

McDonaldization and commercial outdoor recreation and tourism in Alaska

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This article uses perceptions of commercial tour operators in Juneau, Alaska, to examine the extent to which the commercial outdoor recreation and tourism industry in this area reflects principles of McDonaldization – efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. Data from interviews with 23 operators suggest that this industry in Juneau illustrates these principles. The large-scale nature of this industry in the Juneau area necessitates elements of McDonaldization with examples such as the efficiency of short and packaged activities, the predictability of activities with certainty, the calculability of tour timeframes, and the control that the cruise industry exerts over commercial activities through contracts with tour operators. In contrast, evidence of customization and flexibility occurred alongside examples of McDonaldization, such as independent booking and customizable tours and interpretation. Implications of McDonaldization include increased number and diversity of visitors, as well as more outdoor activities characterized by improved accessibility, decreased duration, and increased certainty. Implications for theory, society, the environment, and visitor experiences are discussed.

Keywords: McDonaldization, outdoor recreation and tourism, commercial operators, cruise industry

INTRODUCTION

The commercial outdoor recreation and tourism industry creates challenges for public land managers and commercial operators who attempt to balance the needs of visitors and nearby communities with minimizing impacts on natural resources. Challenges are amplified with growth in this industry, especially with offerings that are dependent on natural resources and gateway communities such as adventure travel, cruises, ecotourism, thematic tourism, and cultural tourism (WTO, 1998). In the USA, nature-based recreation and tourism often occur on publicly owned and managed lands, located

mostly (i.e. approximately 93%) in 13 western states including Alaska (WSTPC, 2005). This industry is among the three largest industries in these states and is a major economic force given that domestic and international expenditures on tourism and recreation contribute over \$120 billion per year to the economy (WSTPC, 2005).

Although recreation and tourism visitation is increasing in many places, most government budgets for managing this type of use are decreasing. In response, public land management agencies look to private commercial operators as an alternative source of offering recreation and tourism products and services

(Quinn, 2002). These operators provide products and services such as maintenance and management (e.g. campgrounds, parking, reservation systems), guided tours, food services, equipment rental, interpretive programs and educational materials, transportation and accommodation, and policing and safety (Absher *et al.*, 2003; Parr, 2000; Ritchie, 1999; Sem *et al.*, 1996; Weaver, 2001). Private operators typically apply for and may be granted permits, leases, or contracts to conduct these activities on public lands (Quinn, 2002; Weaver, 2001).

In Alaska, which contains the most federal public land of all states in the USA (about 240 million acres), one of the fastest growing industries is outdoor recreation and tourism (Allen *et al.*, 1998; Colt *et al.*, 2007). Bordered by the largest national forest in the USA, Juneau is one city in southeast Alaska that has witnessed an increase in nature-related activities. For example, visitation to one of the most popular locations near Juneau, the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, increased from approximately 94,000 in 1985 to over 367,000 in 2005 (Allen *et al.*, 1998; Dugan *et al.*, 2007). The number of commercial operators has also increased. Permits for commercial entities operating on the surrounding Tongass National Forest, for example, tripled between 1993 and 1998 (Cervený, 2005). These changes have led some people to liken the Juneau area to Disneyland (Egan, 2000).

These types of commercial activities depend on and impact local communities and natural resources, yet there is inadequate understanding of changes and challenges accompanying expansion of commercial recreation and tourism (Brooks and Haynes, 2001). Increases in the number and diversity of visitors and activities, for example, can affect communities, visitors, and the environment by causing impacts such as crowding, conflict, and pollution. There is a need to understand the commercial outdoor recreation and tourism industry and its impacts to inform decision-making of

resource managers and commercial operators.

The objective of this article, therefore, is to use the principles of McDonaldization to examine commercial outdoor recreation and tourism in the Juneau area. This article contributes to theory and practice by applying principles of McDonaldization from the sociology literature to this industry. This article uses perceptions of commercial tour operators in the Juneau area to examine two research questions. First, to what extent do the elements of McDonaldization exist in commercial outdoor recreation and tourism in Juneau? Second, what are the possible implications of McDonaldization and other phenomena such as the desire for customization in this setting?

Conceptual Foundation

The McDonaldization thesis (Ritzer, 1996, 1998) provides a conceptual lens to view changes within society or sectors of society, such as recreation and tourism. This thesis states that the principles of the fast food industry – efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control – dominate many sectors of society around the world (Ritzer, 1983). According to Ritzer (1996), *efficiency* means ‘choosing the optimum means to a given end’ and can be characterized by such things as drive-thrus and ready-made meals at McDonalds (p. 35). This restaurant chain demonstrates *calculability* (i.e. can be counted, quantified) and *predictability* (i.e. certainty, no surprises) by ensuring, for example, that products and services are identical (Ritzer, 1998). Ritzer (1998) defines *control* as the use of technologies to minimize inefficiency, uncertainty, and unpredictability among humans and their surroundings in the supply of goods and services. In this context, technologies not only include computers and assembly lines, but also elements of bureaucracy such as regulations and guidelines (Ritzer, 1996).

