

“Generation Screwed” - Are US youths opting or being forced out of society?

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The Min

In the future, it is plausible that the creative class will continue to surge with economic dominance while driving demand and fueling financial support in the creation of smart cities. During this technological advancement, what are the plausible futures for the growing group of young citizens labeled NEET (Lee, 2011) (not in education, employment, or training)?

Since the early 2000's, the creative class, the workforce consisting of “engineers, artist, scientist and educators” (as defined by Richard Florida), has gained momentum becoming the “second largest occupational group” in the U.S. (Gabe, 2012). The spatial proximity of creative class citizens is relatively tight and often is engulfed by human-centric space, shops and businesses. Surging alongside this group is the technological infusion of business-to-business and human-to-object hyper connectivity.

As cities begin to position themselves for the race to maintain future relevance, citizens of economically positive public space are enacting “sit-lie ordinances”. “Sit-lie” ordinances are generally ballot driven societal rules, which declare it illegal for individuals to sit, eat, and sleep in economically positive public space. This gives the city the authority to ticket and or remove citizens that are not positively contributing towards the economically positive space. In this case, the trend of neighborhoods and businesses that are nestled within the creative collective and are trying to foster creative growth are also the neighborhoods that have a high enforcement rate of “sit-lie” ordinances. Congruently, there has also been an astonishing retraction of growth in a much larger portion of society.

The Max

“What are your goals, where do you see yourself in X amount of years?” These are typical generic questions one might ask the youth in the United States. It's expected and acceptable to be responded with shortsighted or rather shallow answers. Yet, when the answers are lack luster or despondently hollow it raises an uneasy alarm. Is the state of this despondent child a condition of the individual answering or one of a subculture of voices? What current and on the horizon opportunities exist for today's youths? What are the atypical answers that our society would expect?

Today, the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that the teenage unemployment rate is at

24.5% (2013), the highest it has been since the 1940's. Many theorists are sounding the alarm for a "mismatch economy," (Şahin, 2012) claiming that the jobs lost today are not being replaced with new jobs tomorrow. Many parents of 16 – 28 year olds are already feeling the strain of the unexpected economic burden. Parents are currently housing and spending up to "10% of their wage" (Ray, 2011) on supporting the livelihood of their adult children. Most kids today are unable to embark on an American Dream life, described by Ted Ownby's "four dreams of consumerisms." This phenomena, though, is not singularly an American condition, it is global.

Currently, Japan and the United Kingdom are addressing the youth unemployment aftermath of the 1990's. The youths, labeled NEETs in the UK and Freeters in Japan, are collectively disengaged from historical social norms. They, like their American counterparts, are living at home longer, being financially supported by their parents and not seeking educational improvements or economic opportunities. There are three major classified subgroups of this phenomenon. The first group of youths is stated to be selfish and seek only enjoyment from life at the expense of others. The second group is reported as mismatched, though they are gainfully seeking employment they cannot. The second group is stuck in dead-end part-time or contract jobs and experiencing life as a day-to-day survival. Lastly, there are youths that, while still living with their parents, have completely withdrawn from society.

Anthropologist, Dr. Katherine Newman, has suggested a correlation between high unemployment with the growing subvert behaviors of youths. She coined the term, "failed joiners", in reference to high school shooters. She states, "A loner absents himself from social contact and withdraws from the world around him. Shooters are engaged, but not successful. They reach out to cliques, only to be rebuffed. Their daily social experience is of rejection and frustration, not isolation" (Newman, 2012). The rejection of employment the American youth has been faced with over the past six years cannot be anything other than frustrating. Lacking the ideology of America being the land of opportunity, the rejected collective is plausibly amassing a new social narrative.

If structural unemployment is accepted as valid problem within the U.S., what becomes of the jobless youths? Who supports them after their parents passing? The U.S. could be faced with a large group of citizens who will be opted out of its current social contract. This potentially creates not only the smart cities of the 21st century but also the segregated communities, quasi governments and quasi economies that are fueled by the different social narratives.

Engaging in plausible futures for the increasing group of youths is important. Understanding the economic and political causal relationships and allowing them unfold, signifies the potential towards creating segregated sectors of the city, altering the social structures we currently know. We once again, might be culturally building "the other side of the tracks" and defining entry into the society of economic prosperity.

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