

Defining Innovation - The Future of Academic Innovation

Discrimination

Run Time - 3:33

In "The New Geography of Jobs," (2012) Enrico Moretti identifies the patent as central to measuring innovation. For Moretti, the number of patents per capita is the most substantial indicator of where the solutions to the problems of the present will unfold. Investors and inventors register patents, and through complimentary events or as the result of the registrations, areas see job growth, venture capital investment, housing price increases and a growth of educated population.

Within these spaces, what Moretti calls innovation hubs, is the promise of a better life. And from these innovation hubs is the projection of a better life not only there but beyond those walls, the technological revolution providing digital luxuries on a global scale.

Consider these innovation hubs under the guidance of futurist William Gibson: "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed" (1999). Much focus of disparity comes when considering an innovation hub such as Austin or Seattle versus a manufacturing hub like Kansas City or Cleveland, and this will continue to be a place of debate: can innovation hubs truly provide a better life for people outside of the few hubs in the world?

But we should also ask if innovation hubs are providing a better life within those few places? Using Moretti's patent metric or even employing a separate metric like start-up density, there are eight cities or metropolitan areas identified as innovation hubs (San Francisco/San Jose, Seattle, Austin, Portland/Salem/Corvalis, Salt Lake City/Provo, Denver/Boulder, and Boston/Cambridge). Three of these cities have seen population explosions over the past 20 years: Austin and Portland are also in the Top 10 cities for population growth, with Seattle close behind. There are 20% more people in Austin today than in 2000, 11% in Portland and 10.5% in Seattle. But while African-American populations have grown from 13% to 16% of Americans over the same period of time, Seattle's African-American growth over that time was only 3.5%, Portland 3.1%, and Austin saw their African-American population decline nearly 5%. To compare, Fort Worth's was the fastest growing city at 36%, and it saw a 28% increase in African American population. Charlotte, NC grew 35%, its African American population grew 45% over the same time. Columbus, OH grew 11%, and saw a 26% growth of African Americans. Of the 12 fastest growing cities in America, the three innovation hubs in that growth not only had the three lowest percentages of African-American growth, they were the only

three cities to see African-American growth below the percentage of African Americans in the country (Watkins, 2016; Tang, 2014)

The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed. The race to innovate is often coached in terms of economic mobility and social justice, using the affordances of the present to make a better future. Can that be accepted at face value when the historical centers of innovation are being abandoned by those for whom innovation is supposed to serve? What is the relationship of innovation growth and minority population regression? Who is innovation intended for?