

*Latino New Urbanism: Lessons Learned
from the Southwest*

The Case of Colonias in Texas

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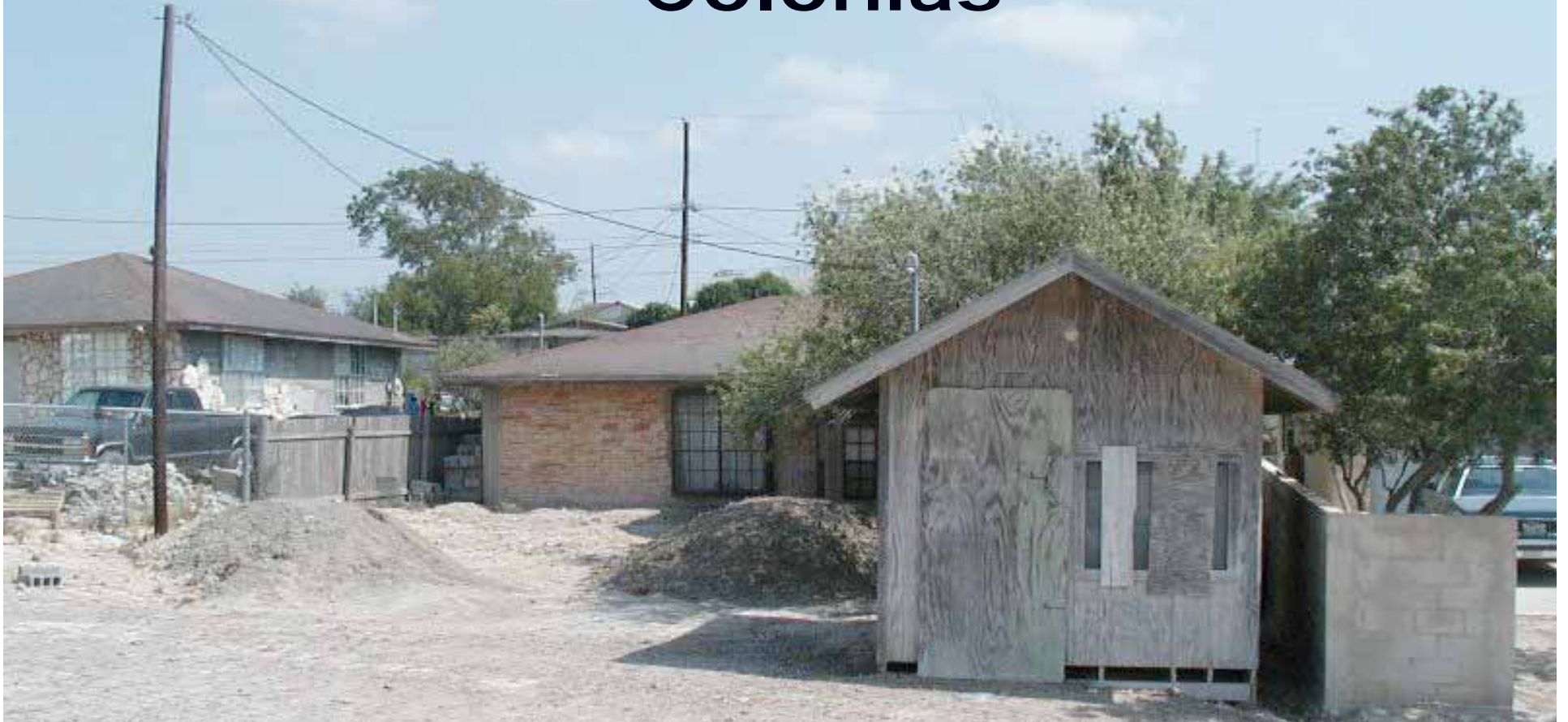
CNU Austin, April 4, 2008

The Case of Colonias in Texas



Culture & Sense of Place
Physical Infrastructure vs. Social Infrastructure
Poverty

