

***Who's Your City?: How the Creative Economy is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life* by Richard Florida. Perseus Books Group, Philadelphia, PA, 2008. 374 pages**

Book Review by:

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The advent of new technologies and the age of globalization is said to have decreased the importance of place. Thomas L. Friedman, foreign affairs columnist at *The New York Times*, famously declared that the world is indeed flat. A flat world allows people to work from an airplane, Paris or wherever modern communication signals extend. Contra Friedman, Richard Florida, author of *Who's Your City?*, asserts that globalization increases the importance of place.

Florida is currently a professor of Business and Creativity at the University of Toronto. His first bestseller, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, described the new class of creative individuals who will drive the 21st Century economy. *Who's Your City?* argues cities hoping to be successful will have to attract highly mobile members of the creative class. Though members of the creative class are mobile, they are choosing to concentrate into distinct cities and regions around the country.

From tech experts in Silicon Valley to financial analysts in New York City our cities are becoming concentrated hubs of highly productive specialized activities. *Who's Your City?* emphasizes the importance of place for both cities within regions and individuals as globalization further changes the economic landscape.

Using light-intensity data linked to economic activity, Florida was able to understand the effects of globalization. He found "the world's ten largest mega-regions in terms of economic activity...house approximately 6.5 percent of the world's

population, account for 43 percent of economic activity, 57 percent of patented technologies, and 53 percent of the most-cited scientists” (p. 48). Florida describes this phenomenon as “the spiky world,” which offers a three-dimensional approach to geography. Florida’s concept of economic activity in a “spiky world” shows large peaks where economic activity is the greatest. The United States, Europe, and Japan have large spikes while other parts of the world such as Africa contain valleys, indicating little economic activity. Clearly, place does matter on a global scale.

Not only does Florida explain the impact of place economically, but also how place can affect our well being. The Place and Happiness Survey, Florida explains, identifies the “Big Five” personality traits which include openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. These five personality types that “Personality psychologists have empirically verified ... in scores of research studies, and have found that ... [the] traits are rooted in biology, stable over time, and that they are consistent across cultures” (p. 191).

Mapping the results, Florida depicts regions of the country with distinct personality traits from neuroticism in the Northeast to agreeableness in the South’s ‘Bible Belt’. According to Florida, finding the right geographical ‘fit’ will help people to live happier lives. He adds where to live high among major life changing decisions, making many people rethink the importance of place throughout their lives.

Florida does not deny that new technologies have changed the world. At the same time, those technological developments have not made place meaningless. Friedman’s concept of a flat world is not untrue, but Florida suggests adding a third dimension to truly understand the impact of globalization. Maps are Florida’s main tools in illustrating his argument. The maps are striking and tell an instant story about the differences in place. Analyzing the Place and Happiness Survey in conjunction with understanding the geography of personalities describes the unique characteristics across the United States. Interviews with many people in different stages of life, allows Florida to portray how large issues like globalization can affect the lives of millions.

Florida starts *Who's Your City?* by painting an economic portrait of the world using data and maps. Florida continues to emphasize the importance of place by describing socio-economic factors that successful cities possess. Stressing the importance of place, Florida takes his lofty ideas and applies them to the individual. He contends that certain people are drawn together, which in turn creates cities that reflect their citizens' characteristics. Being happy, according to Florida, strongly depends upon place.

Finally, Florida breaks down place according to life's stages. A city that is great for college students may not be the best for families. Finding the right 'fit' depends on the person and his or her life's stage. The author may not have all the answers, but it certainly can be a guide for people ready to make a big move.

While Florida presents strong reasons for people to consider where to live as important as what their career should be, his message is directed towards those with the ability for voluntary mobility. Many people in the United States and the world for many reasons cannot move – or are forced to move – because of changing economic realities. Florida understands that as some places concentrate higher amounts of wealth and educated workers, other places will feel the pain of losing wealth and educated workers. He should develop an argument explaining how disadvantaged cities can compete with their wealthier and more educated counterparts.

Florida fails to describe the implications of his understanding. If 6.5 percent of the population lives in an area that produces nearly half the world's economic output, what happens to the other 93.5 percent? Florida should explain how people could adapt to this developing economic scenario. Florida's idea of a spiky world has far reaching implications, but he fails to explore it fully.

Some credit Florida more for bringing cohesion among many existing ideas instead of developing new ideas. Edward Glaeser, professor of economics at Harvard has pointed out that Florida's idea of creative cities stems from Jane Jacobs and other urban theorists. Glaeser further calls into question Florida's super-star cities idea.

Glaeser does not agree that cities must be open to diversity or rank high in Florida's 'bohemian rank' to be successful.

Citing Plano, Texas, Glaeser (2004) suggests creative people are attracted to the same things other well-off people like: including good schools, big yards, and easy commutes. However, urban planners are applying Florida's ideas. For instance, the 'Cool City' initiative in Michigan is trying to revive older industrial cities throughout the state by attracting the creative class. Only time will tell if the program will attract creative people and whether that leads to economic success.

Florida is a renowned scholar, but this book is not primarily for academics. It creates a fascinating argument about why location is important in a globalizing world. Anyone who plans to move or make a transition in life would find Florida's insights especially relevant. Florida explains the implications of place globally as well as for individuals. A young college graduate ready to start a career or an empty-nester couple looking to live an active retirement will find the book a valuable tool to make a good decision. Ultimately, Florida has produced a guide for the over 40 million Americans that decide to move annually.