



# Research Brief

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## Northern Australian Aspirations

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## RESEARCH AIM

*In this brief we investigate an aspect of remote Northern Australian Aspirations through the comparison of employment and industry participation data for several clusters of communities in Central Australia. Using a snapshot of national ABS census data (2011) and industry information where available, our aim is determine whether national data adequately shows the scope of economic activities which are so essential to remote Australians, and what some of the key indicators of remote economic capacity and advantage are.*

*We analyse a sample of mixed-market activities in relation to economic participation in a cluster of remote Aboriginal communities in Central Australia constrained by the quality and nature of available data, and as a result gauging mixed-market activity relied on patch working industry data (as available) with 2011 ABS census data (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). We hypothesis this is likely to provide an understated impression of the contribution of mixed-markets in many remote communities, and the requirements of those in the forms of regional and non-market structures.*

*ABS Occupational categories represent one primary occupational activity, yet we know that many people living in sparsely populated and remote communities are occupied in a number of activities. The constraints of the data available confirm that indicators for Overcoming Remote Disadvantage (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014) and planning for Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia (Australian Government, 2015) are vulnerable to 'non-market failure' (Wolf, 1979) that effects mixed-market capacity and advantage.*

## KEY FINDINGS

- The activity of locally nuanced mixed-markets is essential to aspirations and wellbeing. In a mixed-market structure, costs and benefits can be ascertained, but as yet have not been
- This data snapshot suggests mixed-markets provide primary and secondary occupations; and opportunities to engage in economic activity that meet aspirations, are attainable and rely on local capacity and advantage.
- Non-market structures do not reflect these qualities of mixed-market activity, which alter the analysis of cost and benefits to society as a whole
- Scarcity of information at the local level contributes to regional and national indicators that are contrary to wellbeing
- Regional structures are essential to support and facilitate wider market engagement, and to maintain the innovative edge so necessary to recognise and promote the advantages that remote communities offer for the future of Northern Australia.
- We suggest evaluating industry pathways and regional industry bodies in the context of local activity (and inactivity) is a first and imperative step towards recognising how non-markets can work more collaboratively with remote capacity and advantage, as evident but under-reported mixed-market activity and contribution.

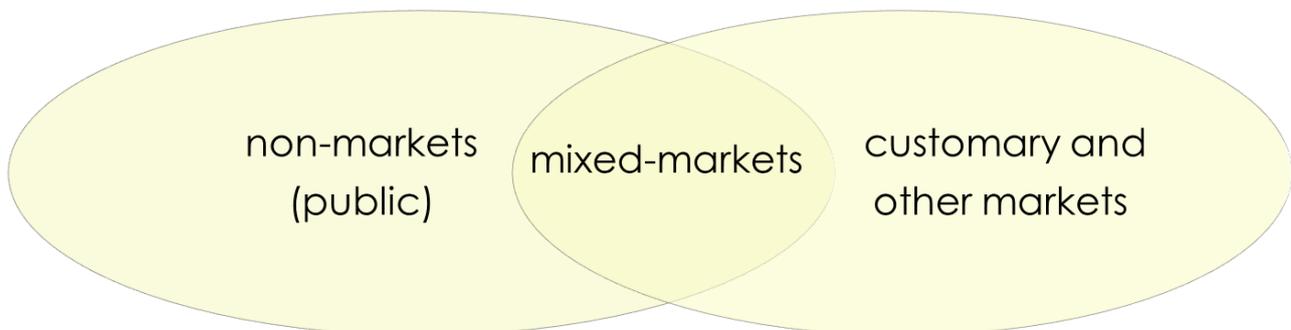
## I. Introduction

How is aspirational and mixed-market opportunity contributing to economies in remote Central Australia, and why does it matter?

To answer this, we compare employment and industry participation data for several clusters of communities in Central Australia, using a snapshot of 2011 national ABS census data (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014) and industry information where available (Central Lands Council, 2014; Desart, 2014; Ninti One Limited, 2014). We wanted to ascertain whether national data adequately shows up the scope of economic activities which are so essential to remote Australians.