Colonias



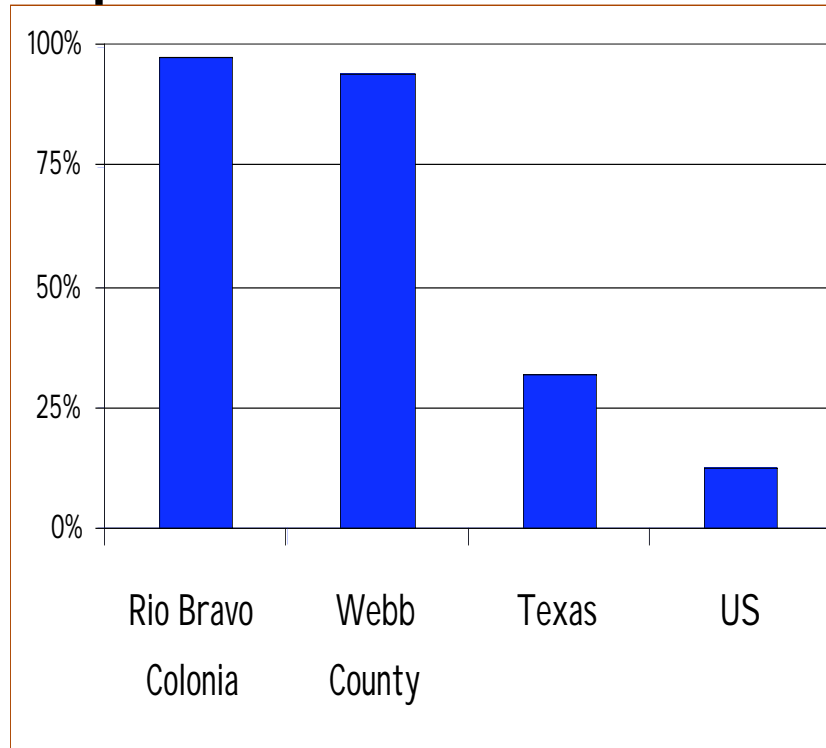
Spanish term for neighborhood or community.

" A residential area along the Texas-Mexico border that may lack basic water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing" *Texas Office of Attorney General*



Demographic characteristics

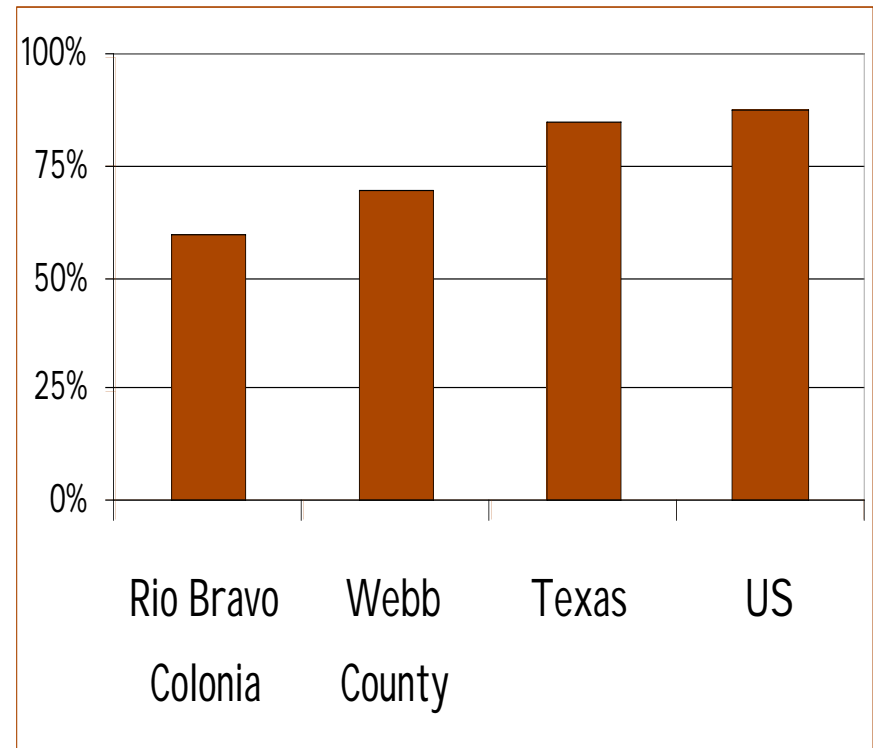
Latino Population



These are Latino Communities and share the good and the bad of being clusters of "ethnic minorities"

