



# REAL GEOGRAPHY

EXPLORING THE GEOGRAPHY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

McGraw-Hill Higher Education

## “Geography of Fast Food Restaurants” by Jon C. Malinowski, Ph.D.

Chapter 9 highlights several models of industrial location, but it often can be difficult to apply the models to examples from the real world. This case study discusses how some of the ideas in the chapter might apply to the location of fast food restaurants.

First of all, restaurants are market oriented firms. In most cases, restaurants need to be near customers. This is especially true in the case of fast food, because the profit per customer is relatively low compared to an expensive restaurant. Fast food is all about getting the most people through in the least amount of time.

Because of this, fast food companies try to locate at high-traffic sites, preferably near family oriented activities such as shopping malls or movie



theaters. The fact that most fast food restaurants are near major intersections is no coincidence. It doesn't make sense for a fast food joint to locate far from people, even if they can lower costs (such as rent) by doing so.

Geographic Information Systems are playing an important role in the site selection process because business patterns, property or rental costs, taxes, traffic flows, and demographic statistics can be combined.

But why are fast food restau-

rants often clustered in one place. In other words, why is there a McDonald's on one corner and a Burger King next door?

For some help, we can turn the locational interdependence theories outlined in the book. According to this model, a competitor can locate near a rival business to try to take as much market area as possible. If consumers are used to coming to a particular intersection for fast food, and a new restaurant is opened there, as long as the

traffic volume is high enough the new restaurant may do well by stealing customers from a rival.

Some of this is psychological, because people will often head to one location but then decide to try something different when they see the sign. By locating a fast food taco restaurant next to a burger joint, the taco establishment might entice people away from the burgers by being different while still offering fast food.

### Further Research

1. On a map of your community, locate all of the fast food restaurants. Why are they located there? Is there a better place? How would you conduct a research project to determine if another site was better?
2. Check out *Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age* by John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle to learn more about the history of the fast food restaurant in America.

### Links:

- National Restaurant Association <http://www.restaurant.org/>
- SiteSelection <http://www.siteselection.com/>