

# START-UP CITY

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECONOMY: CREATIVE INNOVATION  
AS A BY-PRODUCT OF AN URBAN ECOSYSTEM.

BY JESSICA SICK



**URBAN LOVE**

The creative class flock to cities like Seattle, Austin, and Boulder—vibrant incubators of innovation.

Last year, more than 1,000 people gathered in Miami Beach for a conference at the Frank Gehry-designed New World Center, a stark-white structure punctuated by never-ending glass panels and those signature Gehry reliefs that swoop and jut with architectural perfection. It wasn't to attend a concert by the renowned New World Symphony that calls the space home, nor was it to take in a movie projected on the building's hulking front wall from the sprawling lawn, as locals are wont to do on a pleasant night during the winter months—and they all tend to be pleasant in Miami Beach.

Rather, the crowd was there for a conference hosted by *The Atlantic* on the idea of the “start-up city,” a unique ecosystem spurred by entrepreneurial

growth and the businesses and institutions that thrive because of it. It was fitting that such an event take place in a space that represents Miami's potential to attract the same kind of start-up entrepreneurs who have already helped transform places such as Seattle, Austin, and Boulder into creative, vibrant incubators of innovation.

The start-up city is the kind of place where happy hour can turn into a brainstorming session. Where the local shop owner can now expand because business is booming. Where top talent happily moves because the office culture feels more collaborative than conforming, and life outside the office feels more frenetic than fleeting. “Start-up cities are dense and diverse,” says Richard Florida, senior editor of *The*

*Atlantic* and author of several best sellers, including *The Rise of the Creative Class*. “They have great neighborhoods that are walkable and filled with the energy that smart, creative people generate when they come together.”

Florida insists that the start-up city comes in all sizes. New York City, he says, “used to ship its venture capital to Silicon Valley.” Now, Lower Manhattan is “a bustling start-up hub” that “attracts something like three billion dollars in venture capital a year.” Then there are the collegiate cities, where thriving university scenes make them obvious locales for companies looking for top talent around the corner. “Smaller cities like Cambridge, Massachusetts—especially in and around Kendall Square, where MIT is located—

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Palo Alto's downtown area near Stanford University, and Boulder, Colorado, have thriving start-up hubs," Florida says.

When advertising agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky (think: Burger King, Mini Cooper, and Truth's anti-tobacco campaign) was looking to expand its business outside of Miami, Boulder stood out. "It ranked high on the lifestyle list," recalls cofounder Chuck Porter. "They wanted lifestyle, not dental," he says of the talent they were trying to acquire. Today's talent is no different.

"Millennials are passionate and curious," Porter says. "They want experience and they want to learn. Boulder is a place where people come to not only be successful but to make the world a better place." They also want to make their own little world better, which is why CP+B employs a full-time "extreme concierge," a person whose job it is to handle everything from making sure an employee's bike is tuned to working with new hires who are outdoor novices.

Indeed, action ranks high on the millennials' checklist when it comes to where they choose to work. "Millennials love to live in a downtown, near where the energy is," says Brad Feld, who started the Foundry Group, a venture-capitalist firm that focuses on tech start-ups. "In the 1950s, there was a giant migration to the suburbs. This has reversed with the current generation of young people, and the city is now where everyone wants to be." For millennials, a start-up city also appeals to how they want to work.

**CREATIVE CLASS**  
A start-up community is essentially an inclusive network, not a hierarchy.



FOR TODAY'S ENTREPRENEURS, WHAT THEY DO ISN'T AS IMPORTANT AS WHERE THEY DO IT.

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**WORK HARD, PLAY HARD** A start-up city is the kind of place where happy hour can turn into a brainstorming session.

“Millennials look beyond status quo,” says Timothy O’Shea, who helps organize Boulder Startup Week (BSW), an annual event that showcases the city’s start-up culture. He adds, “The rules from before about how to run a business don’t apply. They gravitate to places that influence their world and that have an easy, accessible entry point. Flextime, remote work, tech, and spirit: they all go hand in hand. Start-up cities reward creativity, they encourage community, and they welcome self-starters.” It’s the self-starters that cities like Miami hope move in and set up shop. That entrepreneurial spirit, after all, is what start-up cities are built on. One self-starter who already calls Miami home is Avery Pack, founder of Republic

Bike, a company whose mission it is to design affordable bicycles “with just the right dash of whimsy to make biking appropriately joyful, approachable, and indispensable.” Republic builds everything from foldable bikes for the big-city commuter to farmers’ market cruisers to campus fleets for companies like Google and Nike. Miami appealed to him as a place to run his business, Pack says, because “there are no barriers to entry in a start-up city. There is no old guard with keys to gates, and you’re not lost in the crowd. If you’re doing something interesting, the community has access to you and can rally behind you.”

Pack also credits Miami with being an entrepreneurial city “where people are reinventing

themselves, taking chances, starting fresh. The spirit is fun and infectious.” Like any other start-up city—current or future—the live/work balance is essential.

“The emotional investment in start-up work is impossibly demanding,” Pack says. “Therefore, you have to put yourself in an environment where you can be nourished by what also keeps you going—whether that’s paddleboarding at sunrise or biking to work.” Admittedly, the latter activity is Pack’s favorite part of the job. It doesn’t hurt that his commute runs along the Atlantic Ocean. “So many communities are popping up that embody the entrepreneurial spirit,” says O’Shea, who hopes the possibilities explored at BSW are

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**A WAY OF LIFE**

Creative entrepreneurs are attracted to communities by the overall lifestyle, not just by the jobs available.



“MOMENTS HAPPEN WHEN WE’RE ALL IN MOTION.” –TIMOTHY O’SHEA

exported to other start-up cities.

“People from international cities come to BSW of their own volition to engage with start-ups here to see what they do and take it back to apply to their own markets,” O’Shea says. “The event is a chance to foster more unique communities around the world.”

Indeed, Florida says he sees so many places abroad on the verge of becoming start-up cities: “Berlin is transforming from a hard-pressed city of bohemians into the most dynamic start-up hub on the European continent. In the Middle East, start-

ups are thriving in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem, where the mayor, a former entrepreneur and venture capitalist, made them his priority.” Back at the New World Center, Tony Hsieh, founder of Zappos.com, spoke about establishing the company’s headquarters in hopes of pioneering a start-up city in the most unlikely of start-up cities: Las Vegas. He makes an analogy to the first person who ran the four-minute mile. It couldn’t be done...until it was. It’s that mentality that creates a start-up city.

“People would rather build something of their own than work for a big company,” says Florida. “Great ideas, whether in tech or in music, start in garages. We have to empower our kids and all our people to build more of them.” It’s also the start-up city that promotes what Hsieh calls “collisions” with each other—those instances when we interact and the potential for greatness happens.

O’Shea affirms that idea. “People want to get out and get together,” he says. “Moments happen when we’re all in motion.”

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