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Globalization, the Market and Outdoor Adventure

Chris Loynes

Access to outdoor adventure in the UK has a long history of power struggles between social classes. In the late nineteenth century, the working classes were increasingly able to travel on the cheap railways and were gaining the right to have weekends off and take paid holidays. Some of the middle classes attempted to prevent them reaching places such as the Lake District by opposing the construction of the railways. They claimed that the working classes did not have the education with which to properly appreciate the sublime landscapes of the British coasts and mountains (Williams, 2002). The upper classes had an even more effective strategy, as they owned much of the land and excluded others from it. This led to the mass trespass movements of the 1930s (Glyptis, 1991). It was only in 2000 that the law commonly known as the right to roam restored the right of access for all to open country in England and Wales (Pearlman Hougie & Dickinson, 2000). In Scotland, the 'right to roam' was never lost, but was bitterly fought over, nonetheless. Struggles to access land are still not fully resolved, as access to rivers and coastline continues to be a contentious issue.

The colonization and possession of the land by one class to the exclusion of others affected the development of many outdoor activities. In the late twentieth century and early twenty first century, access to outdoor adventure is again becoming increasingly controlled, but this time, I will argue, it is by aspects of the commercialization of the activities and the locations in which they take place. The impact of these trends on the quality of outdoor experiences and who has access to them is worth understanding, and is thought by some to represent a new struggle as the market attempts its own 'colonization' of the outdoors (Bonnett, 2004). As recently as 2011, protestors challenged the way privatization and charging money for access, in their view, excludes some people from the land and creates a barrier to participation in a range of outdoor activities. They also

defended the concept of public land and the right to a freedom of access for all.

Despite reassurances from government agencies, the protestors stuck to their arguments and were successful at retaining the public status of the forests. History suggests that they were right to be skeptical. The National Trust, a charity and one of the biggest landowners in the country owning or leasing vast areas in perpetuity on behalf of the nation, has, in the past, also considered charging for access in order to pay for the costs of maintaining the land. The plans were only abandoned because of the impracticality of collecting the fees. However, the question remains as to whether these lands should be understood as national assets managed by the public or charitable sector, and supported from national taxation revenue and charitable giving. Alternatively, should they be funded on the 'user pays' principle, and managed by voluntary and increasingly commercial organizations? This remains a political question about which the public has strong feelings.

Market forces are also at work in a different way within outdoor education. The right to choose the school your children attend and the league tables and reports that help parents to make this choice have created a market in education. Schools are driven to compete on their standards of attainment, which is important, but is not the sole purpose of education. Outdoor education has been drawn into this trend as professionals and providers are increasingly asked to justify their contribution in relation to how it enhances this attainment.

This chapter will examine the background to commercialization in society. In particular I will use the ideas of commodification, McDonaldization and globalization to consider some of the trends in the outdoor adventure field and their impacts on both recreational and educational forms of outdoor adventure.

The origins of rationalization in outdoor adventure

Outdoor adventure activities emerged at various times during the 19th century. A

changing attitude to the landscape, encouraged by the Romantic movement and coupled with increasing disposable income and leisure time among wider sectors of society, led to hill-walking, cycling, fishing and, later, climbing and sailing, becoming popular pastimes.

As explored fully in Chapter 2, Weber (1947) identified the trend in modern societies towards market-led ideas. He defined modernity, the modern way of life in Europe, as a trend towards materialism and rationality (Benton & Craib, 2001). In particular, he was interested in the relationship between the production of material goods and the wider culture. He saw the trends towards *rationalism*, the dominance of means – ends instrumental thought, impacting on many areas of life beyond the commercial world. Weber's critique was aimed especially at the shift from valuing things for themselves to one in which things are valued for the benefits they provide. For example, in outdoor adventure, the value placed on the experience of being outdoors might be replaced by benefits to health, status, or education (i.e. the experience is justified in terms of the ends it supports rather than for the intrinsic value of the experience itself). Weber argued that, as modernization progresses, organizations and institutions become more complex and bureaucratic, which leads them to adopt rationalized policies in order to manage the situation. He described this as a means – ends or *instrumental* approach.

