



LIFE

CLICK TO ENLARGE

Published: Nov. 18, 2013

STUDY ASKS: IS A 'BETTER WORLD' POSSIBLE?

Contact(s): [Andy Henion](#), [Zachary Neal](#)

Social sharing buttons: Facebook Like (460), Tweet (165), LinkedIn Share (3), Email, Print

For years, policymakers have attempted to create communities where a diverse group of residents not only live close to one other but also interact freely – in other words, neighborhoods that are both integrated and socially cohesive.

But that might be a lost cause, a Michigan State University sociologist argues in a new study.

As reported in the American Journal of Community Psychology, Zachary Neal found that neighborhood integration and cohesion cannot co-exist.

“Is a better world possible? Unfortunately, these findings show it may not be possible to simultaneously create communities that are both fully integrated and fully cohesive,” Neal said. “In essence, when it comes to neighborhood desegregation and social cohesion, you can’t have your cake and eat it too.”

The reason has to do with how people form relationships. Neal said people usually develop relationships with others who are close rather than far away, and similar rather than different from themselves (be it through race, religion, social class, etc.).

Neal ran computer modeling of different fictional neighborhoods and, after millions of trials, consistently found the same thing: The more integrated a neighborhood is, the less socially cohesive it becomes, and vice versa.

“These trends are so strong, it’s unlikely policy can change it,” Neal said.



Creating communities that are both diverse and socially cohesive may be a pipe dream, argues Michigan State University sociologist Zachary Neal. Photo by G.L. Kohuth

Related Links

- [Build it and they will come? Think again](#)
- [Networks – not size – give cities advantage](#)

Top stories

Busting Biases
Jan 06, 2016
Last year, an MSU School of Journalism class researched and published a . . .



1 in 4 kids sexually harassed by friends online
Jan 07, 2016
It's not just strangers who target children online. Kids' . . .



MSU rolls into 2016 Detroit Auto Show
Jan 08, 2016
Two cars designed and built by Michigan State University engineering. . .



He said policymakers should instead try to find the right balance between integration and cohesion, which may differ from community to community.

Neal said he started the project because past research had failed to turn up a city that is both truly integrated and cohesive – from the United States to the United Kingdom to Asia. But it's not from lack of effort, he said.

"It's not that local leaders and policymakers aren't trying hard enough," Neal said. "Rather, we now think it's because the goals of integration and cohesion are just not compatible with each other."

Jennifer Watling Neal, assistant professor of psychology, co-authored the study.

Honoring Martin Luther King Jr.

Dec 14, 2015

Project 60/50 will continue its mission to foster community conversation. . .



More on this topic

Sociology

Climate-change foes winning public opinion war

Dec 02, 2015

A new study by MSU environmental scientists suggests opponents of. . .

How voters would accept higher gas tax

Nov 10, 2015

Americans would be more likely to accept a gas tax increase if they knew. . .

Carl Taylor: Living in the Third City-Nation

Oct 28, 2015

My field studies of urban America have been anchored in my birthplace. . .

A gender revolution – minus the bigger paycheck

Oct 27, 2015

Women are more likely than men to have a bachelor's degree and a. . .

Childhood stress fuels weight gain in women

Jul 07, 2015

When it comes to weight gain for women, childhood stress appears to be a. . .



Several MSU faculty members were named on a national list of scholars recognized for having the greatest influence on public debates about education. [More](#)

[Share](#) [Subscribe](#)

From the archives



**CLIMBING IN
NATIONAL
RANKINGS**



**EARTH DAY. EVERY
DAY.**



**FUNDING NEW
AUTISM
RESEARCH**

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

[Contact Information](#) | [Privacy Statement](#) | [Site Accessibility](#)

Call MSU: [\(517\) 355-1855](tel:517-355-1855) | Visit: msu.edu | MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer.

SPARTANS WILL. | © Michigan State University