

Our blogs

Q&A with Richard Florida

By [Richard Florida](#)

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Richard Florida is one of the world's leading urbanists. He is a researcher and professor, serving as University Professor and Director of Cities at the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto. He is also a writer and journalist, having penned several global best sellers, including the award winning *The Rise of the Creative Class* and his most recent book, *The New Urban Crisis* published in April 2017. He serves as senior editor for *The Atlantic*, where he co-founded and serves as Editor-at-Large for *CityLab*.

Q: How have your views on cities evolved since you wrote your previous book on this topic, *The Rise of the Creative Class*?

A: I started writing *The Rise of the Creative Class* in the 1990s. Cities had not regenerated, and there was a question of whether cities could regenerate... Even London wasn't fully regenerated the way it is now. In New York, there was no High Line; the Meatpacking District [*now known for nightclubs*] was still a meatpacking district, there were still punks in the East Village. Brooklyn had not gentrified, never mind places like Pittsburgh or Philadelphia. People largely disagreed with my views that everyone would go back to the cities.

A class of professionals, which I've called the Creative Class, started to be attracted to cities, and preferred to live in urban rather than suburban areas. When I published *The Rise of the Creative Class* in 2002, people thought I was crazy.

But now, those same people today look back and say, "Weren't you responsible for luring those people into cities?". But really, none of us would have predicted that the urban revival could have been so fast and far going.

That's what *The New Urban Crisis* is about. If the old urban crisis was about the failure of cities in the 1960s and 1970s, the new urban crisis is about a crisis of success and revival.

Q: Are these cities falling victim to their own success?

A: Cities like London, New York, or San Francisco – so called “superstar cities” – have fallen victim to rising house prices, and a growing gap between the rich and the poor. The problem that we face today is not simply economic inequality, but geographic or spatial inequality. And that’s occurring on every scale.

Those predictions of technology and globalisation moving us further and further away from each other, spreading out across the country, didn’t happen in the end. In fact, the real source of economic innovation and growth is the clustering of human beings together.

When we cluster together in cities, we make each other more productive. By combining and recombining our skills and ideas we generate innovations. That’s the motor force of economic growth.

But when that clustering happens, the gap between successful cities and less successful cities grows. Not only that, but the inequalities within these winner-take-all cities grow as well. We’ve divided into small enclaves of the affluent, bigger enclaves of the less affluent or disadvantaged, and our middle class neighbourhoods have collapsed.

When this happens, you get a recoil, because of that divide. People think that cities, the very places that generate our wealth, our diversity, our cosmopolitanism, are the source of our problems.

Q: How optimistic or pessimistic are you about the future of cities?

A: I would call myself a guarded optimist. Here’s the reason for my optimism. When I was a boy, I saw cities explode into riots. As a graduate student, I saw cities become deindustrialized. I could have never imagined that our cities would regenerate. But our cities came back. It took a lot of work, but getting cities to talk about inclusion is certainly doable.

As I’ve gone around the world talking about the book, I’ve met many people and institutions that see the problem, and recognise that they are both part of the problem and part of the regeneration. And they want to be part of the solution.

I am happy to see the idea of creative and inclusive cities embraced in many places. This is something that also resonates with your current mayor here in London. Making that shift is doable, it will take a lot of work and a lot of time, but I’m optimistic about it happening.