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After the crash

by Galen Barnett, The Oregonian

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Might the crisis roiling the economy reshape the American landscape? Is it a turning point in the country's social geography? As the economy mends and growth begins anew, what cities or regions will be best-suited to take advantage of the change? Urban theorist Richard Florida, author of "[The Rise of the Creative Class](#)," has some interesting thoughts on those questions in a major [piece](#) in The Atlantic, and his answers are encouraging for Portland and the Northwest. (The Oregonian's Susan Nielsen comments on the subject [here](#).)

Florida believes that what he calls mega-regions -- which include the Cascadia corridor stretching from Portland through Seattle to Vancouver, B.C. -- and their ability to attract highly educated, innovative and creative people -- human capital -- will have a distinct financial advantage in the post-recession economy. Money graph:

The University of Chicago economist and Nobel laureate Robert Lucas declared that the spillovers in knowledge that result from talent-clustering are the main cause of economic growth. 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.

Accompanying his story is a fascinating interactive [map](#) that allows you to compare cities' patent output per capita (check out overachieving Corvallis), average income and population. Very cool.

Some of Florida's ideas for encouraging the coming changes will sound familiar to urban planners in Oregon.

If there is one constant in the history of capitalist development, it is the ever-more-intensive use of space. Today, we need to begin making smarter use of both our urban spaces and the suburban rings that surround them--packing in more people, more affordably, while at the same time improving their quality of life. That means liberal zoning and building codes within cities to allow more residential development, more mixed-use development in suburbs and cities alike, the in-filling of suburban cores near rail links, new investment in rail, and congestion pricing for travel on our roads. Not everyone wants to live in city centers, and the suburbs are not about to disappear. But we can do a much better job of connecting suburbs to cities and to each other, and allowing regions to grow bigger and denser without losing their velocity.