Trees in Retail Districts: Building the Consumer Habitat

Kathleen Wolf, Ph.D.
Research Social Scientist

University of Washington (Seattle)
School of Environmental and Forest Sciences
USDA Forest Service, Pacific NW Research Station

Urban Forestry & Green Infrastructure
MS Annual Urban Forestry Conference
August 20 & 21, 2015
Trees in Retail Districts

studies about consumer ‘habitat’
local economics

overview

trees in retail settings
studies overview
design ideas
conclusions

Trees & Shopper Environments Research

• Research Questions •
  trees and visual quality?
  trees and consumer behavior?
  trees and product pricing?

• Methods:
  mail out/in surveys
  national or local sample
  residents/nearby city residents

partners: U of Washington, NGOs, business organizations
funded by USDA Forest Service
Image Categories (sorted by ratings)

Scale: 1=not at all, 5=like very much, 26 images

Pocket Parks
mean 3.72
(highest)

Full Canopy
mean 3.63
Enclosed Sidewalk 3.32

Intermittent Trees 2.78
No Trees
mean 1.65
(lowest)
(high - 3.72)
1. Place Perceptions
   • Place Character
   • Interaction with Merchants
   • Quality of Products

2. Patronage Behavior
   • travel time, travel distance
   • duration & frequency of visits
   • willingness to pay for parking

3. Product Pricing
   • higher willingness to pay for all types of goods
   • higher in districts with trees – 9-12%
strip malls

vegetation varied
using image editing

shopper survey
freeway roadside
importance of ‘gateways’
1. Place Perceptions
   - Place Character
   - Interaction with Merchants
   - Quality of Products

2. Patronage Behavior
   - travel time, travel distance
   - duration & frequency of visits
   - willingness to pay for parking

3. Product Pricing
   - higher willingness to pay for all types of goods
   - higher in districts with trees – 9-12%
social science of consumer behavior

‘atmospherics’
retail & place marketing

“Companies stage an experience when they engage customers in a memorable way.”
ALPHA
Awaji Landscape Planning & Horticulture Academy
typical retail street in urban Japan
Namba Parks, Osaka

view from nearby hotel
interior retail space

ground level
small plazas
retail entry
up-close nature experiences

place of respite
Namba Parks
retail success & nature experience benefits
lessons learned?

social spaces
small rooms
variety within unity
Bainbridge Island, WA
“main street”
outdoor rooms
social spaces
sense of welcoming
Austin, TX
South Congress Avenue redevelopment district
public xeriscape
shared design & management
identity

affordable materials

message of renewal
Trees as Place-Makers
summary

urban forests = human habitat

studies of trees in business districts
perception, preference & behavior
design & place messaging/identity
customer relationships
Nature and Consumer Environments

Shoppers are increasingly interested in the experience of shopping, as well as the goods and services they expect to purchase. A series of studies has investigated associations between the urban forest and people's response to shopping settings.

These studies show that providing trees in the streetscape is an important investment for a business community. The presence of a quality urban forest positively influences shoppers' perceptions, and probably, their behavior.

Studies

Trees and Business - Growing Together
A National Research Program

Trees provide environmental benefits in cities, but also contribute to program development. Scientific studies have found that shoppers respond positively to the presence of trees. These findings have been consistent across large, urban areas. The most positive consumer response is associated with urban forests where overhanging tree canopy helps create a sense of beauty and privacy. The results across several research studies. Details of research found in sections below.

Human Dimensions of
Urban Forestry and
Urban Greening

featuring research on peoples' perceptions and behaviors regarding nature in cities

www.naturewithin.info