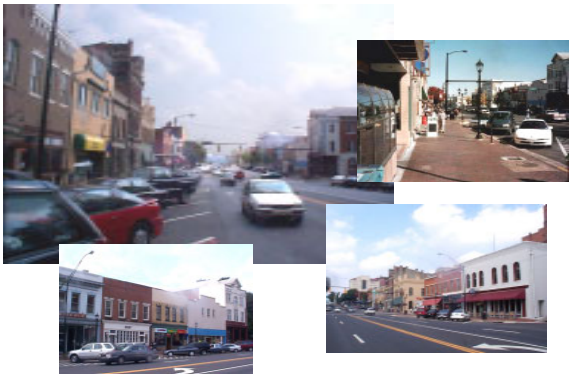
Research on Business Visitors' Behavior: Trees and Commerce in Athens, Georgia



District Condition 1 - No Trees

District Condition 2 - Small Trees

What are the benefits of trees in cities? Scientific research has provided many answers to this question! First, trees provide environmental benefits such as improved air and water quality. They also improve the quality of life and well-being of people in cities. And all of these benefits translate into dollars saved or earned in America's cities!

The urban forest is also an outdoor feature that creates a sense of place in business districts and retail communities. Microeconomics is the study of how individuals and households make decisions about purchases of goods and services. Traditional economic models have overlooked the potential value of environment on consumer behavior. Are green places also good shopping places?

Research Project

A survey study was done in Athens, Georgia to learn more about how nature in streetscapes affects business district visitors and shoppers. The survey used a research technique called contingent behavior. People who were familiar with the Athens central business district were asked to answer questions about their patronage behavior in three "what if" street conditions. 365 respondents provided interesting feedback about trees and business places.

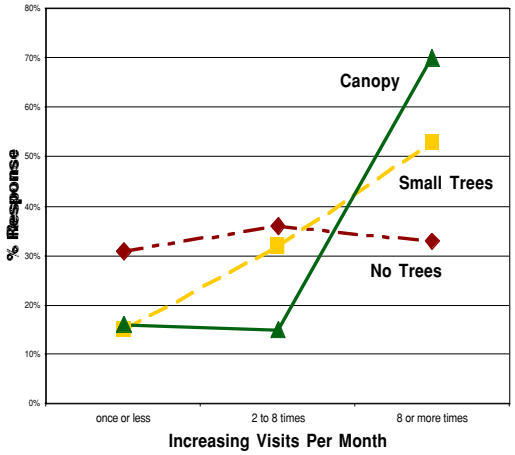
Three Shopping Districts
Visitor Behavior Affects?

District Condition 3 - Canopy

An eight page survey was used to learn about patronage behavior in the Athens, GA central business district, in response to varied street landscape conditions. Respondents were asked about their current visit frequency, length of visits, and spending for specific activities (baseline data). They were then asked to project their future behavior if the streets of Athens were to have a different appearance (one of three contingent conditions). Highlights of the scientific results are below.

Increased Number of Visits

More (and larger) trees were linked with reports of more frequent visits. Small Trees showed the most direct relationship with visit rates, and the Canopy condition is associated with the most visits.



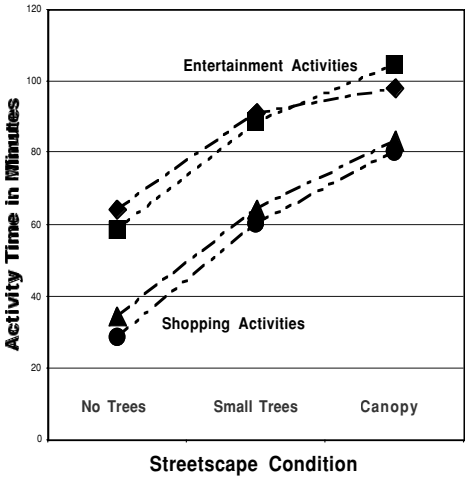
Visitors Prefer Trees

Responses to the three district conditions were analyzed by focusing on demographics of the visitors. These characteristics were isolated: student status, physical location of job, place of residence, low or high income brackets, and shopper style (Enthusiast, Traditionalist, Grazer, Minimalist). Then shoppers having these different traits were compared for visit frequency, entertainment activity time, and shopping activity time. These behaviors were analyzed by the No Tree and Canopy streetscape conditions. The results? Patronage activities for all respondents is generally greater when trees are present. With few exceptions, Athens visitors claimed they would visit more often and spend more time if there are trees in the central business district.

Increased Time for Shopping Activities

Measures were collected for two general visitor activities - entertainment and retail shopping. Again, full Canopy was found to be linked with reports of longer times for consumer activities. Specifically, having tree canopy is associated with longer shopping times for both browsers and those people who shop for specific goods.

Times for the Canopy condition were reported to be up to 28% greater than the amount of time visitors indicated for the No Tree Condition. Does this translate to greater spending? If we can assume that more time means more spending, a conservative estimate is that shoppers may spend up to 10% more during a visit.



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