Author: 'Talent, technology and tolerance' key to attracting creative workers

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A leading thinker on creativity believes attracting talented people is the driving force behind successful cities. In an interview with EurActiv, Richard Florida, author of 'The Rise of the Creative Class', said European countries are battling to attract and retain innovative people.

Richard Florida is author of 'Who's Your City?' and director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto.

You have suggested that attracting large numbers of 'creative types' to a city can help generate a more innovative and creative culture. Have many cities have put this theory into practice and how can European governments practically apply this idea?

For a place to prosper in the Creative Age, communities have to approach the global economy utilising a comprehensive framework for community and economic development. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, I presented a 3T approach to economic development that provides communities with a strategy for positioning their community for growth in the global economy.

Talent: The driving force behind any effective economic strategy is talented people. We live a more mobile age than ever before. People, especially top creative talent, move around a lot. A community's ability to attract and retain top talent is the defining issue of the creative age. As the global economy becomes more competitive, European countries, like other peer nations across the globe, will be challenged to attract and retain the brightest talent, as well as provide the necessary skill training and education opportunities to stay competitive.

Technology: Technology and innovation are critical components of a community or organisation's ability to drive economic growth. To be successful, communities and organisations must have the avenues for transferring research, ideas and innovation into marketable and sustainable products. European universities are paramount to this and provide the innovation infrastructure necessary for the creativity and technology transfer.

Tolerance: Economic prosperity relies on cultural, entrepreneurial, civic, scientific, and artistic creativity. Creative workers with these talents need communities, organisations and peers that are open to new ideas and different people. Europe has to continue to be a place that is receptive to immigration, alternative lifestyles and new views on social status and power structure.

What role do salaries and infrastructure play in attracting creative thinkers?

There is no disputing the importance of competitive wages and a strong infrastructure to attract creative workers. However, for organisations and companies to effectively attract and retain critical human capital, they must effectively manage their workers; it's the most important decision they can make for their future. There are three key principles employers can use to manage their creative thinkers.

First, an employer must eliminate distractions for its creative workers. This allows employees to remain fully engaged in their work. Some employers have done this by creating campuses that include schools, daycares, dry cleaners, etc. Second, managers are responsible for sparking creativity, which may include creating a workspace that has public art, landscape sculpture, and innovative uses of space. Finally, employers must engage creative workers as invested equals in the company's future. Creativity is embedded in relationships, and it thrives among people who have worked together a long time. If a company or organisation can keep people for 20 or 30 years, that human capital forms creative capital.

Since you published *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Web 2.0 has changed how we work. How do your ideas fit into the modern workplace, where teleworking is on the rise and online social networks are serving as virtual creative clusters?

Collaboration is an essential element of creativity and innovation. I think it's important to underscore the importance of clustering AND human networking. Creative workers need to be around other thinkers, innovative and knowledge workers. Web capabilities and

teleworking can extend a creative worker's ability to cluster and network, but cannot replace the importance of physical connectivity.

Your work has attracted some controversy, not least the suggestion than urban centres with more gay, foreign and bohemian types are happier than less cosmopolitan cities. Does the data support this?

Tolerance, social inclusion and openness are critical to the future success of a community or organisation. Research has proved time and time again that tolerant communities are more likely to attract coveted high-level human capital and technological innovation than those that are not. Indexes like the Gay and Bohemian Indexes help to quantify a signal of diversity of backgrounds that strengthen the creative process.

How do you counter the charge from critics that your Creative Class theory is elitist?

As I wrote in *The Rise of the Creative Class* and emphasised in *Who's Your City*, we have to tap into the creative talents of every single human being – not just the Creative Class. The greatest challenge we face is to expand the structures of the creative economy and harness the creativity of much larger segments of the workforce in the service and manufacturing sectors alike.

Economic growth is driven by creativity, so if we want to increase it, we have to utilise the creativity of everyone. We are all creative beings and have the potential to [contribute to] the creative economy.