

## Chapter 13

# The Role of the Built Environment in the Creation, Cultivation and Acquisition of a Knowledge–Base

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the role of the built environment in the creation, cultivation and acquisition of a knowledge base by people populating the urban landscape. It examines McDonald's restaurants as a way to comprehend the relevance of the physical design in the diffusion of codified and tacit knowledge at an everyday level. Through an examination of space at a localised level, this chapter describes the synergies of space and the significance of this relationship in navigating the global landscape.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores a slice of an integrated multi-level approach of knowledge-based development through an examination of the built environment. Very little research has been directed at understanding the role of the built environment in sustaining everyday action at an everyday level (Franck, 1984; Stimson, 1986; Jobes, 1998; Jerome, 2007). Here, a particular setting is explored in order to comprehend the relevance of the physical domain in operating to create, transfer and use knowledge that appeals to a person in order to secure everyday action. In this instance the setting of McDonald's

restaurants is used as a way to demonstrate the importance of micro-spaces in the maintenance of a global economy and how they diffuse codified and tacit knowledge at an everyday level. It does this by describing two different kinds of McDonald's settings. The descriptions illustrate the importance of the physical domain in constructing a common-sense world for participants to manage the task of consuming.

This exploration provides an opportunity to understand the relevance of the built environment in the creation of a knowledge-base at a micro scale. McDonald's restaurants are used as a case to describe this set of relations because these spaces have, and continue to dot the urban landscape across the globe. They are environments that are

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easily recognisable and accessed by a significant percentage of the world's population twenty-four hours a day. It is argued here that an examination of a slice of urban life at a micro scale provides a very interesting reflection of the role of the built environment in the generation and acquisition of a knowledge-base needed to navigate the world environment.

### **ENGAGING WITH MCDONALD'S RESTAURANTS: THE OLD FACE OF MCDONALD'S**

It is at the site of McDonald's restaurants that the physical domain operates for a particular kind of consumer to engage in a particular act of dining with a particular set of products across the globe. Whilst McDonald's recognises that 'diversity' is a key method in its success, evidence suggests that comprehending the extent of diversification manifest in the built environment is crucial for maintaining economic security. This is why the physical environments of McDonald's restaurants have traditionally deviated very little across the globe (Bryman, 2003). They have manufactured and maintained a fast food restaurant 'script' to ensure a standard sequence of events occurs in each location across the globe (Abelson, 1981). The following description reflects the model of traditional McDonald's restaurants and the way the physical design emphasises activities and certain kinds of interaction suitable to the McDonald's experience. It illustrates a design formula intended to homogenise experience and meet the expectations of a clientele seeking the consumption of familiar fast food.

This description is a result of careful observation of a traditional McDonald's restaurant located in Kenmore, a suburb in Brisbane, Australia. The description highlights the way that the interior setting has been carefully planned to standardise experience and engage with the strategy of Westernisation. There are no surprises in this

description and there are no surprises in the environment. The absence of surprise is important in enabling participants to engage with the fast food restaurant script with relative ease. This is a traditional McDonald's restaurant, typical of McDonald's restaurants that have populated the urban landscape of Australia.

Prior to entering McDonald's restaurant you are greeted with a square building supporting a tiered roof that supports signage of 'McDonald's'. The building is surrounded by a carpark and access for 'drive-through customers'. A main road sits immediately to the south of the restaurant and a small grassed area separates a footpath from this roadway. A tall yellow 'big M' is located on the grassed area – clearly visible to passing traffic and residents situated opposite the McDonald's restaurant. After moving through the carpark and upon entering McDonald's you are greeted by a tiled floor of muted browns and earth tones. This colouring is repeated on the vinyl panels that cover the wall to dado rail height. Straight ahead of the entrance is a wide corridor that leads directly to the service area. The granite service counter is easily recognizable with counter registers and overhead illuminated signage. This signage displays graphics of consumable items and pricing and, is positioned to the rear of this area. Behind the service area is the food preparation section, barely visible beyond the stainless steel dispensing items.

Situated perpendicular to the service area is another section nominated for the provision of coffee, teas and condiments. On this granite bench is a display cabinet with cakes, muffins and sweet biscuits. Behind the bench area overhead illuminated signage shows imagery of coffee mugs, cakes and milkshakes. In this area the lighting is notably softer - employing downlights as opposed to the fluorescent lighting used elsewhere. Adjacent to this area, in the centre of the restaurant, are timber and vinyl armchairs used for seating around fixed lowest granite tables. A dividing lowset wall of dark blue vinyl tiles and glass mosaic panels of

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