The industries our sample activities link to are active throughout Northern Australia and described by ABS Occupational categories as environmental science, garden and nursery labourers; and visual arts, community arts, and tourism. Aboriginal community research and evaluation is not a Census Occupational field, but the data we have for 2011 represents their activity within the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP). In this paper we use the terms ‘mixed-market’ and ‘non-market’ hereafter (Wolf, 1979, 1998).

We know customary and mixed-market activities provide significant opportunity for economic participation in remote communities, but we find they are under-represented in the national policy and reporting frameworks of the non-market sector. Wolf’s concept allows us to describe the sorts of nuanced and localised capacity and aspirations found thriving in remote customary and mixed-markets.



Wolf suggests non-market failure occurs where the real costs and benefits of providing a service do not reconcile with the real costs and benefits to a society as a whole (1979) and if that is the case, then the omission of aspirational economic activity as an indicator of remote advantage and capacity has added to the problematic impression of remote Australia.

## 2. What does the literature tell us?

Tan's (2014) comprehensive overview suggests neo-classical economics underpins the Human Capital Theory (HCT) which is so central to current program 'logic' and implementation strategy of non-market interventions. Human Capital Theory relies on the neoclassical position that human behavior can be described in economic terms. A prevalent example in our sample of where national policy fails to compliment local nuance, can be attributed to the HCT assumption that educational attainment will lead to employment as a matter of fact; and employment will lead to mobility where necessary (Tan, 2014), and consequentially these activities will create wellbeing. This is not the pattern we see in remote research findings or in the context of remote aspirational customary and mixed-market economies. Rather, other forms such as cultural, environmental, social, knowledge, financial and manufactured capital are more logical, consequential and fundamental contributors to local economies and wellbeing that impacts everyday life (Guenther, Bat, & Osborne, 2014; Lovell, Blake, Alice, & Wallace, 2014).

Colquhoun and Dockery (2012) provide an assessment of the assumption of neoclassical economic thinking; that income is a good proxy for wellbeing and therefore the greater the income, the better the wellbeing. Striving for income equates to taking better care of oneself and family through having increased opportunity and choice; having access to income leads to spending, and more choice of what, how and where to spend. These feed back into market and non-market economies, ad infinitum; or until there is a market or non-market failure. (Dockery, 2014) counters this Eurocentric assumption with the rationale it therefore follows that public policy should serve the interests of wellbeing; that is public policy should support the choices people make to avoid 'ill-being'; even when these do not follow neoclassical economic theory, such as Human Capital Theory.

Remote and sparse populations need fine grained analysis to establish how change impacts on services and businesses. Carson, Carson & Lundmark (2014) points out remote and sparse population in all developing nations are more susceptible to unintended consequences and unforeseen outcomes from policy and politically driven agendas. Even if designed to benefit, such measures are often not locally fit for purpose. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights proves for the expression of Indigenous Knowledge as a human right (United Nations, 1948) and while the right to use first language is enshrined in the declaration, linguistic capacity is also a huge local and regional advantage in remote Australia. For example, much of the data we have collected across CRC-REP research programs document the significant multi-linguistic capacities of remote country men and women, and points to reserves of knowledge and oral history held in the many Aboriginal languages spoken across remote Australia. In contrast the trend against privileging children's capacity to learn in two languages in remote communities is causally linked to the international commitment Australia has to ensuring every child attains the same educational benchmarks at the same time in the same system – and that English is the only Australian option, in order to meet future demands for human capital. Yet bi-lingual and multi-lingual capacity is internationally regarded as one of the most important enabling functions for employment into the future and nowhere more so than throughout Asia and in remote Australia. Garrick describes our record of producing multi-lingual Asian language speakers as 'lax'. Currently, less than 6% of language students study an Asian language in Year 12 and, in returning to our sample, even fewer study an Aboriginal language throughout high school (Garrick, April 2015. Pers. Com). Could the linguistic advantage of remote Aboriginal language speakers provide an opportunity to develop specialist Asian language speakers, translators and interpreters?

