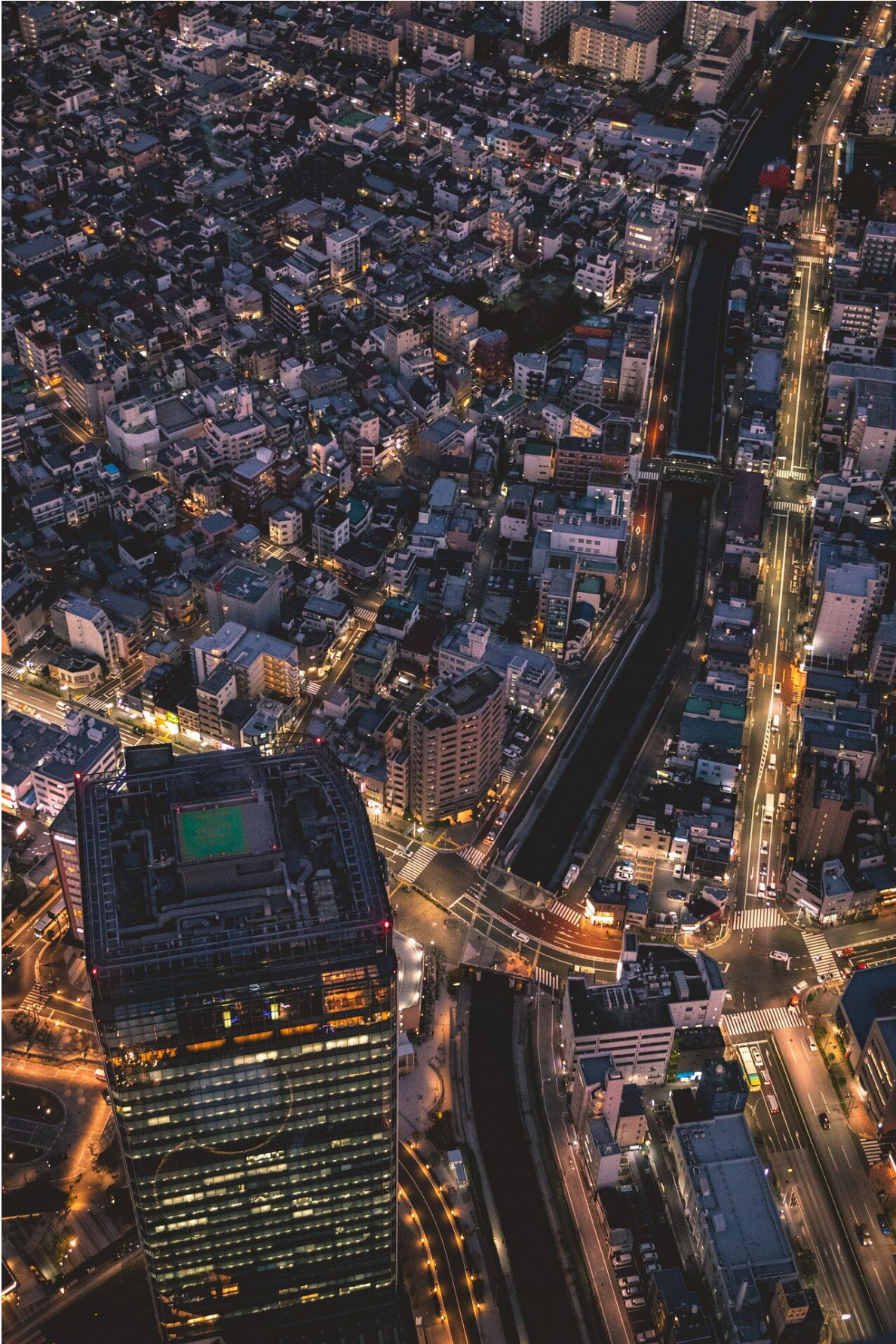


City dwellers found to be just as helpful to strangers in need as country folk

October 7 2020, by Bob Yirka



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A pair of researchers at University College London has found via experimentation that city dwellers are just as likely to help a stranger in need as people living in the country. In their paper published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, Elena Zwirner and Nichola Raihani describe three types of experiments they conducted to test people's willingness to help a stranger and what they found.

For many years, television, movies and books have portrayed people living in the country as easygoing, friendly and always ready to lend a hand when needed. In sharp contrast, people living in the [city](#) have often been portrayed as aloof and suspicious of strangers. In this new effort, Zwirner and Raihani sought to discover whether such portrayals are accurate.

The work consisted of conducting three kinds of experiments in small towns and cities across the U.K. over the years 2014 to 2017. The first involved watching to see if people would post a lost letter (some of which included a note asking for it to be posted), the second involved observing the actions of people who witnessed someone dropping an item (a set of cards) and the third involved watching to see if drivers would stop to let pedestrians cross a street. In all of the experiments, the researchers recorded what they saw.

After 1,367 trials, the researchers found that help was given approximately 47 percent of the time overall—55.1 percent of letters were posted, 32.7 percent of people helped pick up dropped cards, and 31.1 percent of cars stopped to let a pedestrian cross a street. They also

found no evidence of people being more or less willing to help based on location—country folk and [city dwellers](#) were equally likely to help a stranger. One factor that did influence willingness to help was economic conditions. People living in affluent areas or neighborhoods were more likely to help than were people living in poor areas. The researchers acknowledge that their experiments were limited—they dropped the cards and tried to cross the roads themselves. Thus, they were not able to tell whether race or gender might have played a role in their findings.

More information: Elena Zwirner et al. Neighborhood wealth, not urbanicity, predicts prosociality towards strangers, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* (2020). [DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2020.1359](#)

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