McDonalds displays control over production and supply of goods and services, for example, by replacing employees with technological advancements such as conveyor belts and automated drink machines (Ritzer, 1998). Principles of the fast food industry influence many successful companies, but possible consequences include homogenization of communities and denaturalization of ecosystems, which are described by what Ritzer (1996) called 'the irrationality of rationality' (p. 121).

This phenomenon is thought to be present in the recreation and tourism industry, as both Disneyland and the cruise industry have been compared to the McDonalds restaurant chain using Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis (Bryman, 1995; Ritzer, 1998; Ritzer and Liska, 1997; Weaver, 2005). Disneyland, for example, exhibits principles of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control (Bryman, 1995; Ritzer and Liska, 1997). Disneyland demonstrates efficiency in the way that it manages large numbers of people at one time, and predictability (i.e. certainty) and calculability by offering consistent customer service and experiences (Ritzer and Liska, 1997). Control is exerted over employee language and attire through guidelines outlined in the employee handbook and mandatory employee training at the Disney Institute (Bryman, 1995; Ritzer and Liska, 1997). According to Weaver (2005), these principles of McDonaldization are also apparent in the cruise industry. Through a controlled system, for example, people can efficiently visit many ports on a predictable and calculated schedule.

McDonaldization deserves more consideration in recreation and tourism because these sectors may also include some contrary evidence of customization, unpredictability, and flexibility (Weaver, 2005). Some visitors, for example, desire more individualized products such as customized tours that may challenge the efficiency, predictability, and calculability of more

standardized experiences (Mullins, 1999). In nature-based settings, many elements of the experience are beyond control, and participants desire varying degrees of uniqueness and unpredictability that challenge the principles of McDonaldization (Weaver, 2001). The McDonaldization thesis has been used to examine and explain some tourism-related activities such as the cruise industry and Disneyland, but limited research has extended it to commercial nature-based outdoor settings. This article, therefore, extends this thesis to recreation and tourism in a more resource-oriented setting in southeast Alaska.

Study Area and Context

The Tongass National Forest is the largest national forest in the USA and makes up 80% of the land in southeast Alaska (17 million of 21 million acres). An additional 15% of the land in this area is managed by the National Park Service (e.g. Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve) and the remaining 5% consists of Alaska Native Corporation lands (500,000 acres), state lands (180,000 acres), boroughs and communities (53,000 acres), and 11,000 acres of private lands (Allen *et al.*, 1998). These federal forests and designated wilderness areas attract many visitors to southeast Alaska (Kruger and Mazza, 2006). Given these land ownership patterns and that visitors are drawn to this region by its wildlife, glaciers, and other natural attributes (Dugan *et al.*, 2007), most outdoor activities in the area depend on publicly owned land (Figure 1).

Although Alaska was a destination of the traveling elite in the early 1900s (Hall, 2007), growth in visitation to southeast Alaska since the 1980s can be attributed largely to the cruise industry (Colt *et al.*, 2007). The ability of large ships to navigate the Inside Passage increased the number of people visiting Juneau and other towns in southeast Alaska (Hall, 2007). In 1964, only