We know Aboriginal art (Acker & Woodhead, 2015; Desart, 2014), Cultural Natural Resource management (Central Lands Council, 2014; The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013), Indigenous tourism (Carson, Carson, &

Lundmark, 2014; Jacobsen & Tiye, 2014) and Aboriginal community research all value Indigenous capacity and aspiration - and that these advantages have a transactional and, in most cases, financial value in customary and mixed-markets

### **3. What does the data tell us?**

The aim of this synthesis of those findings is to establish what sort of aspirations and capacity that underpin customary and mixed-market activity can be 'seen' in national data analysis, by using a sample of remote communities in Central Australia (NT).

#### **3.1 Method**

We know local staff in remote places provide advantage and capacity which are significant to non-market service delivery such as in health clinics, across local shire services, through family and children's work, for aged care programs and in schools. For the purpose of finding out more about the customary and mixed-markets and industries that are active in an intercultural space, we concentrated on:

- Occupational Categories (ABS, 2011) that represent mixed-market activities which includes Arts, and Cultural Natural Resource Management
- An industry activity record, where the activity is outside the ABS categories (Ninti One, 2011-12), which is Aboriginal Community research
- One non-market Occupational Category (ABS, 2011) that is representative across the clusters, which is Education

We choose to sample sparse and remote Aboriginal communities in a region of Central Australia in southern Northern Territory, also a region captured by the Northern Australian Development policy (Australian Government, 2015). The sample was aggregated by the number (3 or less) of confirmed mixed-market activities in each community. Mixed-market industry activity was captured as Aboriginal art center, Indigenous Ranger program and Aboriginal Community researcher activity in 2011.

The sample from ABS Census 2011 was compiled in ABS 'Table Builder' facility. It is formulated for Occupation (OCCP - 4 Digit Level) by Indigenous Geography (ILOC) and Indigenous Status (INGP), for Census counts at Place of Usual Residence (POUR). Occupational data relating to Education is included in parts of analysis for a non-market activity comparison, and educational occupation occurs across all communities in the three clusters. There are no records of Aboriginal Tourism businesses active in the sample region in 2011. There are Tourism products that involve sites within the sample region but they are not aboriginal owned or run, do not utilise local governance or business structures, and may employ locals intermittently as guides. There was a regional ATSI tourism group in Central Australia in 2011, but this did not involve communities in our sample.