The introduction of national governing body awards into recreational sports including outdoor activities can be understood as a good example of these rationalizing trends at work. For some people, the training involved in gaining an award may be valued for the performance or coaching skills that are learned. For others, the assessments and awards may be more highly valued for the status or employment opportunities that they offer. In my view, this practice can spiral into a 'paper chase' instead of an effective coach-training strategy, where people engage in training events as preparation for assessments, rather than for learning skills.

Weber saw the trend towards rationalization in modernity as increasingly widespread and inevitable. However, another German theorist, Jurgen Habermas (1962) viewed the rationalized world as being in dialogue with the cultural world, so that influence could take place in both directions. Habermas called the rationalized world of commerce and institutions the *system world* and the more creative and organic cultural world the *life world*. Nevertheless, he also thought that the system world was colonizing parts of the life world, such as recreation and education, and that this was a bad trend that reduced quality of life and involvement of the citizen in society.

In earlier articles I have discussed how what Habermas calls the system world is impacting on outdoor adventure recreation and education (Loynes, 1996; 2002). I adopted the term the *algorithmic paradigm* to characterize the impact of the system world on outdoor adventure (Loynes, 2002). The term was coined by Martin Ringer (1999) who saw the same process of rationalization taking place in approaches to group work. To represent the counterpoint of the life world approach, I used a term from the ideas of Robin Hodgkin (1976): *the generative paradigm*. Hodgkin, a professor of education, a mountain guide, and a supporter of outdoor education during his time as a head teacher, developed ideas to counter the trends towards rationalization that were already concerning him in the mid-twentieth century. He saw the role of the teacher as one of offering intriguing ideas and experiences to students and then accompanying them in conversation as they made meaning of it and developed it into their identities, their understanding of the world, their values, and their sense of direction.

Others, such as Jay Roberts (2011), have noticed the same rationalizing trends in our field. These influences can be encapsulated by thinking about the name we choose to describe the world of outdoor adventure. It is easy to slip into calling it an 'industry', which serves to normalize uncritically what is only a recent colonization of a field that I suggest also makes proud claims to be of the life

world, and an antidote to the trends in modernity.

The next section explores some of the concepts that have been developed to aid our understanding of the commercial, rationalized system world. This will help us recognize these processes at work in outdoor adventure education and recreation. I will apply them to some examples in order to provoke further thought and raise questions for you to consider in relation to your own experiences.

Some system world terminology

In understanding the influence of the market on outdoor adventure it will be helpful to consider some key terms. I will begin by exploring the concept of *commodification*. This is the process in modern economies by which the value of goods or services are not only understood in terms of the intrinsic benefits they provide, but also, or often exclusively, for the extrinsic value (such as money) that can be made from the provision. This is a trend that Weber (1947) predicted, as goods in the market place are increasingly valued for their instrumental worth and not as goods in the wider sense.

I will then look at two related terms. First I will look at *McDonaldization*, which is a concept that seeks to explain and critique how some commercial activities can be copied from their originating culture and spread around the world, thus colonizing other cultures as they impose one approach on everyone. Next, I discuss globalization and why this can be a problem. I will use these terms to discuss some features of outdoor adventure in the modern world and explore why some critics think these trends are a problem.

Commodification

Commodification is easily identifiable in the commercial outdoor adventure world. Bungy jumps and white water rafting are readily understood as money traps for young people on their gap years and other tourists on holiday. These activities are stripped down to the bare bone of the thrill ride, which is not far

removed from a theme park experience. As highlighted in Chapter 2, in bungee jumping, the risks typically managed by the exercise of hard won skills, knowledge, and judgment developed over time -- all central to traditional concepts of outdoor adventure experiences -- are removed by direct supervision and failsafe equipment. The same occurs in many commercial raft trips in which a guide manages the oars and the other occupants are merely passengers. While ski resorts leave participants to develop their own skiing abilities on the piste, the designers of the infrastructure of the resort ensure that the place is commodified and very efficient at making money from the skiers, as the chair lifts, food, entertainment, and accommodation are all controlled. It is worth the effort of many businesses concerned to create artificial snow when the weather doesn't play along with the planned ski season window; this in itself is counter to the uncertainty factor that is considered to be a key element of outdoor adventure.