Born in the US

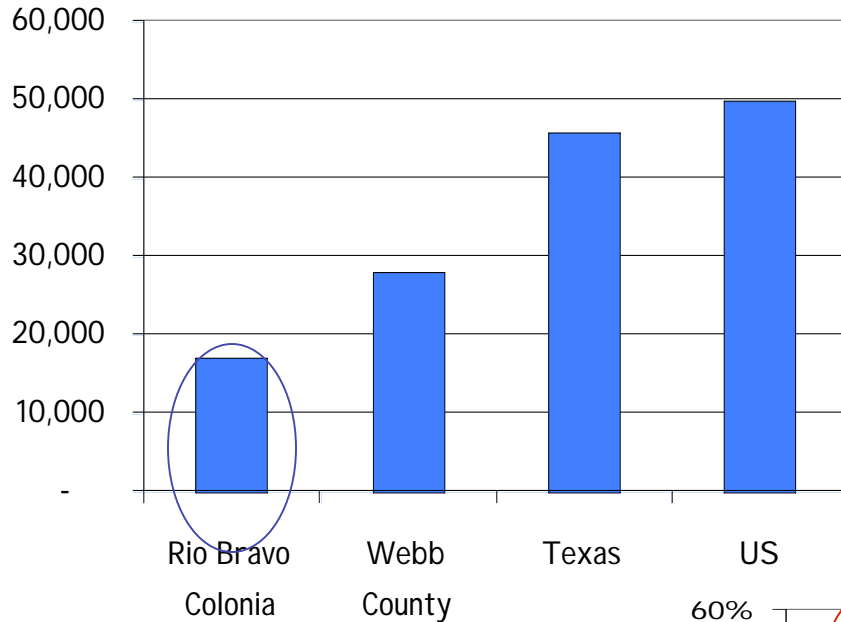
Source: Census 2000



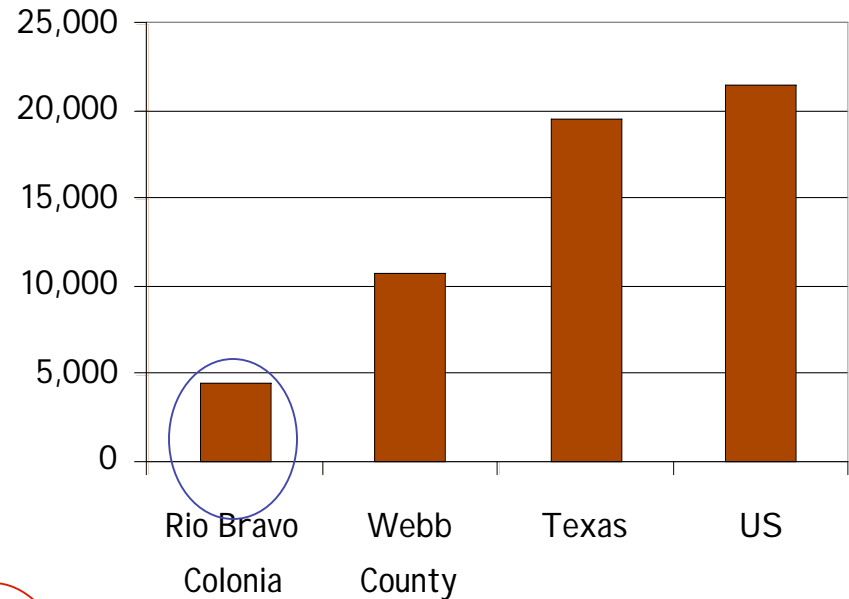
About 60% of these Latino communities are born in the US, and those who don't are in big percentages US Citizens