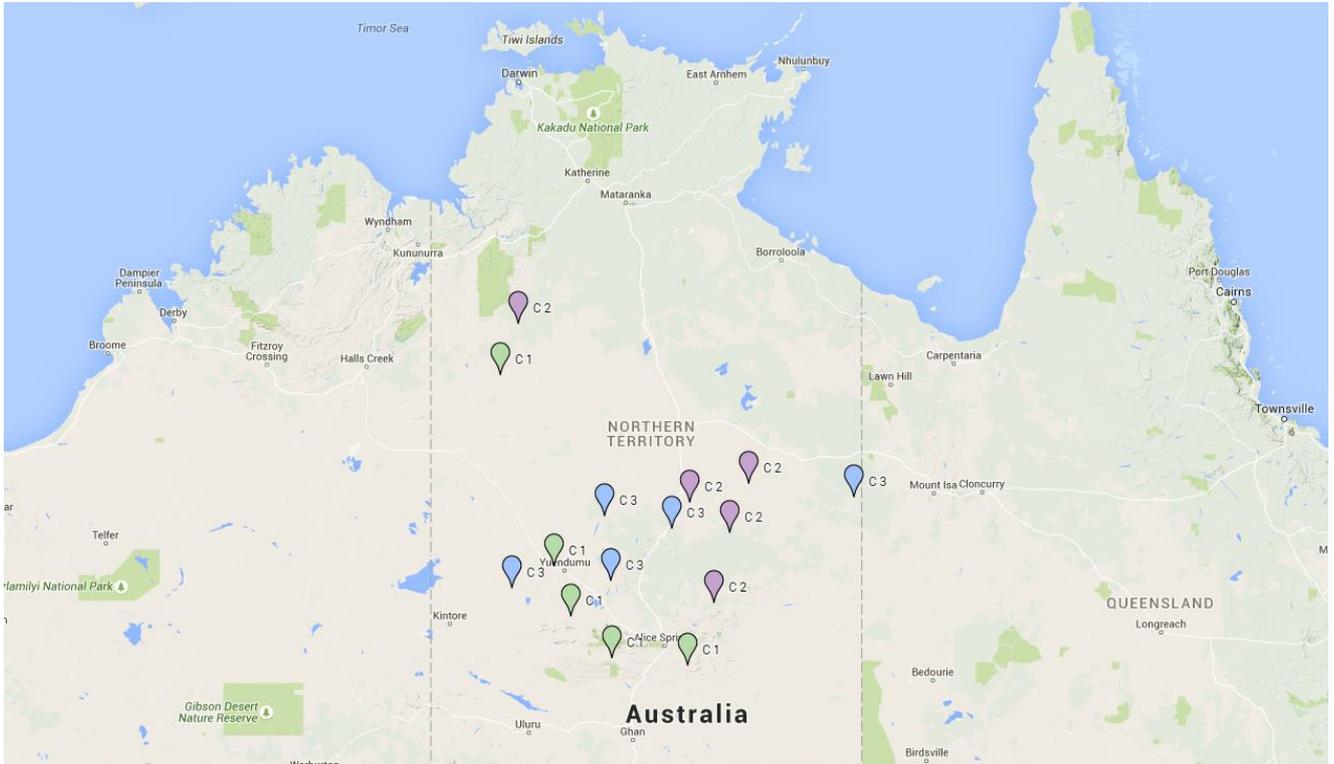
Clusters on the map include:

Cluster One (c1) = 3 mixed-market activities: Ntaria, Lajamanu, Ltyentye Apurte, Yuendumu, Papunya

Cluster Two (c2) = 1 or 2 mixed-market activities: Atitjere, Daguragu, Owairtilla, Ampilatwatja, Alekerenge

Cluster Three (c3) = 0 mixed-market activities: Wirliyatjarrayi, Alpurrulam, Nyirripi, Laramba, Tara

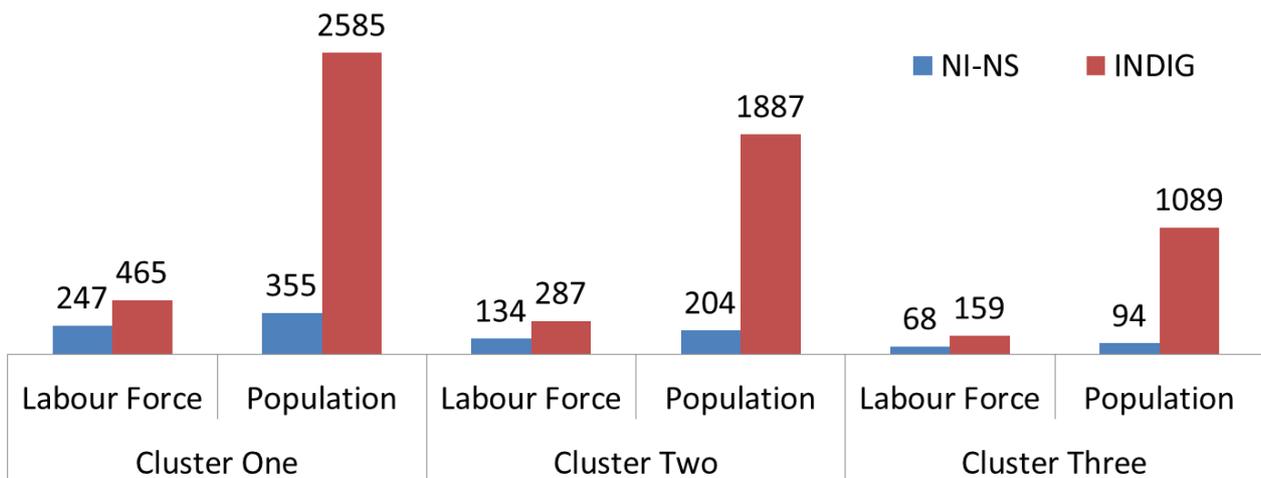
**Map I:** showing the location of each of the communities sampled, identified as clusters.



