

Despite upbeat headlines, Detroit still reeling

22 November 2016, by Laura Reese , Andy Henion



"In the news media, Detroit has gone from being the poster child for urban decline to a shining example of urban regeneration," said Michigan State University's Laura Reese. "Yet despite this increasingly crowded Detroit bandwagon, reality does not match the hype." Credit: Michigan State University

Reports of Detroit's revival may be premature.

Despite the [news media](#)'s portrayal of Motown as a comeback kid, most revitalization is occurring in a small swath of the city's core - including the just-announced Detroit Pistons move downtown - while the rest of Detroit continues to decline, finds a new study led by a Michigan State University scholar.

The coffee shops that have sprung up along Woodward Avenue do little to address the lack of quality education, job skills and employment opportunities that continue plaguing the city, said Laura Reese, professor of political science and director of MSU's Global Urban Studies Program.

The study, which appears online in the journal *Cities*, is titled "'It's safe to come, we've got lattes': Development disparities in Detroit."

"In the news media, Detroit has gone from being

the poster child for urban decline to a shining example of urban regeneration," said Reese, lead investigator of the study. "Yet despite this increasingly crowded Detroit bandwagon, reality does not match the hype. The gap between the city's core area and its neighborhoods is significant and increasing."

Following Detroit's high-profile bankruptcy in 2013, media reports have highlighted the city's retail and commercial growth; a burgeoning artistic scene; vibrant restaurant, nightlife and theatre options; and extensive public and private investment, including construction of a light rail line and a new hockey/basketball arena. The Pistons basketball team announced Nov. 22 that it would leave its suburban home, The Palace, to join the Detroit Red Wings at Little Caesars Arena, under construction in downtown Detroit.



Laura Reese, political scientist and director of Michigan State University's Global Urban Studies Program. Credit: Michigan State University

In fact, much of the city's high-profile development is centered in a roughly seven-mile-square area of downtown and Midtown. The positive changes in this area, the study notes, stand in stark contrast to what is happening in the other 95 percent of Detroit, where "decay continues to dominate the post-apocalyptic neighborhood landscape."

Provided by Michigan State University

The study analyzes a host of factors that show Detroit's continuing plight. Among them:

- Poverty in the city jumped from 33 percent in 2009 to 40 percent in 2014. Some 300,000 Detroiters live in poverty.
- Unemployment increased from 25 percent in 2010 to 27 percent in 2013.
- Most hotspots for crime - including homicide - are concentrated in the neighborhoods, and not in the downtown/Midtown area.
- Public education continues to decline. In 2015, for example, only 1 percent of fourth-graders scored as proficient or advanced in science, 8 percent in math and 12 percent in English.
- The loss of population and jobs has hurt municipal finances. Property tax delinquencies reached a high of 47 percent of parcels and uncollected taxes are estimated at \$131 million.

On the positive side, city leaders have not completely ignored the neighborhoods, the study says. Enhanced public safety, new streetlights, modest improvements to public transportation, demolition of abandoned buildings and land-use changes to agriculture have addressed some basic quality of life issues.

While these efforts need to be continued, Reese said, they do not address the core issues of substandard education and lack of job training.

"Without a major commitment to improving education and job skills throughout Detroit, the gap between the city core and neighborhoods will continue to grow," Reese said. "While the availability of lattes may be a sign that Midtown is moving toward the best of times, these are instead the worst of times for most Detroit neighborhoods."

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