Perhaps commodification is less easily seen in outdoor adventure education than in the recreation examples used above, but Weber (1947) suggests that the instrumentalization of experiences will impact beyond the market place in all walks of life. Habermas recognizes the encroachment of the system world into education and recreation, as they are both realms that he considers to be more properly part of the life world and in which actions are determined by values oriented thinking rather than instrumentalization (Dodd, 1999).

I think the instrumentalization of outdoor adventure first took place in outdoor centres offering courses in 'adventure training' to corporate clients (Everard, 1993). The first corporate clients were relatively accepting, and believed that well-rounded employees developing in all aspects of their lives would also contribute more to the company. However, at times of financial constraint, managers began to ask for justification for the money spent, in terms of the objective impacts on performance or company profits. Evaluations were administered by training providers and employers began to look for explicit outcomes at the end of the course and impacts back in the work place. This

approach has two limiting aspects to it. First, it narrows the value of the outdoor adventure experience down to those desired by the employer. Second, it reduces the aspirations of the company and the provider to outcomes and impacts that they can quantify, or at least report on, and make claims for. Other, less tangible, 'softer' benefits are often disregarded or reported as 'anecdotal' (Rickinson, 2004).

A number of trends in education have led to the same instrumentalist approach being adopted by schools and outdoor adventure providers (Moore, 1987). Schools, also under financial pressure, want to ensure they are getting value for money. Value, in this case, is determined by what will support schools in what is now a competitive market place, in which parents choose schools for their children based on nationally published tables ranking schools by their exam results and government inspectors' reports. Schools, and their supporting organisations, now ask for specific outcomes from outdoor adventure programmes. These outcomes are usually linked directly to attainment or indirectly to indicators of the likelihood of better attainment, such as engagement with learning in school, improvements in behavior and attendance, or the development of study skills such as problem-solving or collaborative-working. This is the data that will justify the investment and impact on league tables and student uptake.

Of course, outdoor adventure can provide some or all of these outcomes and these are good things. The point that critics of these trends make is that, as for corporate training, the focus of what is worth doing is narrowed down to the desired and measurable outcomes. Naturally, teachers can still value the other 'intangible' benefits of personal, social and environmental education. In my view, some even resist the trend by refusing to engage with the encroachment of the system world when they are away on residential, and focus on appreciating the life world -- the 'breath of fresh air' -- as much as the children. The issue here is that the outdoor experience has become a means to an end, and this end has become narrowed to

outcomes linked with academic progress and employability, rather than with the wider educational benefits for which outdoor adventure education has been historically valued.

Commodification is the first step towards two other issues first described at work in the world of commerce: *McDonaldization* and *globalization*. Both of these ideas can help us more deeply understand trends in the world of outdoor adventure.

McDonaldization and globalization

Ritzer (1993) identified how a successful commercial model could be 'scaled up' by branding a product that was of a predictable quality wherever you bought it. He used McDonald's restaurants to show how the burger became an international dish that not only looks and tastes the same throughout the world, but which is provided from look alike shops where even the transaction with the customer is scripted to ensure efficiency and predictability. This approach gave the company control over the market, and allowed McDonald's to become a global corporation. This is a good example of the process of globalization, the international trends that increasingly bring about the integration of markets, ideas and worldviews. You will be able to think of many examples of globalization of this kind.

It is helpful to consider that globalization, which in this context is being critiqued, need not always be understood as a bad thing; globalization is not being demonized as such. Many cultural aspects, such as sport and the arts, can be thought of as having positive impacts on our understanding of ourselves as a diverse species with one world to share.