### 3.2 Data

We know the demography of our sample communities reflects that the majority of constituents have a linguistic heritage associating them with their country, and this is predominantly of the region where they live. This is part of another pattern of displacement or proximity to homelands which differs throughout Australia.

### 3.3 Labour Force and Population



**Note:** The ratio of Indigenous (INDIG) Labour Force to Population across the clusters is 1:5.6 in Cluster One; 1:6.7 in Cluster Two; and 1:6.9 in Cluster Three

The ratio of Non-Indigenous-Not Stated (NI-NS) Labour Force to Population across the clusters is 1:1.4 in Cluster One; 1:1.5 in Cluster Two; and 1:1.5 in Cluster Three

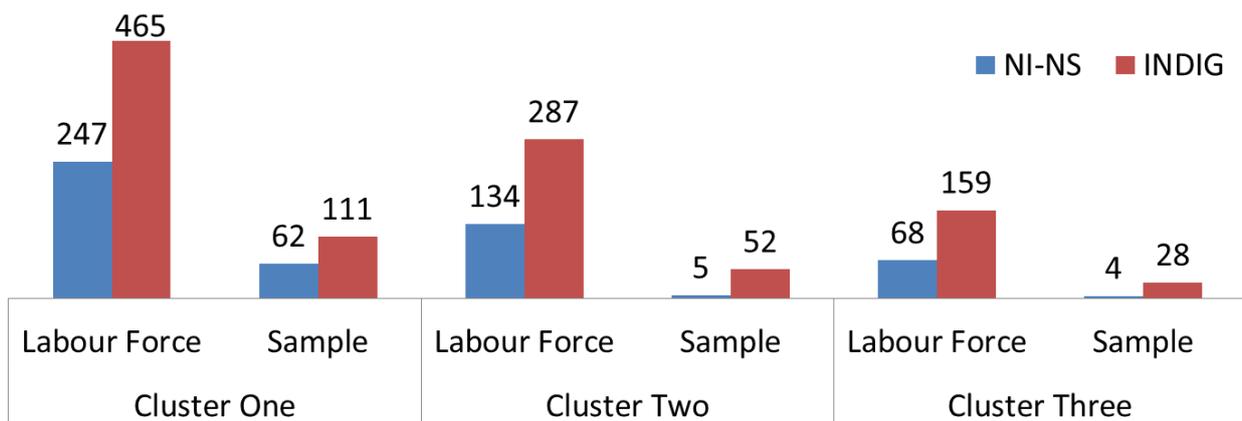
We know most people who declare *Non Indigenous–Not Stated* status are ‘migratory’ staff – or the family of migratory staff; those who come to live in a community in order to work there for a period of time.

What is interesting is the comparison between clusters. The labour force ratio is highest where mixed-market activity is located, and this is also the cluster of highest population. That sounds obvious and logical – but the question remains: how does non-market policy and programming influence the opportunity structures necessary to support such local aspiration and capacity (infrastructure, regional support and so on) as it interfaces with a market economy?

