Reference No. 118

Summarising: Smith (2006), *The Social Underpinnings of the ‘outstation movement’ in Cape York Peninsula, Australia*
Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
The Social Underpinnings of the ‘outstation movement’ in Cape York Peninsula, Australia

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
B.R. Smith

Time period:
1995

Geographic location:
Coen, Cape York peninsula (Qld.)

Methodology:
An ethnographic study, with fieldwork conducted over 1996 and 1997.

Aims:
The purpose of this paper is to examine the contemporary rates, forms and motivations of Aboriginal mobility among the Indigenous population of a remote Cape York township community and associated outstations.

Selected findings and insights:
An outstation refers to a perennial or seasonally re-established camp or settlement, serviced and administered by, but distinct from, a larger population centre with which it has strong ties, including the occasional residence of its population.

- Within the outstation, populations hold and assert ‘traditional’ and/or historical ties with the area in which the outstation is situated and close ties of kinship and socio-cultural identity with each other.

There were 8 outstations associated with the Coen township, and their development and continuing existence was influenced by ‘focal’ men and women who played a key role among the extended family in gaining financial and other resources for its ongoing existence and generally had control over access to vehicles which, in turn, influenced movement between outstations and town.

There was regular movement between outstations and other outstations, the township of Coen, to other communities in the region and to Cairns, some 700 km. distant.

- Generally mobility was contained within the Coen region and there was greater mobility in the dry season due to accessibility.

Factors influencing mobility identified in this research were:
- Desire to spend time on one’s own country or that of ‘in-laws’ in the company of a small group of close relatives;
- To access bush foods, materials and other requirements;
- As an obligation to kin, to move other people and resources;
- A desire to escape the noise and tension of life in the township by going out to the outstation or leaving the outstation to go into town to overcome boredom, to shop or to take in bush resources;
- Obtain services such as medical services located in Coen.

There was a high degree of mobility among young people, who are able to rely upon kinship ties for food and shelter, partly as an attempt to overcome boredom associated with exclusion from economic participation and meaningful social roles.

**Educational implications:**

Addressing temporary mobility is difficult for educational authorities and individual schools, particularly when it involves rather large families as is often the case, and occurs more spontaneously. The educational needs of these families requires not only their school-age children being accommodated in a class but also the setting in place of appropriate educational transition arrangements, especially when, as is often the case, these students will have come in from the 'bush', have lower literacy skills and have experienced quite a different school curriculum. [curriculum]

**Relevance:**

*Introductory Topic: The Changing Demography of Indigenous Australia*

*Domain 2: School and Community Educational Partnerships*

  Complexity and diversity of communities

**Related papers:**