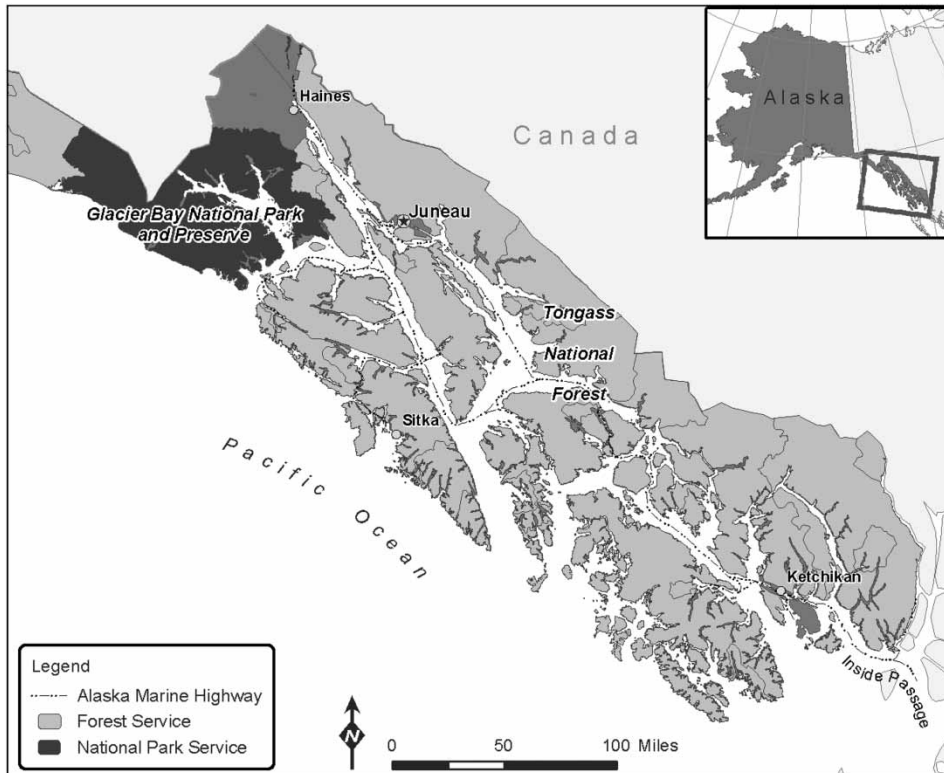


Fig. 1. Map of Southeast Alaska and the Juneau Area

11,000 people arrived by cruise ship, but Alaska hosted 700,000 visitors by 1986 (Hall, 2007). Approximately four or five ships, each carrying over 2500 passengers, are now docked daily in Juneau during the summer (Hall, 2007). The number of cruise ship passengers to southeast Alaska has more than doubled since 1990 (Colt *et al.*, 2007) and cruise ship visitation to Juneau increased from approximately 85,000 visitors in 1980 (Allen *et al.*, 1998) to nearly one million per year between 2002 and 2007 (JCVB, 2007). Cruise passengers have constituted the majority of seasonal visitation to the Juneau area since 1990; the number of independent (i.e. non-cruise) visitors to this area remained relatively constant from 1993 to 2001 at just over 100,000 people per year

(JCVB, 2007). Many of these visitors participate in nature-based activities.

Commercial recreation and tourism within the Tongass National Forest boundaries have increased in the past decade, and commercial operators in the Juneau area provide a variety of nature-based activities on and adjacent to this forest including hiking, flight-seeing, kayaking, marine charters, and glacier excursions (Cervený, 2005; US Forest Service, 2004). Some of these commercial activities are influenced by cruise lines that have contractual relationships with many local commercial tour operators to provide shore excursions for cruise passengers while they are in port (Cervený, 2005; JCVB, 2007). Operators without cruise contracts still receive some business from cruise

passengers who arrange commercial activities on their own.

METHODS

Data Collection

Data were obtained from in-depth, semi-structured interviews of commercial outdoor recreation and tourism operators in the Juneau, Alaska area. This qualitative data collection technique was used because interviews can capture complexity and depth of contextual meanings and real world phenomena, and offer rich and detailed understandings of issues through the structure and responsiveness of the research process (Berg, 2007; Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Patton, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify participants. A purposive sample helps to gain insight about perceptions and phenomena rather than empirical generalization from a sample to a population (Patton, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Given that information-rich cases are selected (Patton, 2002), a purposive sample often ensures that types of individuals representing certain attributes are included, but generalizability may be limited (Berg, 2007). Snowball sampling involves asking participants to identify other potential participants (Patton, 2002), and this is often a useful way for locating subjects with attributes necessary for a particular study (Berg, 2007).

Consistent with previous research (e.g. Cerveny, 2005), participants included owners or senior personnel from companies grouped by categories of activities offered – flightseeing (e.g. helicopter, fixed wing), marine charters (e.g. half to multi-day trips on water), adventure (e.g. adventure carts, zipline, biking, kayaking), and sightseeing (i.e. passive sightseeing on land such as tram, glacier, fish hatchery, salmon bake tours). These participants were selected to maximize diversity in attributes such as activities offered, visitors served, ownership

type, business size, and amount of time in business. Participants were given pseudonyms (e.g. Nancy, Joe) to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. In total, 23 semi-structured interviews of 40–95 minutes were conducted with these operators in the Juneau area during August and September 2007. A two-page interview schedule was developed integrating previous research and relevant concepts and theories. Interviews were guided by this schedule to allow for comparability (Patton, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 2005), but adaptability of responsive interviewing permitted use of additional questions to explore individual responses (Berg, 2007; Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

Interviews were digitally audio recorded and transcribed verbatim into word processing software. Data were then coded and analyzed using NVivo qualitative software (QSR International, Version 7). The initial stage of analysis involved creating thematic codes through an open coding process where themes emerged freely from the interview data (Berg, 2007), as well as themes that corresponded to the presupposed McDonaldization thesis. These initial codes were refined, organized, and operationalized through definitions during both coding and analysis. Axial codes were then created by relating and categorizing similar themes, and maintaining both *in vivo* (i.e. *in situ*) and theoretically guided codes (e.g. efficiency, customization). Principles of McDonaldization such as efficiency and calculability (Ritzer, 1983) were grouped within a literature guided hierarchical code called McDonaldization, whereas free codes that emerged independent of theory such as customization and flexibility were coded independently.

RESULTS

Evidence of McDonaldization

Commercial outdoor recreation and tourism in the Juneau area offers some evidence of

Table 1. Examples of McDonaldization in Commercial Outdoor Recreation and Tourism in Juneau, AK

Themes	Efficiency	Predictability	Calculability	Control
Tour packaging	X	X	X	X
Cookie-cutter approaches	X	X	X	
Short duration activities	X			
Seamless tours	X			
Bigger ships, economies of scale	X			
Accessible, convenient tours	X		X	X
'Soft' adventure		X		X
Certainty with tours/schedules/experiences		X		
Quantifiable timeframes			X	
Cruise transportation, land ownership				X
Cruise contracts with operators				X
Activity demand from cruise passengers				X

Note: X = observation of principle.

the principles of McDonaldization (i.e. efficiency, control, predictability, calculability). Table 1 lists themes that emerged from the interviews as well as connections among these themes and the principles of McDonaldization. Some themes demonstrated more than one principle. Tour packaging, for example, provided evidence of all four principles of McDonaldization.

