



## The Environmental Psychology of Shopping

### Assessing the Value of Trees

Kathleen L. Wolf

Consumers claim that they are willing to pay 9% more in small cities and 12% more in large cities for equivalent goods and services in business districts having an urban forest.



### Better Design with Trees

#### Signs and Forest Co-design

An oft-repeated concern in merchant interviews was the tension between placement of trees and the visibility of signs, awnings and storefronts. Many of these visual conflicts can be avoided by the co-design of signage and vegetation. Compare sign height and mature tree height. Select and plant taller trees that will grow above signage. Routine pruning can be used to thin branches and lift canopy, enabling better views and more light to filter to the ground. Color and materials choices for signs should contrast with the foliage, drawing the eye to visual accents.



Trees are a living resource that change in character and form over many decades. This dynamic design element not only offers opportunities, but also can create tensions in the built environment.



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City trees provide environmental benefits, the usual justification for urban forestry investment, and are an important concern as the public gains greater interest in urban sustainability. These studies demonstrate that trees serve other functions, particularly for retail and commercial interests. Trees and landscapes can be significant elements in place marketing. Economists have noted that shopping was once a utilitarian activity to fulfill needs and wants, but today's shoppers are pursuing places that offer social, memorable experiences. Trees help create place and connect to deeply felt preferences and appreciations that people have for nature. The urban forest is an important part of the vibrant, satisfying places that shoppers enjoy.



**Dr. Kathleen L. Wolf** is a research social scientist at the University of Washington, Seattle. Her work focuses on the human dimensions of urban forests and ecosystems, using theory and methods of environmental psychology. Additional information about urban greening research is at: [www.cfr.washington.edu/research.envmind/](http://www.cfr.washington.edu/research.envmind/)