We know from literature mixed-market activities are conduits of remote advantage and capacity, and they contribute significantly to wellbeing - as well as to economic participation. This data snapshot suggests the measure of costs and benefits to society as a whole could be best extrapolated with the addition of mixed-market activity into the equation.

In any case, the clusters with less opportunity structures also have less labour force participation. As we see from the next graphs and especially those relating to the sale of art in each cluster, the opportunity that mixed-market activity offers extends economic participation beyond those who are labour-force participants.

### 3.4 Mixed-market (sample)

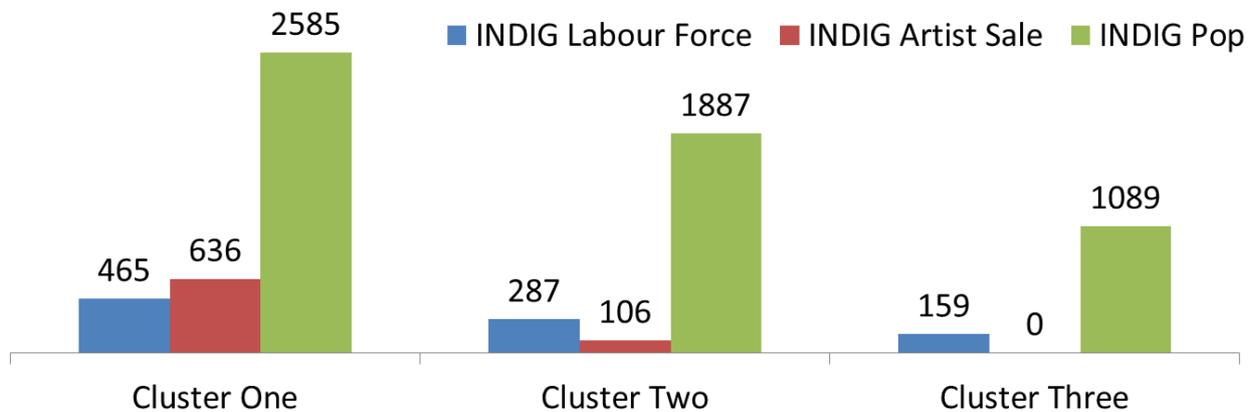


**Note:** The ratio of INDIG Mixed-Market (sample) to Labour Force by cluster is 1:4.2 in Cluster One; 1:5.5 in Cluster Two; and 1:5.7 in Cluster Three  
 The ratio of NI-NS Mixed-Market (sample) to Labour Force by cluster is 1:4 in Cluster One; 1:27 in Cluster Two; and 1:17 in Cluster Three

This data highlights the correlation by cluster, between the number of people engaged in our sample of mixed-market activity against the labour force statistics at Place of Usual Residence x Occupational status; with the addition of the Aboriginal Community Research activity data for 2011.

Again, it is fairly obvious – where the option exist for people to contribute through an opportunity structure which recognises and values their capacity and aspiration, we see a significant labour force contribution to the local economy, across multiple forms of capital which are transactional in everyday remote Australia. These include cultural, social, natural, knowledge, manufactured, human and economic forms of capital.

### 3.5 Artist selling work



**Note:** Cluster One – active art centre in each community and active peak body in the region.

The ratio of INDIG artists (with a sale) to INDIG population in Cluster One is 1:4; in Cluster Two it is 1:18; and Cluster Three it is nil.