Efficiency

A primary principle of McDonaldization is efficiency, which was defined by Ritzer (1996) as an approach for choosing the optimum means to a given end. In the Juneau area, efficiency was reflected in short duration activities, accessible and convenient tours, tour packaging, seamless tours, bigger cruise ships with economies of scale, and cookie cutter approaches (i.e. uniform, mass produced). The proliferation of short duration activities offered by most commercial operators served as a primary example of efficiency. Most commercial outdoor activities were time limited (i.e. partial day) mainly due to constraints of cruise ship itineraries. Given that cruise ships spend limited time in Juneau's port (i.e. 5–12 hours), most shore excursions

are only a partial day in duration. As a result, operators agreed that the spatial distribution of commercial activities tended to be concentrated around the urban center near transportation corridors, facilities, and developed and hardened sites. The type of activity also determined its duration. Flight-seeing tours, for example, occur for 1–3 hours, whereas marine charters are typically longer in duration (e.g. a few hours to multiple days).

Given that Juneau is surrounded by the Tongass National Forest, minimal time and effort is required for residents and visitors to travel to public lands. Situational factors such as Juneau's accessibility to a 'wilderness experience' help to facilitate these time-limited activities (Janson, 2008). The convenience and efficiency of accessible glaciers, for example, offers a unique outdoor experience for people with limited time. *Joe*, a flightseeing operator, claimed that his 1–3 hour flightseeing tours offer visitors a 'taste' of Alaska. *Wyatt*, an adventure operator, discussed the rising popularity of trips marketed as 'quick escapes' and attributed lack of time to influencing changes in user desires: 'So it seemed to be a time factor, people having less time and wanting to do

more'. Likewise, *Mike*, a marine charter operator, said that 'people don't want to take five or six days out of their lives ... they want to see it all in three days'. Operators explained that their clients seemed to desire shorter, less in-depth experiences in favor of increased quantity and variety of activities.

Tour packaging exhibited additional elements of efficiency. Not only does the visitor assume a discounted price, but a package could allow for an efficient 'taste' of multiple options. *Jessica*, a sightseeing operator, explained that one cruise line has combined cruising with land tour itineraries in over 28 cruise tour packages 'so people don't just purchase cruising, they purchase a tour package that includes cruising'. This tour packaging ensures efficiency through provider continuity. Operators work to accommodate client desires to 'see and do it all' by packaging tours to include multiple dimensions. One of the newer tours, for example, was the product of a partnership between companies – a half day combination zipline and mountain bike tour. *Nancy*, a marine charter operator, discussed the proliferation of packaging: 'We, of course, like everybody else, offer a combination'. Package tours offered efficient means to satiate visitors' diverse desires.

Specific commercial activities in the Juneau area such as flightseeing tours also provided examples of efficiency in their seamlessness. Flightseeing tours' efficient operations allow passengers to return to their cruise ships before departure. *Matthew*, a flightseeing operator, explained the efficiency of his flightseeing tour:

The [aircraft] comes back and picks up another group. So, we'll actually take one group up, drop them off, pick up a group, bring them back. We just try to keep the [aircraft] going back and forth, which is kind of nice because then you don't have all the modern stuff out there ... You really get a feel [for] glaciers, and suck in the aura of Mother Nature out there, which is nice.

This back and forth of aircraft demonstrated tour efficiency in smooth transitions between groups; one group explored the glacier while another was picked up for transport to the same spot. Additionally, the experience on the glacier without helicopters allows visitors a brief time for the efficient consumption of an outdoor and relatively natural experience.

Increasing size of cruise ships, representing increased economies of scale, offers another example of efficiency. According to operators, cruise ships in Juneau have increased in size from smaller (e.g. 250-foot long) 'Love Boat' style ships of the late 1970s to exceeding 'Panamax' size (i.e. 1000-foot long; maximum that can fit through the Panama Canal). *Troy*, a marine charter operator, has witnessed this increase: 'They keep bringing bigger ships, more people and more ships and all of that'. *Nancy* explained her future outlook: 'The ship companies just send bigger ships. [T]hey're probably building bigger ships ... as we speak'. *Truman*, a sightseeing provider, offered his perspective on these trends:

If you would have told me then that there were going to be a million people here in Juneau, I would have asked you how the [expletive] you were going to fit that many people on those small ships.

Given increases in the number of visitors served and diversity of activities offered, the Juneau area has evolved into a location that some operators labeled 'large-scale industrial tourism'. To cater to this type of use, elements of efficiency and standardization must occur. To serve large numbers of people, many operators rely on cookie cutter approaches, which *Mike* described as 'the McDonalds approach to recreational tourism'. The operators also described current and future developments in the area by the cruise lines as large-scale packaged 'one stop shop' wilderness destinations. *Truman* discussed one future

large-scale exclusive cruise destination outside Juneau whose development is headed by Disneyworld's developer.

