater Geraldton local government area compared with greater Perth and regional Western Australia, 2016**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016)

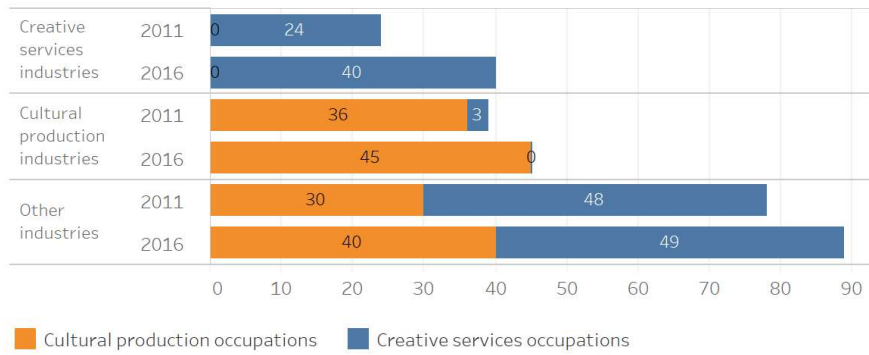
**Figure 2: Economic activity by ANZSIC subdivision, Greater Geraldton local government area**



Note: Bubble size ~ business size.

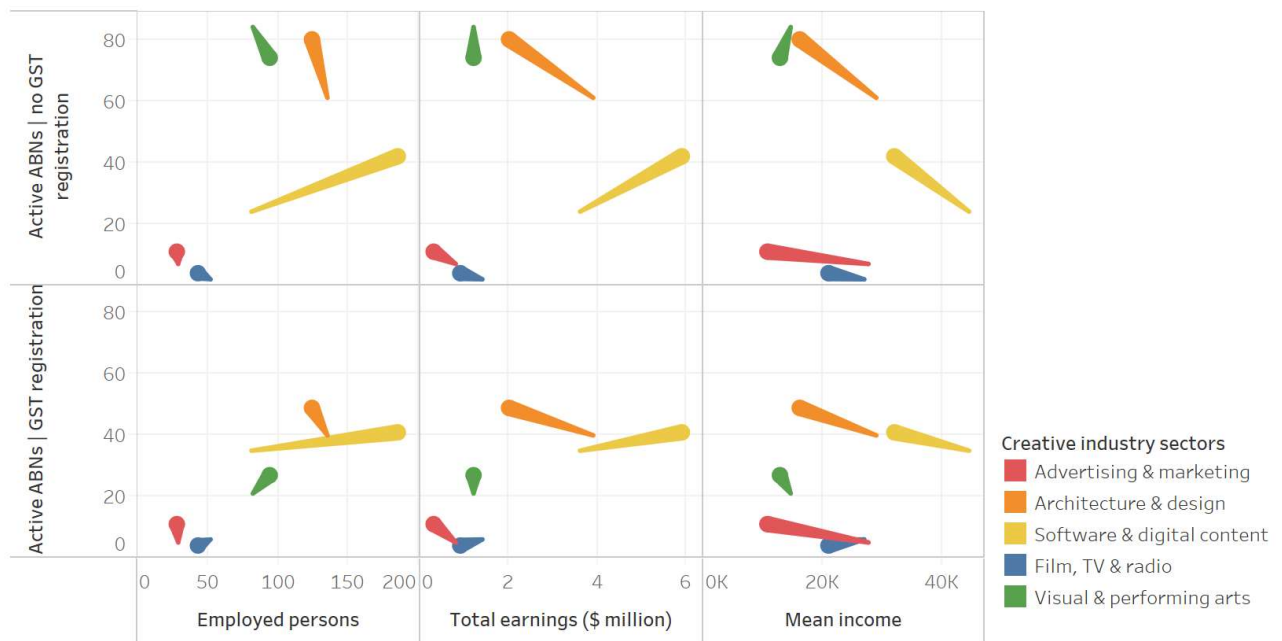
Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), ABR (2019), REMPLAN (2019)

**Figure 3: Creative service and cultural production employment by industry and occupation, 2011 and 2016, Greater Geraldton local government area**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016)

**Figure 4: Creative industry employment, total earnings and mean income by place of work compared with business registrations, 2011 and 2016, Greater Geraldton local government area**