Economic Characteristics

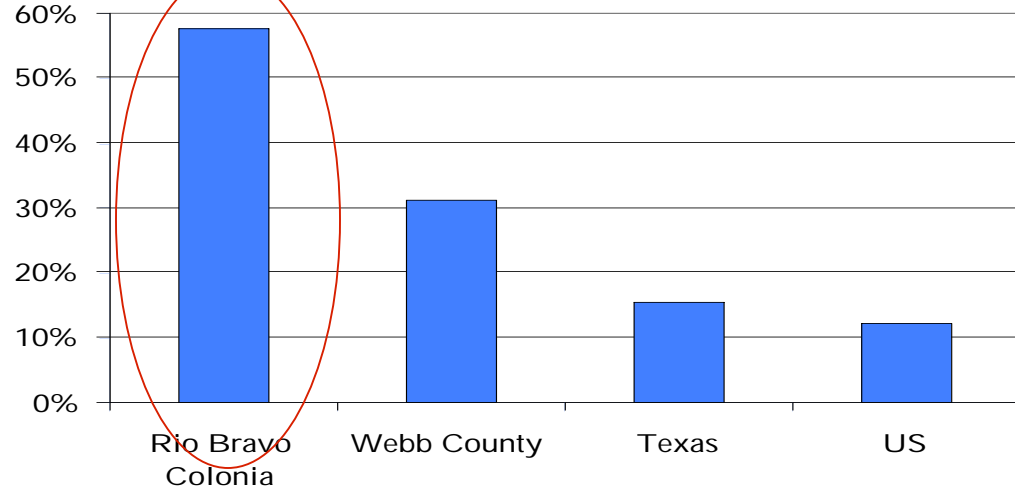
Median Household Income



Per capita Income



Percentage of individuals below poverty level



Source: Census 2000

Economic Characteristics

- Besides, these are Latino communities that are clusters of poverty:
 - Median household income in colonias is less than half National levels
 - Per capita income is worse, being about $\frac{1}{3}$ of national levels (family size)
 - More than $\frac{1}{2}$ population live below poverty level

HOW COLONIAS STARTED?

Supply: agriculturally "worthless" land that lay in floodplains or other rural properties



Demand: low-income individuals who could not afford city housing costs



What is going on in Latino communities without intervention?

- "Informality"
- Poverty / lack of access / limited infrastructure
- Health concerns

And...

- Walkability
- Social interaction
- Sense of place
- Enjoyable places



Walkability

Social Networks

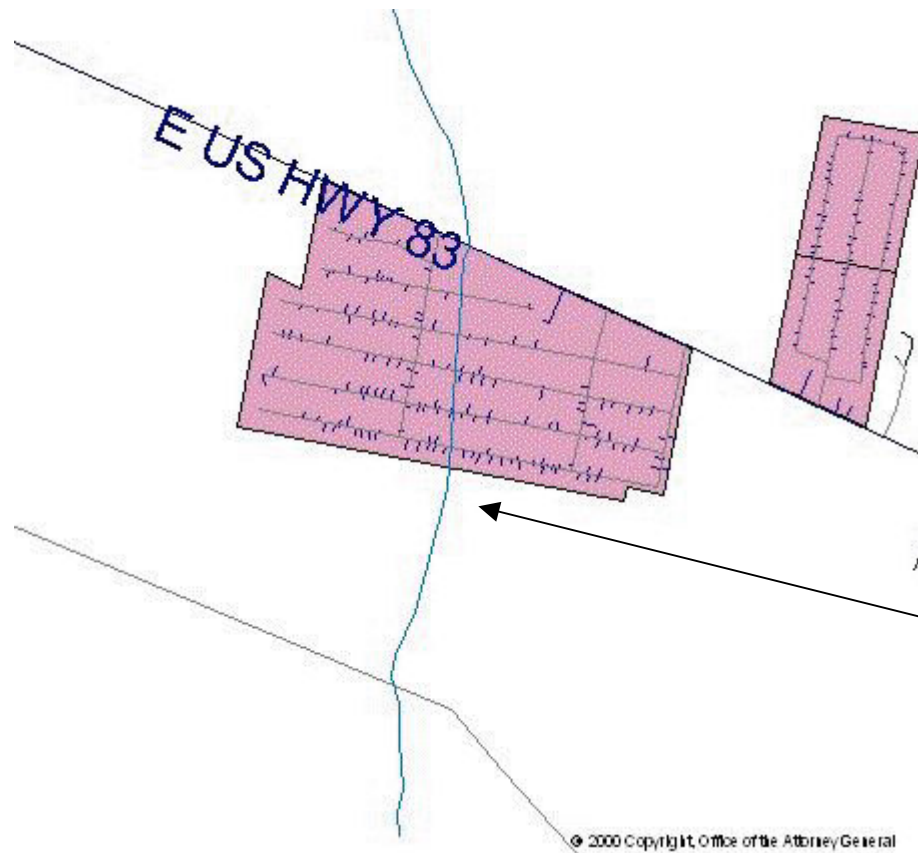
Sense of Place



Location Issues

- Colonias are located on under regulated land, so they can exist:
 - On flooding areas
 - As lots are not platted → conflict arise about lot borders
 - Far from urban areas with minimum or no-basic services, and lack of transportation
 - Lack of environmental impact assessment

West Alto Bonito Colonia, Starr County Case of Flooding Area



When lots were platted
the arroyo was evident

“Informality”
Poverty / lack of access / limited
infrastructure
Health concerns

And...
Walkability
Social interaction
Sense of place
Enjoyable places



From one of our surveys:

Q: Now you have a title. How likely is your stay in here?