Predictability

Predictability refers to consistency and certainty across products and services to ensure that customers are not surprised (Ritzer, 1996, 1998). In the Juneau area, predictability was evidenced in tours and experiences that offered elements of certainty. Although nature-based experiences are often defined by unexpected events, the large-scale nature of commercial recreation and tourism in the Juneau area necessitates some predictability.

Many operators categorized trends in their activities as active and adventure based, but short duration and 'soft' in nature (Weaver, 2001). Cruise lines have attracted visitors who are typically less experienced in some activities than independent travelers, and marine and adventure operators, both of whom receive the majority of multiday visitors, explained that their clients now desire more comfortable adventure activities. According to *Wyatt*, his multiday non-cruise clients began demanding shorter adventures with more comforts and certainty:

People are less willing to go to one area and have an in-depth wilderness experience. They want ... shorter experiences that still get people back to lodges and showers and bathrooms and comforts ... good wine and food, short wilderness experiences as opposed to ... seven days in one wild place, sleeping on the ground.

Mike discussed declines in wilderness cabin use and commercial and private overnight use of the Tongass Forest by kayak, canoe, or foot. Other operators offering multiday trips spoke of similar declines in overnight use and increases in 'softer' day use activities. Some operators offered reasons for these shifts away from 'hard' activities including visitor desires to participate in more activities in a shorter amount of time,

as well as to experience predictable and safe activities. *Chris*, a flightseeing operator who described his trips as 'softer', claimed that a more active company 'scared people off' with marketing focused on demanding and challenging adventures. These accessible, convenient, and 'soft' adventure tours lend themselves to more predictable experiences with more elements of certainty than multiday wilderness adventures.

Flightseeing tours in Juneau offered additional examples of predictability in their tours, schedules, and experiences. These tours operate within an expected timeframe; when they leave, where they go, and when they get back is all known. Aware of the tour schedule, travelers can determine if their time in port allows such a trip and can assume a timely return. These tours were described as somewhat cookie cutter in nature to allow for this predictability. Flightseeing operators also provided evidence of predictability in their companies. *Jeff*, a flightseeing operator who also operates dog sled tours, discussed the certainty of the annual close of business:

And then we do a drop dead date of September 1st ... when it's done because between fighting with the weather and keeping the dogs up there and trying to get everybody down and how it's choreographed to start up and shut down. In our business we think a no is better than a maybe.

Predictability was evident in the unwavering date, removal routine, and business mantra 'a no is better than a maybe'.

Calculability

Predictability and calculability are conceptually similar, but calculability implies that products and services can be easily counted and quantified (Ritzer, 1996, 1998). The McDonalds restaurant chain assures that products can be easily quantified by emphasizing quantity using the slogan 'bigger is better', which arguably makes consumer decisions easier

(Ritzer, 1996, 1998). In the Juneau area, calculability was evidenced in tours and experiences that were quantifiable; similar experiences and packaged tours allowed for more experiences and quantifiable timeframes. This idea is evident in tour packaging in the Juneau area through marketing approaches such as 'get it all in one package'. Beyond enabling efficiency, this packaging also ensures a tour with quantified experiences that a savvy traveler can mentally check off their list.

The principle of calculability was also evidenced in operator marketing. *Truman*, for example, explained:

We try to market ourselves as being like 'coffee with your meal' or 'fries with that, you know, we're... easy to do with everything else you do in Juneau. You need an hour, hour and a half.

Truman's description of his company's offerings suggested that short duration activities that can be calculated to last 1–2 hours maximum lend themselves to packaging or vice versa.

Flightseeing tours in the Juneau area also offered examples of calculability in their quantifiable timeframe, calculable to a quarter of an hour. *Matthew* explained that 'roundtrip from pickup to drop off... is about two hours and 15 minutes'. Likewise, *Joe* discussed his company's flightseeing tours: 'We don't do any long term, just all short, one, two, and three hour tours'. Aware of the tour duration, visitors can calculate if their time in port allows such a trip and can assume a timely return.

Control

The final principle of McDonaldization is control, which is typically represented by standardized means of power exerted over customers or employees (Ritzer, 1996, 1998). Control involves the use of technologies, rules, and guidelines to minimize inefficiency, uncertainty, and unpredictability in humans

and their surroundings (Ritzer, 1998). In the Juneau area, control was evidenced through transportation and tour packaging, accessible and convenient tours, 'soft' adventures, and several means of control over outdoor recreation and tourism products and companies by the cruise industry.

A few large cruise lines ensured control in shore-based tours by using their own transportation from ships to shore activities in Juneau. Control over the transportation component of tours ensured efficiency and predictability that benefit operators, visitors, and cruise lines through provider continuity. The accessible and 'soft' nature of the tours and activities also allows control over timeframe and experience, and tour packaging ensures control through provider continuity, which helps to provide efficiency, predictability, and calculability.