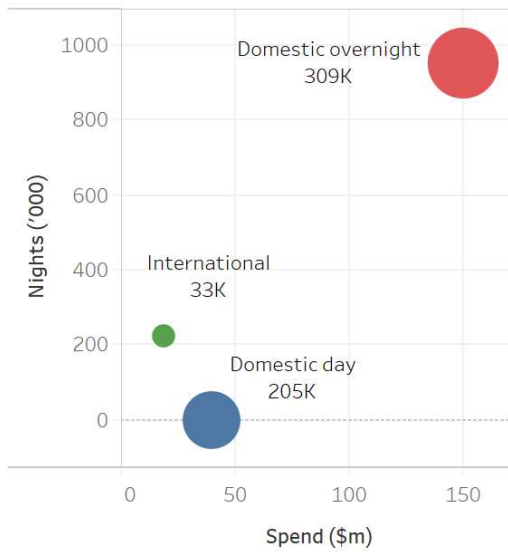


Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), Australian Business Register (2019)

**Figure 5: Tourism activity, 2018 Geraldton**

<b>Output (\$m)</b>	193.4
<b>% of region output</b>	3.3
<b>Value add (\$m)</b>	93.4
<b>% of region value add</b>	3.3
<b>Employment</b>	943.0
<b>% of region employment</b>	5.7

Businesses by number of employees	Count
1 to 4	118
5 to 19	30
20 or more	108
Non-employing	115



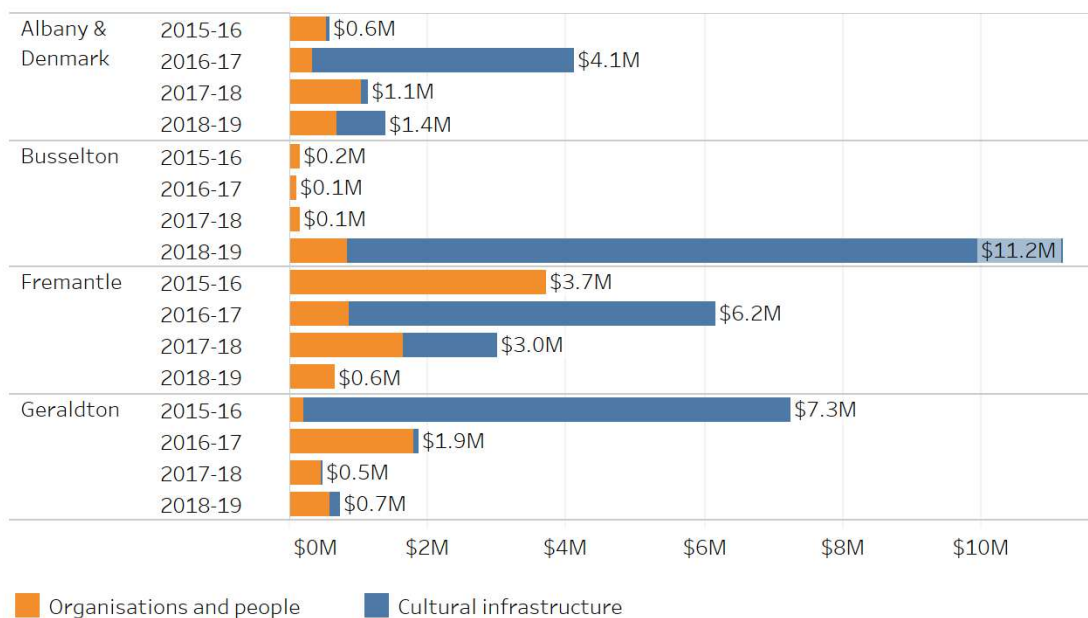
Sources: .id (2019), Tourism Research Australia (2019)

**Figure 6: Cultural grants and infrastructure investments by government type, Geraldton**



Sources: Local government annual reports and web sites, Department of Local Government, Sport and Creative Industries, Lotterywest, Regional Development Commissions, Regional Arts WA, Australia Council, Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, Regional Development Australia

**Figure 7: Cultural grants and infrastructure investments by funding type, Geraldton**



Sources: Local government annual reports and web sites, Department of Local Government, Sport and Creative Industries, Lotterywest, Regional Development Commissions, Regional Arts WA, Australia Council, Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, Regional Development Australia



## Appendix B

### Census data

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

- Appendix B.1 [Creative employment: counts, growth rates, intensities and heat maps](#)
- Appendix B.2 [Creative earnings: total earnings, growth rates, intensities and heat maps](#)
- Appendix B.3 [Creative incomes: mean incomes, growth rates, intensities and heat maps](#)
- Appendix B.4 [Creative employment by sector, heat maps](#)
- Appendix B.5 [Creative employment by ANZSIC4 industry category, state comparisons](#)
- Appendix B.6 [Creative employment by ANZCO4 occupation category, state comparisons](#)

### Australian Business Register data

- Appendix B.7 Creative businesses: counts, growth rates, intensities and heat maps (forthcoming)

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