

INTERVIEW WITH PROF. DR. RICHARD FLORIDA: REFLECTIONS ON THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

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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, a Distinguished Fellow at New York University's Schack Institute of Real Estate, and a Visiting Fellow at Florida International University.

He is 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.

He is an entrepreneur, as founder of the Creative Class Group which works closely with companies and governments worldwide. A 2013 MIT study named him the world's most influential thought leader. And *TIME* magazine recognized his Twitter feed as one of the 140 most influential in the world.

He previously taught at Carnegie Mellon, Ohio State University, and George Mason University, and has been a visiting professor at Harvard and MIT and Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution. He earned his Bachelor's degree from Rutgers College and his Ph.D. from Columbia University.

For more information about Richard Florida and his work: <http://www.creativeclass.com/>

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- 1. UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) defines the creative economy as economic, cultural and social aspects that interact with objectives of technology, intellectual property and tourism. Could you talk more about the concept of Creative Economy and your view on it?**

Prof. Dr. Richard Florida: I've defined the creative class as the more than 42 million Americans – 300 million workers worldwide – that are driving the creative economy. These workers include scientists, engineers, techies, innovators, and researchers, as well as artists, designers, writers and musicians. They are the key drivers of economic growth and the revitalization of cities. Examining the percentage of creative class workers in the largest American cities is a very strong indicator of the relative prosperity and economic prospects of each city. The top three major cities are Washington, D.C., Seattle, and San Francisco; some of the country's most significant hubs for tech innovation corporate headquarters. The major cities with the lowest creative class share are Detroit, Fresno, and Milwaukee; two post-industrial “rustbelt” cities, and a struggling agricultural community.

- 2. In your book “Cities and the creative class” New York: Routledge, 2005, you state that the level of education of individuals is an important factor in characterizing the so-called creative locales. Is the current educational model ready to stimulate the creative appeal of young people?**

Prof. Dr. Richard Florida: Educational systems need to emphasize more hands-on, in-person learning experience that stoke students' interests in the fastest-growing, most promising economic sectors. Schools need to be teaching skills that are relevant in today's economy, especially the STEM fields of science, technology, math, and engineering. Humanities fields that develop critical thinking and inter-personal skills are essential as well. Creative synthesis comes from a mix of these left and right brain skill sets. To get students out of the classroom and into the real world, schools should emphasize partnerships with companies and governments, and more foreign exchange programs. Creativity comes from exposure to new ideas, and challenging, real world situations, not from sitting in a classroom.

3. Could the Creative Economy be able to provide economic development in a sustainable and inclusive way in peripheral countries, thus reducing the gap between rich and poor countries?

Prof. Dr. Richard Florida: My own research and the research of others increasingly demonstrates that the creative economy can actually increase inequality in cities and communities. There are two principal strategies to combat this side-effect of 21st century economic. The first is to increase onramps to the creative class, whether through improved access to education and skills training, or explicit diversity initiatives by companies, governments and other institutions. Of course, society will always require more rote, low-skill jobs, including retail, homecare, custodial work, etc. So the other key to sustainable, equitable economic development is to upgrade these service sector jobs through higher wages, more autonomy, and more stability. That's exactly what labor unions did for low-wage manufacturing jobs in the middle of the 20th century, and now it needs to happen again for service class jobs.

4. Could the growing increase in activities related to the Creative Economy lead to the emergence of new forms of market? Something more focused on the social, cultural and cooperation than oriented toward consumption.

Prof. Dr. Richard Florida: Absolutely. Creative work unlocks new forms of commerce, new markets. This is especially true in the cities where the creative class are concentrated. The so-called "experience economy" is a powerful example, with online retailers like Warby Parker and Amazon increasing opening brick and mortar stores. In the experience economy, places like restaurants, bars, gyms, and performance venues are seeing high rates of growth because people are increasingly willing to pay for unique, exciting, in-person experiences. The rise of the creative class in cities has also led to a whole new business category, which I call the urban tech sector. This includes businesses that enable a more seamless experience of the city, like Uber, Yelp, and Airbnb, or else monetize urban data and functioning, like the real estate startup Trulia, or Google's Sidewalk Labs experiment in Toronto.

5. What policies can national and local governments adopt to create creative cities and creative people? Could you say a little more about your Creativity Index?

Prof. Dr. Richard Florida: I like to say that there are 3Ts of economic development: Talent, technology, and tolerance. The 3T's approach represents a comprehensive strategy for organizations, cities, regions and countries to compete and prosper in the creative age. In our ultra-mobile age, talented people move around a lot. Companies, cities, and even countries need to create the climate that naturally attracts talented people, through economic, cultural, and quality of life initiatives.

Technology is at the heart of the contemporary economy. Every company is a tech company now. To grow economically cities and countries need to foster a vibrant tech ecosystem. High quality research universities are key, since they produce the innovations and talent that can power a tech hub, like Stanford and Berkeley in Silicon Valley, or MIT and Harvard in Boston.

Finally, tolerance is important because it creates a climate where people feel they can take risks, be themselves, and express their creativity. Diversity promotes creative friction, as different people and ideas come together to form new synergies. Places receptive to immigration, alternative lifestyles, and new views on social status and power structures are and will continue to be the winners of the creative age. "Weird" cities like San Francisco, Austin, and Seattle are magnets for innovation, not conservative cities with anti-immigrant, anti-gay, and anti-woman policies.