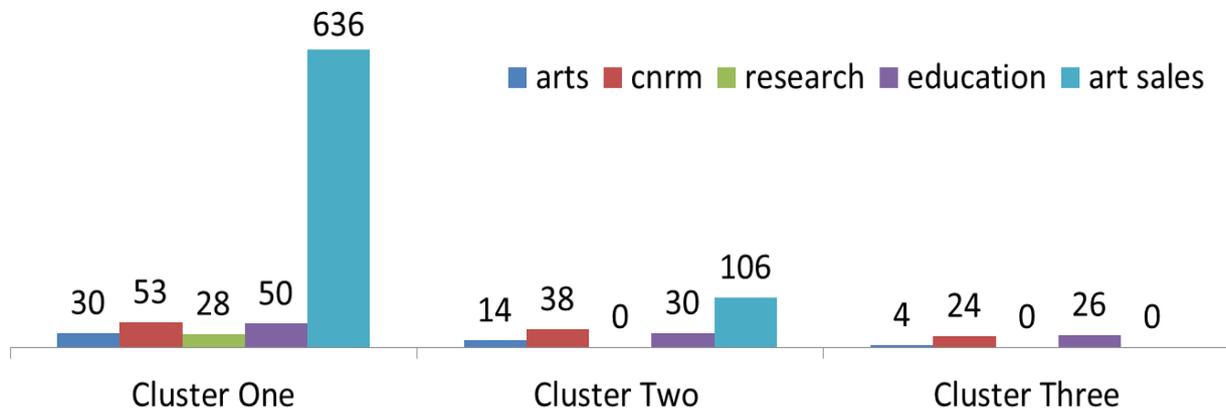
The ratio of INDIG artists (with a sale) to Sample (OCCP) for Cluster One is 1:3.9; for Cluster Two it is 1:1.2; and nil for Cluster Three.

Occupational data provides information about the primary occupation, and omits other activity. The problem with this lack of representation is it is likely to conceal the secondary mixed-market activity and obscure the multipliers of value locally, to regional industry and beyond.

This graph is interesting because it demonstrates potentially flexible mixed and customary market activity facilitates economic participation at a rate higher than expected of the labour force. The data is constrained in representing the number of artists who sold an art work as it represents only data available from art centre records (Acker & Woodhead, 2015). We know artists will sell work independently and without a record of transaction, and so we consider these findings are likely to under-represent the sale of artwork as a record of economic participation and contribution.

Such local nuances – as customary and mixed-market activity - are not considered for the degree of their absence or presence in policy frameworks; yet policy effects remote labour forces, regional support and infrastructure developments. This is a non-market failure, which we suggest is detrimental to empowerment and wellbeing in sparse and remote communities, and promotes an under-representation of the links between remote capacity and advantage, and mixed-market activity and opportunity structure.

### 3.6 Sample, non-market and artist selling work



**Note:** The ratio of Artist Sale to Sample (OCCP) for Cluster One is 1:3.9; for Cluster Two it is 1:1.2; and nil for Cluster Three.

The market activity of artists is opportunistic. Occupation in the arts and occasional economic participation as a seller of art are significantly higher where local infrastructure is available.

The number of artists who sold a work during the 2011 FY is greater than the number of people who are recorded as Labour Force participants. This means artistry is an attainable occupation to some degree for a least some percentage of those otherwise unable to participate. Without the data to show us, we do not know the demography of this indicator and we do not know the correlations across the other industries.

There is benefit in extending this work to look more closely also at the Indigenous standpoint as well as the intercultural pathways to and from mixed-markets, beyond the constraints of neo-classics and Human Capital Theory that dominate contemporary non-market theory. For example, how could local schools better link to work in local opportunity structures?

## 4. Constraining Factors

We know this data is very constrained, but it is the best we have available. In a nutshell the artist sale of work data available, plus the occupational and Aboriginal Community Researcher activity data supports the argument that mixed-market structures provide attainable and local opportunity for people – and at least some of whom would otherwise be outside the labour market - to participate in and contribute to local, regional and wider economies.

- The ABS classification of Occupation captures only one primary activity
- Indicators for non-market failure and mixed-market aspiration are not readily available at the local level

The non-market constraints seem to be those which fail to recognise and support local capacity and aspiration through mixed-markets. There is a significant cost or benefit to society as a whole in supporting mixed-market economic activity which has a flow on of multiple forms of capital, provides additional benefits to wellbeing, and can interface with a range of other markets, national and cosmopolitan.