	Frequency	Percent
More likely	244	93.13%
Less likely	6	2.29%
No difference	5	1.91%
Not know	7	2.67%
Total	262	100.00%

From one of our Focus Groups

- o *Q:... you are all owners.... Can you sell it for more?*
- o *Before we did not have title, or before we had a possibility of getting title, that land was bad, we were cheated, no one wanted to return to see us, we could not even rent? If I wanted to sell, there was no one to buy because people said it was not valid. If I did not have title then the person I sold it to would not have title. Now that we have title we could sell. **But now we do not want to sell.***
- o ***That is exactly it.***

Focus group updated study, #1 March 15 2004

- Colonias, against prior belief, enjoy a relatively stable population, and regardless of the many difficulties and lack of “formality” they face, are showing signs of being livable communities.

- Is it necessary to bring into line these communities with mainstream codes, requirements and regulations? Is it feasible? Do we need/want to impose current strict regulations on them?

- Shall we start thinking on new –more innovative- approaches to improve living conditions?

Colonias Characteristics

- I. Housing
 - Incremental Construction
 - Financing: Micro-lending
 - Legal instability
- II. Neighborhood
 - Poor physical infrastructure
 - **Rich social infrastructure**
- III. Economic Activity
 - Microbusinesses

Housing in Colonias

Precarious
Living conditions
Health





Incremental Construction:
Positive
Negative



**Incremental
Construction:**
Positive
Negative





Housing in Colonias Incremental Construction

Lack of access to