Many operators discussed control that the cruise lines' exerted over commercial recreation and tourism products, employees, and visitors. *Truman*, for example, discussed a joint venture between a cruise entity and an Alaska Native Corporation to develop a wilderness destination: 'There is tight control that the cruise companies have that is difficult to overcome'. Operators also discussed how cruise lines exert control over development and delivery of visitor activities. For example, the cruise industry has influenced operators to accommodate the short duration of time that ships spend in port (Cerveny, 2005). *Suzanne*, an adventure operator, discussed how her company needed to create shorter tours for cruise passengers:

We were offering trips that were like 10 or 11 hours in duration. Well, no one off the cruise is going to do that, so... we had really limited numbers... we need[ed] to offer a product that is short enough to work for cruise ship clients... we had to find a product... that we could sell to independent bookers like cruise clients that are finding us in other means besides booking on the ship.

The importance of catering to cruise passengers provided an example of cruise industry influence over the nature of activities offered in the Juneau area as operators respond to the demand and volume of cruise passengers. Contracts between cruise companies and these operators ensure delivery of products for cruise ship passengers and customers at port destinations. For each operator type, control was also demonstrated through the sheer volume of clients who were cruise passengers. According to most interviewed operators, the majority of their customers were cruise passengers rather than independent travelers or people visiting friends and family. The proportion of cruise travelers, however, varied by operator type. Flightseeing companies, for example, almost entirely catered to cruise passengers, whereas one adventure company offering multiday adventure tours operated solely for non-cruise visitors. All other adventure companies mostly catered to cruise passengers.

Operators also mentioned a more extreme example of the cruise industry's large-scale control of land-based activities occurring near Juneau where one cruise company controls most elements of multiday land excursions, typically to Alaska's interior, which occur before or after stopping in Juneau. Control is exerted mainly through large-scale ownership of transportation, tours, lodging, and some of the land where these excursions occur. In this case, ownership assures product availability and certainty of quality. In Juneau, cruise companies maintained some control over activities offered through high proportions of cruise travelers and negotiated contractual relationships with private operators.

Evidence of Customization and Flexibility

Somewhat contrary to the principles of McDonaldization, evidence from operator experiences indicated that a number of

visitors desire some flexibility, customization, and uniqueness in their experience. *Jessica*, for example, wanted her clients to leave feeling 'touched by Alaska'. She explained her desire to provide a unique experience: 'they don't get a packaged corporate deal; we don't want to seem like that'. Examples of operator efforts to accommodate this desire for uniqueness included customizable tours, independent booking, and customized interpretation.

Customizable tours

Several company types and tours attempted to accommodate visitor desires for unique and customized products. One example included the 'Guide's/Pilot's Choice' tours, which are designed to offer customization within a predictable, efficient, and calculable schedule. On these tours, for example, a pilot guides his or her clients on a flightseeing tour of the pilot's choice, showing visitors 'their own little favorite spots', or the experience of witnessing natural occurrences such as watching a glacier calve (i.e. a sudden breaking away of ice). *Matthew* discussed how his company's Pilot's Choice tour is the 'Rolls Royce of all [aircraft] tours', offering more flight time and the pilot serving as the guide and choosing where to land:

It changes departure by departure. Sometimes there's a waterfall that opens up for a week or two and they may see that. [The pilots] know what's... unique up there, so they'll go and land in those areas.

During these tours, pilots provide elements of both diversity and standardization. After flying and landing, for example, *Jeff's* pilots 'do an alternate flight back'. He elaborated on the variety that his pilots offer: 'they'll... try not to fly over the same spot twice'. This type of customization also exists with some bicycling and hiking tours in the Juneau area. These adjustable, Guide's Choice tours provide examples of customization in addition to principles of

McDonaldization. The Pilot's Choice flight-seeing tours, for example, still operate within a predictable, efficient, and calculable timeframe that allow visitors timely return to their cruise ships.

Independent booking

Independent booking offers an example of visitor desires for choice and diversity within the suite of activities offered by commercial operators in the Juneau area. Respondents explained witnessing a trend, mostly among cruise passengers with a standardized itinerary, toward what *Truman* and others called 'smart shopping'. Cruise travelers, he claimed, educate themselves more now than in the past on details of shore excursions such as options, prices, and companies. Some operators described visitors searching for more value and quality in their experiences as a trend. Rather than booking activities on ships, operators explained how more cruise passengers are booking shore excursions independently (i.e. in advance or day of tour). *Jane*, a flight-seeing operator, explained motivations of visitors who independently book tours: 'More people are wanting to do their own thing and not get locked into taking a tour with a ship or go through another booking agent'. Companies accommodated this phenomenon by 'holding back' tour space from cruise line preseason tour purchases for what they called 'independents' who are mostly cruise passengers booking independently of the ships, rather than independent people who travel by air or ferry to the region.

Customized interpretation

Another example of variation within the outdoor recreation and tourism industry in the Juneau area was the repeated theme of the guide's customized interpretation approaches. Operators discussed how they offer their guides materials to create a unique interpretive talk, which could be

customized based on client interest. *Ryan*, an adventure operator, discussed how his guides used their 15-page informational handbook to inform interpretation: 'We like people to personalize it'. Some companies explained how their hiring practices reflected this importance of individuality; they claimed to hire guides primarily for their personalities. An individual touch, operators explained, can help to create the memorable lifetime experiences they strive to offer for their clients.