- The activity of locally nuanced mixed-markets is essential to aspirations and wellbeing. In a mixed-market structure, costs and benefits can be ascertained, but as yet have not been

- The cost (to economies and wellbeing) of mediating change which is driven by successive policy shifts and political cycles, contributes to non-market failure through under-representation of mixed-market contributions to empowerment and wellbeing

## 5. Findings

We know from literature and research that wellbeing indicators include: economic participation and empowerment. This data snapshot suggests mixed-markets provide primary and secondary occupations; and opportunities to engage in economic activity that meet aspirations, are attainable and rely on local capacity and advantage.

Non-market structures do not reflect these qualities of mixed-market activity, which alter the analysis of cost and benefits to society as a whole:

- the extent to which people in remote communities value and participate in secondary employment
- the impetus and motivation to invest time and effort in occupations with attainable benefits and outcomes
- customary economic activity as both essential undertakings and ones from which mixed-market activities may flow
- the centrality of wellbeing in everyday life and the impetus to avoid ill-being

Scarcity of information at the local level contributes to regional and national indicators that are contrary to wellbeing:

- overstated non-market reliance; under-stated market activity
- perceived lack of mixed-market opportunity
- missed opportunity to make and experience choices; eroded governance and self-determination
- eroded economic empowerment
- governance confused with implementation
- diminished consideration of advantages - living languages, laws and customs

In order to provide policy that can support locally nuanced structures it is essential to understand the relationship of local activities and regional structures.

Regional structures are essential to support and facilitate wider market engagement, and to maintain the innovative edge so necessary to recognise and promote the advantages that remote communities offer for the future of Northern Australia.

Multi-lingual expression and research are essential to developing northern Australia, but in order to draw together what can be offered to industry, remote advantage and local nuance must be valued and considered.

Indigenous Cultural Natural Resource Management (CNRM) and the Aboriginal arts are known and understood as sources and maintenance of extensive records kept through time across Northern Australian environments. They represent the systems of management of resources, people and laws which are valued in everyday life and underpin many transactions in contemporary life. These are accepted ontological principals.

## 6. Conclusion

Census data alone is of limited use in ascertaining the scope and nature of Aboriginal engagement and capacity for mixed-market economic activity in remote areas. The White Paper on Developing Northern Australia (Australian Government, 2015) expresses some general and high level priorities in relation to Indigenous economic participation, but there is no statement of efficacy beyond ‘known’ opportunities – as opposed to those which remain un or under-reported, or which ontologically privilege remote capacity and advantage.

Has the language of ‘deficit’ overcrowded the reality and begun to promote ‘disadvantage’? Indicators for *Overcoming Remote Disadvantage* (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014) stress advantages of non-market contribution in remote Australia through improving ‘land and business ownership’ (2014, p.78); but the aspirations of the traditional land-owners in relation to mixed and customary market opportunities which accompany land and business activity are not evident. Again, health evaluation of non-market programs in relation to wellbeing emphasize ‘collaborative relationships with local communities and businesses’ are essential (Osborne, Baum, & Brown, 2013, p.6). Clearly, non-market failures do occur, where real costs and benefits of providing a service do not reconcile with the real costs and benefits to a society as a whole (Wolf, 1979).

It is time to recognise the aspirational advantages of remote Australia exist beyond non-market scope and imagination, and are not simply characteristics or artefacts of public policy and program implementation. Northern Australia, including Asia, offers opportunities to remote Australians to engage through nuanced mixed-markets, and confidently consider economic empowerment through the pathways of remote advantage, capacity and aspiration. Non-market enablers of mixed market activity remain essential to avoid the failure of contributing to ‘ill-being’.

We suggest evaluating industry pathways and regional industry bodies in the context of local activity (and inactivity) is a first and imperative step towards recognising how non-markets can work more collaboratively with remote capacity and advantage, as evident but under-reported mixed-market activity and contribution.

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