

Architectural Features of Streetscapes and Aging in Cameron County, Texas: Preliminary Results

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Background

An estimated 23% of global deaths are due to the environments in which people live. We aim to characterize prevalent architectural features of Cameron County, Texas streetscapes and analyze their role in health promotion and healthy aging.

Methods

We studied several design attributes of the streetscapes in Cameron County, Texas. Elements analyzed included: site connectivity with context, pedestrian quality, scale of buildings, architectural elements, landscaping, and signage.

Results

Some of the most frequent general features:

- There is little interrelationship between open spaces and buildings. Parking lots are usually in front of buildings.
- Urban streetscapes are mostly designed for motorists and not for pedestrians.
- Most buildings are at human scale, with few buildings over 5 floors.
- The most common residential architectural style is Ranch-Style house characterized by single-story, open space concept, almost non-existent ornaments, and low-pitch rooflines.
- In retail store buildings, we have the same style but with variation in the façade. The distribution of the spaces and the essence of the buildings, it's the same. We can find

the same typology of store open space without ornamentation. The parking and the functionalism are the protagonist in the design.

- The tall palms characteristic of the region add scale to street edges; however, their canopies are high and small, and few provide shade.
- Blank walls are common, with few exhibiting architectural features that enhance streetscapes.
- Most signage is commercial and does not enhance building character or the pedestrian experience.

Discussion

Streetscape design is essential to creating safe, appealing environments that engender pedestrian activity. We identified the most frequent typologies of architectural design in Cameron County. This information will be particularly relevant to build environment policy, as well as to residents and researchers interested in understanding influences on urban health.

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