Ritzer (1993) thought that the problem with McDonaldization was that it uses the rational approach of the market to create an efficient brand that can be imposed throughout the world. For example McDonald's, he claims, devalues local cultural fast food practices and traditions that hold a richer meaning as a part of the

indigenous and commercial life of each place. The marketing power of international companies is able to encourage consumers to emphasize certain values, such as our taste for cheap, fatty and salty foods, over our values for healthier foods that are produced in season by local workers being paid fair wages, and which have higher ethical standards of environmental impact and animal welfare. Much is lost for the commercial gain of a corporation not even located in the country affected. That is not to say that local always means better or more ethical. It is to suggest that local production, in context with the culture and environment of the place, contributes more to the expression of culture in that place and can be more readily influenced to produce to higher standards. It is the possibility of a process by which local people can be engaged in these important aspects of food production, rather than be excluded from them, that is at stake.

Ritzer (1993) extended his critique of the fast food industry by suggesting that society is taking on the same characteristics. For example, McDonaldisation can be applied to outdoor adventure experiences. They, like the food industry, can be a rich combination of elements embedded in a local culture, history and environment. They can be embedded in a culture's history, for example our mountaineering and polar exploration exploits celebrated throughout British culture and not just by mountaineers. And they can have potentially rich forms of current expression. Consider the way in which health and wellbeing are currently being promoted valuing fitness and contact with nature in the British countryside. This is leading to changes in policy and funding that encourage participation in outdoor adventure activities. As a consequence, more doctors are now prescribing a good walk as part of a recognized treatment for a range of medical conditions and therapists are increasingly going for a walk with clients rather than having them lie on a couch (Natural England, 2009). Outdoor adventure is also a social event, both in relation to the people you are active with and the sub-culture that arises around the activity. These activities also take people out into certain landscapes and environments that can form the central motivation for taking part. In this case, the activity as a means to an end (as opposed to the experience of

which the activity is one part) can be thought of positively, as it provides a way for people to visit remote or beautiful places and see unusual wildlife and scenery.

The McDonaldization of outdoor adventure

A good example of McDonaldization from the field of outdoor adventure, is the challenge course (also known as high ropes course – see also Chapter 9). In the article *Adventure in a Bun* (Loynes, 1996), I highlighted the McDonaldization of adventure by comparing it to the mass production of hamburgers. Roberts (2011) also refers to challenge courses and activities in his recent critique of market driven forms of outdoor adventure in education. Popularized in the USA through widespread practice in both youth and corporate training markets, the challenge course and the ‘processing’ techniques used to reflect on the experience, were celebrated in a number of textbooks that were then used as templates for the construction and facilitation of such courses around the world. When I witnessed the construction of possibly the first one to be built in India, the director of the training organization enthused to me about the new resource because it meant that he could ‘provide the same training to the executive of a multinational client here in India that they would receive in the USA or Europe’. The efficiency and consistency from the McDonaldization of outdoor adventure training was being explicitly encouraged by the clients.

As Roberts (2011) points out, it is not that challenge courses are offering necessarily bad experiences. They have a contribution to make. However, they lend themselves to a universal approach and to McDonaldization in a field that has previously valued diversity brought about by the environmental and cultural contexts in which it is practiced.

It is not easy to McDonaldize a relationship with the environment or a group, but it is possible to disembed the activity and locate it elsewhere. The recent history of climbing moving from crags to indoor climbing walls is an example of the experience called climbing being radically altered by disembedding the activity

from the context in which it was originally located. This process of transferring an activity from one context to another creates the potential for rich new experiences to emerge. It also creates the possibility of ‘McDonaldization rationalizing’ the experience down to a small number of key elements that can be branded and marketed globally.

When an activity is McDonaldized, it is no longer part of a cultural story, nor does it explore a particular landscape. It becomes a replicable structure, often with the same elements everywhere. While it remains a social activity, one of the ‘strengths’ of this approach, especially in education, is that individual elements of the challenge course can be constructed to determine the character and process of social engagement. This engagement can promote, for example, specific ways of team building that are underpinned by the latest popular abstract psychological theory¹, rather than a group working organically in the context of their culture, where participants determine roles and tasks, work out what the experience means to them, and how best to get things done.

