



# Who's Your City?

Richard Florida and the Creative City

Tell us a little bit about your new book, *Who's Your City?*

In *Who's Your City*, I make an argument about the importance of "place" in the global economy and how it is creating a spiky world. A large part of the book puts emphasis on location—the idea that the decision of where to live is the most important decision anyone can make. *Who's Your City* identifies and rationalizes the profound impact "place" has on various aspects such as the jobs we have access to, our career paths, our social networks, our family lives, and our lifestyle choices. Ultimately, where we live affects the wealth we accumulate and our overall happiness.

As well, *Who's Your City* provides the first-ever rankings of cities for people in different life-stages by rating: the best places for singles, the best places for young families, and the best places for empty nesters. This section of *Who's Your City* grounds new ideas and data to provide an essential guide for the

40 million (and more) Americans who move each year. It advises them on issues such as how to choose where to live and what those choices will mean for their lives, happiness, and communities.

You say in your book that the decision of choosing where to live is just as important if not more important than deciding whom to marry and other such life-changing decisions. What factors convinced you to move to Toronto?

I moved to Toronto for what I believe was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I was invited to build a major research think tank at the University of Toronto on the topic of "place", "creativity", and "prosperity". The prospect of heading a well-funded and professionally-supported research institute at a highly respected major university was, for me, or just about anybody for that matter, a no-brainer decision.

I love living in Toronto; it's a world-class city with countless amazing amenities. Toronto has wonderful parks, top-notch arts and culture, and vibrant neighborhoods.

Many globalization scholars such as Thomas Friedman argue that globalization has led to an increasingly leveled economic playing field worldwide. In *Who's Your City*, however, you present an economic landscape that is, as you describe it, "spiky". Cities and regions are increasingly specialized. In your view, how "flat" is the globalized world?

Currently, economic activity is concentrated in a select group of what we call "mega-regions". These new and incredibly powerful economic units are areas that host business and economic activity on a large scale. Mega-regions generate a lion's share of the world's economic activity and an even larger share of the world's innovation and technological discoveries. Worldwide, there are 40 significant mega-regions. These rich economic areas are



# Richard Florida

In his new book, *Who's Your City?*, Richard Florida, Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto, makes the point that, increasingly, one of the most important decisions you will make in life is where you choose to live. Contrary to a flat world emerging through globalization, Professor Florida explains how the concentration of creativity and talent into mega-regions, such as the Vancouver-Portland Corridor (Cascadia) and the Boston-Washington region (Bos-Wash) is causing the global economic field to, rather, become spiky. In our interview with Professor Florida, we talk about his book and ask him about the importance of location and creativity when it comes to succeeding in a new global economy.



home to one-fifth of the world's population, two-thirds of the global economic output and 85% of all worldwide innovation.

Although in comparison to each other these regions are relatively flat, the gap between mega-regions and the rest of the world is extremely spiky. This is because mega-regions are in constant competition with each other for technological development and a higher state in the global economy.

In *Who's Your City*, you discuss the concept of mega-regions as the new "engines of the global economy." Vancouver is identified as part of the Cascadia mega-region, which includes Seattle and Portland. How is Cascadia unique when compared to other mega-regions in the world?

The reason Cascadia has been identified as a strong and competitive mega-region is because of talent magnets like Seattle, WA and Vancouver, BC. For instance, although Cascadia ranks only 61st out of 116 regions (in terms of population), it possesses remarkable leadership in innovation and scientific citations. In fact, Cascadia ranks 10th in innovation leadership, 3rd in scientific citations, and 21st in economic output.

You have a concept called the "Clustering Force", which is a force that brings together talented and productive people into specific cities and regions. Why are certain groups of people clustering together, and is this a new trend in human history?

Regions, cities, and communities are becoming more specialized in their industry make-up and economic portfolio. More so than

ever before, the global economy is forcing regions to think about their individual competitive advantages. This in turn is causing human capital and highly sought after talent to concentrate in select communities. Clustering provides effortless face-to-face communication, information sharing, and teamwork – all of which are required to spur innovation and enhance productivity.

The fact that creative work relies heavily on innate knowledge is something we acknowledge and accept as very real. The bottom line: Creative workers must be able to bounce ideas off of each other; thus, in this respect, clustering and collaboration are essential.

In another book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, you discuss the concepts of the "Creative Class" and the "Creative Economy". What do you define as the "creative class" and what role has the "Creative Economy" played in changing the faces of cities and mega-regions?

The Creative Class is the economic growth of our future and it comprises of two segments of workers:

**Creative Professionals** - These professionals are the classic knowledge-based workers including those working in health care, business and finance, the legal sector, and education.

**Super-Creative Core** - These workers include scientists, engineers, techies, innovators and researchers, as well as artists, designers, writers, and musicians.

Worldwide, there are more than 150 million

creative workers in the Creative Class. In the U.S, the Creative Class only represents a third of the workforce. However, they earn more than \$2.1 trillion dollars - 50% of all wages and salaries. This total represents as much as the manufacturing and service sectors combined. In addition, the Creative Class controls nearly 70% (almost \$500 billion) of the discretionary income or buying power in the U.S. This is more than doubled that of the manufacturing and service sectors combined.

How has the rise of the "Creative Economy" and talent migration played a role in brain drain internationally and growing talent disparities between countries, and between mega-regions and non-mega-regions?

We can already see a strong emphasis on the importance of quality of place in the recent global battle for creative talent. Indeed, this stress on "place" will be greater than ever before as regions and communities compete for talented workers and experience (brain-gain). Regions will have to present a place that has all the characteristics of a complete and authentic community. This includes features such as a good job market/economy, diverse and accessible amenities (restaurants, arts, parks, etc.), appealing aesthetics, safe neighborhoods, and viable public transportation and connectivity.

In the world today, creative types have the ability to choose the community they wish to reside in. A region that wishes to advance must understand this trend, especially if they want to remain competitive in the global battle for talent.