Benefits and Consequences of McDonaldization

Although once a destination of the traveling elite, the Juneau area has evolved to serve more families and multigenerational groups, and people who are younger, less affluent, and from other countries (Hall, 2007). According to some operators, the rise in trip affordability has encouraged a broader diversity of people to visit Alaska. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that cruise line economies of scale influence traveler demographics; through mass production, the cruise industry has created budget trips that attract an increased amount and diversity of visitors. *Dave*, an adventure operator, spoke of the change in traveler affluence in the past 20 years:

And now the cruise line companies are being able to take something that was once for the elite and . . . bring it down to a level where the middle class can afford it – the middle of the middle class even, maybe even lower. Some of those cruises are pretty cheap.

Operators also noted that their clients tend to be less specialized in nature-based activities due to decreasing travel costs and increasing visitor diversity. *Dave* explained: 'Here you get to reach an audience that we think a lot of these people wouldn't normally do that kind of experience'.

Joe realized the opportunity to show many travelers ‘their’ Tongass National Forest: ‘It’s our largest Federal forest and it’s a jewel. It’d be fun to let them explore all of it, but we just get to show them little tiny, tiny parts of it’. Although the number of total experiences increase, the average amount of time per experience may be decreasing. Some operators recognized disadvantages of visitors’ limited time in the Juneau area. *Nancy*, for example, commented on consequences of cruise ship partial day stops in Juneau:

I think that it’s a less quality service for passengers because they get limited time in Juneau – what good is it to be in Juneau from 7am until 1pm? ... I think that’s negative to the community ... It’s not fair to the customers, because you’re really reducing and limiting their time. And that’s got adverse effects on just about everybody except for [the cruise company] who can sell twice as many tickets.

Wyatt explained that although cruise travelers to Juneau can now participate in shorter, more accessible outdoor activities, the experience offered is different:

[They can] get everything – you know, one stop shop – with a cruise ... [but] the experience is nothing similar. A 45-minute sea kayak trip in Juneau has nothing in common with a five day camping trip.

Operators expressed other challenges associated with offering outdoor activities on a limited time schedule. For example, *Leon*, a marine charter operator, described working within the cruise line schedules to take passengers fishing:

Here’s six people, four hours, go take them fishing, and it could be the worst four hours for salmon fishing of the day, but you still [have] got to go out and try to catch some fish.

Operators who cater at least in part to cruise passengers expressed the necessity and difficulty of developing an efficient, short-duration, and high-quality tour.

DISCUSSION

Commercial outdoor recreation and tourism in the Juneau area offers some evidence of the principles of McDonaldization (efficiency, control, predictability, calculability). Efficiency was reflected in short duration activities, accessible and convenient tours, tour packaging, seamless tours, bigger ships with economies of scale, and cookie cutter approaches. Predictability was evidenced in tours and experiences that offered elements of certainty. Calculability was shown in tours and experiences that were quantifiable; similar experiences and packaged tours allowed for more experiences and quantifiable timeframes. Control was evidenced through tour packaging, accessible and convenient tours, ‘soft’ adventure, and cruise line control over outdoor recreation and tourism products and services. Tour packaging provided some evidence of all four principles. In contrast, customization and flexibility occurred alongside evidence of McDonaldization, such as independent booking and customized tours and interpretation. Implications of McDonaldization include increased number and diversity of visitors as well as more commercial activities characterized by improved accessibility, decreased duration, and softer adventures. Operators also noted disadvantages of streamlined and packaged experiences.

Theoretical Implications

This article demonstrates that elements of McDonaldization are present within commercial outdoor and nature-based recreation and tourism. Package tours, for example, are examples of efficiencies that create mass production of homogeneous products (Ritzer and Liska, 1997). In Juneau, a package tour offers a visitor quick, accessible, and ‘soft’ adventures where they can see a bear, set foot on a glacier, and dine at a salmon bake all in the same day. Weaver

(2005), however, suggested that the McDonaldization thesis may offer an incomplete interpretation of tourism products such as cruise travel because it does not adequately address visitor preferences for customization. This research confirms this limitation, offering evidence of customization and flexibility in commercial outdoor recreation and tourism such as the demand for independent booking, supply of guide's choice tours, and customized interpretive talks.

Weaver (2005) suggested, however, that these types of customization may exist alongside aspects of McDonaldization. Ritzer (1996) addressed this desire for diversity and customization within the McDonaldization thesis as a manifestation of 'standardized sameness' or 'mass customization'. Ritzer and Liska (1997) suggested that customization becomes easier as McDonaldization becomes more prolific in society. Although cruise cuisine, for example, was formerly part of a tour package, McDonaldization has enabled cruise passengers to choose their own 'local' cuisine among food chains in each port that provide predictable and efficient meals. In this way, McDonaldization can facilitate 'customization'. Weaver (2005), however, argued that Ritzer understated the pervasiveness of customization in society. Findings from the research reported here suggest evidence of customization and flexibility within a McDonaldized product (e.g. Guide's Choice tours), supporting the notion that there may be some compatibility between customization and McDonaldization. McDonaldization, however, may never completely explain trends in the commercial outdoor recreation and tourism industry.