Even in basic team-building programmes, teachers are already reporting students who, having done barrels and planks yet again (‘we did this in year four Miss!’), roll out the expected remarks about trust, teamwork, and communication; they know what to say rather than say what they know. This hardly warrants the term ‘adventure’, as the anticipated depth of experience in the activity has evaporated. The activity has become a routine that is disconnected from all the rich experiences of self, others and the environment that outdoor adventure education claims to value.

McDonaldization is one expression of the wider phenomenon of globalization that features the spread of ideas, culture and institutions, as well as businesses, around the world. Within globalization is the potential to celebrate the diversity of life

¹ The globalization and McDonaldization of theories as an aspect of outdoor adventure education and training is another dimension to this issue.

worlds from many different cultures. There is also the possibility of imposing the system world of one dominant power source across the globe. This struggle for the colonization of the world is taking place within all walks of life, and outdoor adventure is not immune.

Andy Brookes (2002b), an Australian academic of outdoor adventure, illustrates the issues associated with globalization in his writing about the colonization of Australia by UK and USA outdoor practices. He says that, not only did the early colonists attempt to turn the strange Australian landscape into one that looked familiar, but that when outdoor adventure entered the culture in both education and recreation, participants and leaders alike traveled hundreds of miles in order to participate in outdoor activities such as climbing and kayaking that were popular in the UK and the USA. He argues that this occurred despite an lively emerging Australian tradition of outdoor living and without thought for what outdoor activities might have been undertaken locally that were environmentally and culturally appropriate. (Brookes, 2002a, 2002b; Payne, 2002). The formalization of climbing and kayaking, he argues, has created the potential for them to become McDonaldized. This may be unintentional but it is exactly what Weber (1947) was concerned about when he described the pervasive influence of the market on wider culture. Surfing, skiing, diving and other outdoor adventure activities have all been critiqued for this globalized imposition of an activity on a place and a culture².

As different kinds of space/time borders are crossed, it is possible to critique climbing walls and snow domes that provide indoor 'outdoor' activities as 'colonizers' of urban settings. Likewise, high ropes courses built on poles instead of in trees have enabled these structures to offer their experiences in un-wooded places. These trends can also be understood as strategies that offer businesses certain ways of competing in market places otherwise closed to them. At the same

² See Pedersen (2003) for a Norwegian case study and Payne (2002) for an Australian kayaking equivalent

time, the migration from settings that rely on natural features with local and seasonal variability to constructed settings reflects the rationalization of the activity on a global scale. This trend has led to the emergence of international businesses building and managing large scale, McDonaldized 'outdoor' facilities.

It is not only businesses that can be accused of McDonaldization. Government policies can also act in similar ways. For example, UK Sport frequently attaches targets for participation by minority ethnic groups to grants given to sporting bodies (Cronin and Mayall, 1998) National Parks also set similar targets linked to funding. It can be argued that this is a good thing, as it encourages more opportunities for marginalized groups to access these wild places. This kind of policy trend can also be viewed as one dominant culture imposing its cultural sporting preferences over another (Pedersen, 2003) and thereby creating new market opportunities in the process. Only careful consultation with the groups concerned can reasonably distinguish which is which.

Is it always a bad thing?

The criticisms of the trends in commodification, McDonaldization and globalization can be thought of as implying a wider criticism of commercialization. While this may also be open to criticism, it has been shown to offer benefits in the power relations within a sport. Edwards and Corte (2010) write about the commercialization of BMX biking in one American resort. They highlight that it matters who has control of the commercial activity and how this power is exercised. They noticed in their study that the commercial aspects of the sport were largely controlled by members of the BMX community and that they would often use their power to develop better locations and equipment, provide information, encourage access to and the promotion of the sport and other 'goods' for the BMX culture. In this situation, the sport has been partly commercialized, but not commodified. Edwards and Corte point out that, because the market is a small and specialist one, it is not of interest to bigger businesses and so escapes the risk of commodification. They noted that corporate interests restrain their

impact on the sport to the peripheries, and market elsewhere the food, drinks, accommodation, and 'off-piste' clothing already scaled up and 'McDonaldized'. While there are still potential issues with small-scale commercial activity, for example the problems connected with the cost of participation brought about by the cost of what is regarded as appropriate equipment, these are not straightforward and have to be balanced against the potential benefits that come with a degree of commercialization.