financial credit





Sanitary problems
Frequent in colonias



PEOPLE

**Enhancing
the Quality
of Life**



**Mobility in Colonias:
Roads
Walking facilities
Open/ Public spaces**



**Enhancing
the Quality of
the Built
Environment**

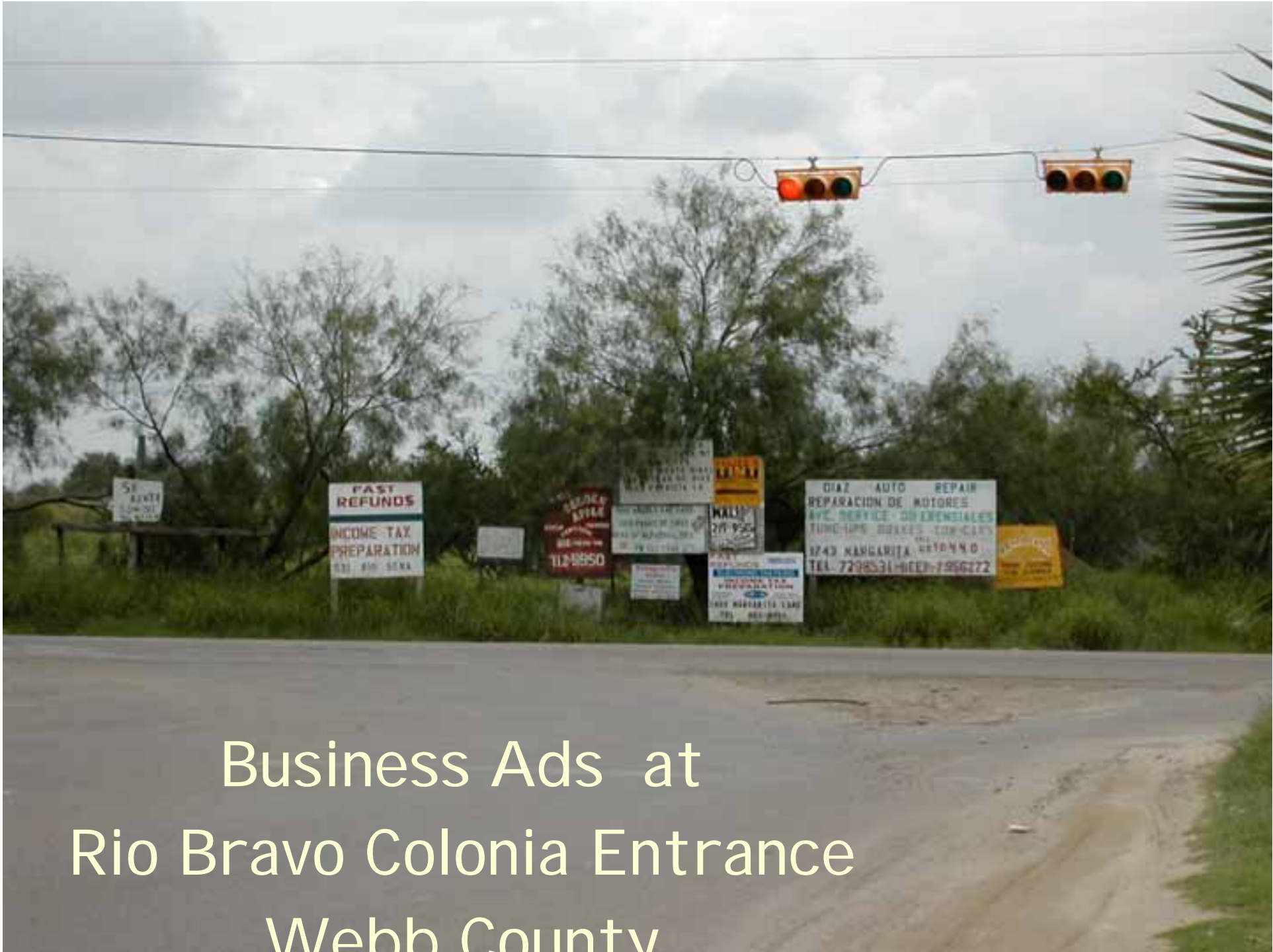
PLACE



But they are still growing and “developing”

As colonias grow, new services are needed, and local initiatives emerge providing such goods and services

1. They create local employment
2. Collection of taxes
3. Despite the many limitations, business owners show a positive attitude toward their future in colonias
4. Local activity is happening and starting to generate a sense of place / community
5. The entrepreneurial attitude is positive from a local economic view.



Business Ads at
Rio Bravo Colonia Entrance
Webb County

El Cenizo, Webb County
Texas



Two aspects: employment contribution & location within the communities



Type of Employment generated by microbusiness in Colonias

- Ethnic Minorities hiring minorities within their communities
- Women
- Less-skilled labor
- Working for a microbusiness is one way of getting work experience and smoothing the transition from welfare to work

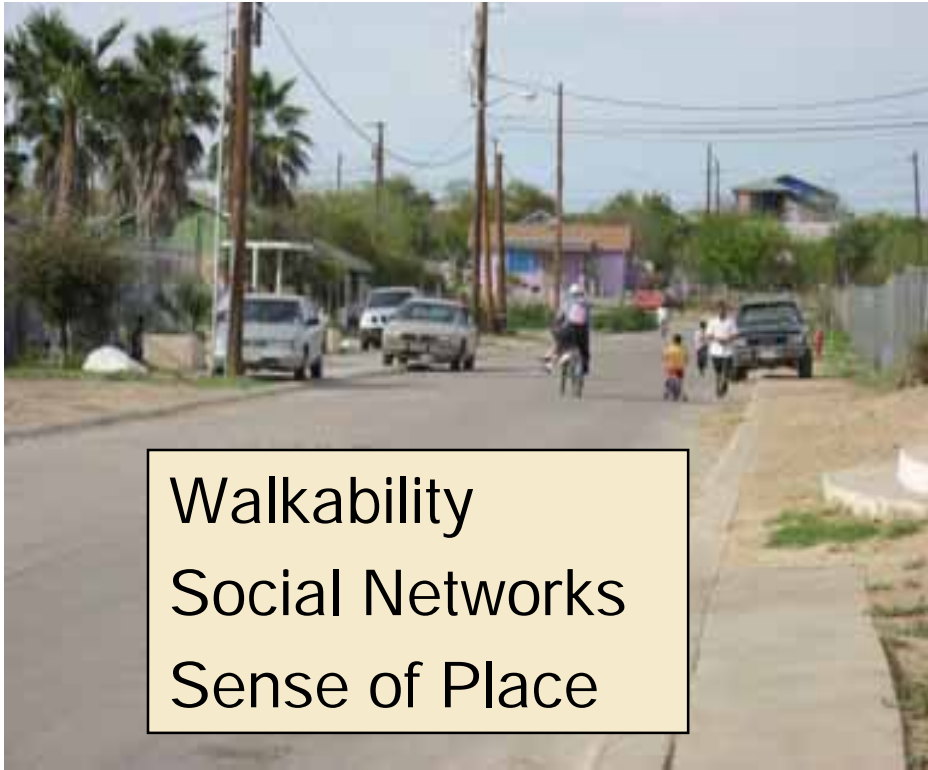




Neighborhood Business

- Supply local needs
- Located WITHIN colonias
- 90% local residents
- All that is available in colonias
- Places for people to gather as there are no parks or "public areas"





Walkability
Social Networks
Sense of Place



*Let's improve what they have already created
Build upon local culture
& Social networks*



Thanks,
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