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THE DAILY DISH

OF NO PARTY OR CLIQUE

“ TO SEE WHAT IS IN FRONT OF ONE’S NOSE NEEDS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE ”

—George Orwell

12 Feb 2009 10:37 am

A Return To The Cities

The Atlantic's new issue [is online](#). Richard Florida's [cover story](#) is on how the recession will change the geography of America. The winners? "Mega-regions, systems of multiple cities and their surrounding suburban rings like the Boston–New York–Washington Corridor":

Well-educated professionals and creative workers who live together in dense ecosystems, interacting directly, generate ideas and turn them into products and services faster than talented people in other places can. There is no evidence that globalization or the Internet has changed that. Indeed, as globalization has increased the financial return on innovation by widening the consumer market, the pull of innovative places, already dense with highly talented workers, has only grown stronger, creating a snowball effect. Talent-rich ecosystems are not easy to replicate, and to realize their full economic value, talented and ambitious people increasingly need to live within them.

Big, talent-attracting places benefit from accelerated rates of “urban metabolism,” according to a pioneering theory of urban evolution developed by a multidisciplinary team of researchers affiliated with the SantaFe Institute. The rate at which living things convert food into energy—their metabolic rate—tends to slow as organisms increase in size. But when the Santa Fe team examined trends in innovation, patent activity, wages, and GDP, they found that successful cities, unlike biological organisms, actually get faster as they grow. In order to grow bigger and overcome diseconomies of scale like congestion and rising housing and business costs, cities must become more efficient, innovative, and productive. The researchers dubbed the extraordinarily rapid metabolic rate that successful cities are able to achieve “super-linear” scaling. “By almost any measure,” they wrote, “the larger a city’s population, the greater the innovation and wealth creation per person.” Places like New York with finance and media, Los Angeles with film and music, and Silicon Valley with hightech are all examples of high-metabolism places.