Restoring the conversation between the system and the life world out of doors

Outdoor adventure has a rich and varied philosophical base. A main strand of this argues that the outdoors is a space from which it is possible to escape from the constraints of the everyday world and feel a sense of freedom, to restore the wildness into a person's spirit. This foundation is strongly allied to Habermas's idea of the life world (Dodd, 1999). Seen this way, the outdoors can be thought of as a space in which the ideas and values of the life world can be heard and developed. Restored and rehearsed, the values can accompany the participant back into the everyday world and contest the encroachment of constraining factors, such as those of globalization and Habermas's system world. This is a struggle. Some people can treat outdoor adventure as escape -- a therapeutic restoration, a place where it is possible to feel a sense of well being, if only temporarily. Others find it hard to return to the system world and become almost full time adventurers, who are unable to accept the limits of an increasingly constrained modern way of life. If Habermas is right in saying that it is possible for the system world and the life world to be in dialogue, and for the life world to influence the direction of the system world, then spaces such as those created by outdoor adventure become important cultural phenomena. From this perspective, it matters a lot if the system world of McDonaldization and the worst aspects of commercialization and globalization colonize the world of outdoor adventure.

With this in mind, the language used in outdoor adventure circles is important. It

can support the dialogue between outdoor adventure as the life world and outdoor adventure as the system world, or it can privilege, sometimes unintentionally, the colonization of this aspect of our culture by the system world. Roberts (2011) proposes that we reinstate the term 'outdoor field' instead of 'outdoor industry', as it more accurately reflects the wider forms of practice that have become marginalized by the word 'industry' as an umbrella term. 'Field', Roberts thinks, implies a mix of practices, in no particular hierarchy, which share some common themes while valuing a diversity of forms. He argues that this would be a much more equitable and creative place. I have argued that we should be careful when we use metaphors from the industrial world (e.g. framing, processing, funneling, front-loading) to describe the processes of outdoor adventure education (Loynes, 2002). These terms are taken from the language of the production line and the computer.

Concluding thoughts

I have focused on the ways in which outdoor adventure crosses national boundaries. Globalization and McDonaldization are not limited to geography. What do you think about the construction of artificial facilities replicating rural outdoor adventure in urban areas – climbing walls, white water rapids and ski slopes for example? Would it be more appropriate to develop forms of outdoor adventure that emerge from this environment? BMX bikes and skateboards might be examples. Or do you think that equity for ethnic groups should be judged on their participation in the outdoor adventure activities that are popular with the dominant ethnic group – higher rates of participation by Asian ethnic groups for example? Perhaps there are cultural factors that could lead to different forms of practice or even just the same activities but understood in a different way. If you consider these as examples of colonization, how would this affect your understanding and your actions?

Anthropologists point out that most of our cultural practices originate from other cultures. The key point is not that we pick up new ideas from other people and

places. It is that the power relations involved need to be considered as these new forms of practice are taken from one culture and then impact on the new culture and environment into which they are introduced.

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Suggested reading

If you want to deepen your thinking on this issue it is worth reading the two papers I wrote for more background to the ideas in this chapter. Brookes' paper is one of several he has written on the colonization of Australian outdoor practices by northern hemisphere outdoor life. Of course reading Ritzer's book will give you a much better idea of the central critique offered here, and Roberts' book, especially the chapter on the market, will give you more insight to this phenomena at work in outdoor adventure. For a theoretical take on how to counter these trends within education you could do no better than to read *Born Curious* by Robin Hodgkin.