This research extends Ritzer's (1996) McDonaldization thesis to a more resource oriented and commercial setting, but more understanding and empirical application of this thesis in outdoor recreation and tourism is needed to strengthen theory and inform practice. This article, for example, only examined perceptions of commercial

operators; it did not examine perceptions of travelers or other residents. Future research should examine perspectives of other stakeholders and the extent that their opinions and desires parallel broader social phenomena (e.g. McDonaldization, customization). Research, for example, could explore travelers' relative demand for various attributes of an experience.

Managerial and Practical Implications

Application of concepts such as McDonaldization can inform management of commercial outdoor recreation and tourism activities, as well as the public lands on which they depend. Applying McDonaldization in Juneau casts a new light on the nature of its recreation and tourism industries and, conceivably, society. Findings suggest that proliferation of principles of the fast food industry in outdoor recreation and tourism can increase the number of people exposed to nature-based activities. A broad diversity of visitors benefit from efficient and accessible experiences, and controlled and predictable experiences enable accessibility to a diversity of visitors beyond the select affluent or highly skilled. In addition, the McDonaldization process (e.g. efficiency, predictability) may increase opportunities such as income and employment for new businesses catering to cruise passengers or independent travelers.

Ritzer (1998), however, explained that 'something vital is lost about life when all of the things we consume, and experiences we have, are highly predictable' (p. 114). Consequences of McDonaldization or the 'irrationality of rationality' (Ritzer, 1998) are evident in the commercial outdoor recreation and tourism setting. Large-scale commercial use of towns and surrounding natural systems, for example, can create ecological and social impacts (e.g. overuse, exploitation). The limited time that visitors spend in the Juneau area contributes to the necessity of tour

efficiency and the need for predictable and calculable activities; the proliferation of short, efficient, and accessible activities provides evidence of McDonaldization, as well as the potential consequences such as a limited and homogenized experience. Examples of customization in recreation and tourism in Juneau may offer illustrations of resistance to McDonaldization.

Industrial scale recreation and tourism can commodify the visitor experience and community lifestyle (Cerveny, 2005). Although some homogenization is necessary for operators to cater to large numbers of people in a limited time, the outdoor experience in the Juneau area risks evolving into an experience more similar to visits at a zoo or Disneyland. McDonaldization might undermine the distinctiveness of these outdoor activities and even Juneau; the same distinctiveness that draws visitors and makes the area a noteworthy travel destination. A possible example of resistance to McDonaldization may include the presence of signs on some downtown business windows announcing that the business is locally or Alaskan owned and operated. Juneau and other ports and communities should caution against homogenized experiences at the risk of being just another port or town with the same souvenir shops rather than a distinct place with a unique history and culture.

McDonaldization and large-scale commercial recreation and tourism may not only threaten the vitality of the experience, but also the sustainability of communities and resources. The nature of the commercial outdoor recreation and tourism industries in the Juneau area, coupled with the limited amount of time that travelers experience the area, can create consequences such as overuse of public natural resources. Surrounded by the Tongass National Forest, the Juneau area facilitates the ability of many visitors to 'park and play,' similar to a fast food restaurant where one can drive and eat, there is minimal effort exerted or

time necessary to experience desired outcomes (i.e. food, adventure). Site hardening techniques may enable concentration of impacts near convenient access points, but if people desire more remote settings and experiences, the spatial distribution of activities and impacts into more fragile and remote areas may increase. In their efforts to 'tame' nature and make it easily consumed by travelers within a short period of time – and thus broaden the appeal of nature and the experience – operators and providers could potentially undermine the appeal of their nature-based tours.

By exceeding social and ecological carrying capacities (Shelby and Heberlein, 1986), operators also risk disturbing experiences and displacing people. Managers must, therefore, weigh costs and benefits of decisions concerning management of commercial outdoor activities. Managers must also adhere to legal requirements such as the Wilderness Act. Not all public protected areas and natural systems, for example, were intended to accommodate significant numbers of people and activities, yet management of these areas is becoming increasingly dependent on user revenues to help offset management costs (Weaver, 2001). Managing agencies, therefore, need more and better qualitative and quantitative data to enable monitoring and management of resources according to site plans and objectives (Manning, 1999).

Although these data cannot be directly applied to all settings, this study provides a deeper understanding of the commercial outdoor recreation and tourism setting. Attributes of the Juneau area (e.g. commercial tourism focus, dependency on public lands, cruise influence) should provide a starting point for application of research concepts and findings to other activities, interest groups, and locations. Future quantitative research may be able to use this study to tailor survey questions that address broad societal trends, such as

asking visitors about desired conditions or activities. Future studies should incorporate perspectives of managers, residents, and visitors, and examine commercial outdoor recreation and tourism trends and their implications for communities such as Juneau that provide a gateway to natural resources.

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