

## **BBC Global Business**

### **Meet the Presenter**



In this edition of Global Business Peter Day hears from Professor Richard Florida of the Rotman School of Management in Toronto, Canada, where he's the Academic Director of the [Martin Prosperity Institute](#).

Richard Florida is a leading thinker on the nature of cities.

He grew up in Newark in the USA, and it was, he says, the failure of this city that got him interested in urbanism.

He's also the author of a number of books, most recently ['Who's Your City'](#), which looks at the way that people choose the places they live and how that affects everything from their real estate to their families.

Here Richard Florida talks to Peter Day about the new shape of cities, what companies do not understand about them, and what business can learn from them in Global Business

### **About this programme by Peter Day**

Cities, don't you hate them?

Don't you love them, too?

They do seem to divide people.

Amazing how little has changed in the two thousand years since Aesop wrote his revealing fable about the Town Mouse and the Country Mouse, and how unfitted each mouse was for the other kind of life.

It may seem unlikely to those of use who live in the middle of great urban muddles, but the latin word civis, or citizen, is at the heart of the word civilisation.

It's what happens when people crowd together and start scrambling over each other for light and opportunities.

Even though cities seem always to tremble on the edge of extinction if the supply chains into them falter for even a few days, they show amazing vitality.

In this week's Global Business, you can hear from a noted urbanist, Professor Richard Florida from the Rotman School of Management in Toronto.

Inspired by the wonderful writings on the vitality of the urban neighbourhood of his fellow American the late Jane Jacobs, Richard Florida has long been looking at cities through the eyes of what he calls the creative classes.

In particular he is fascinated by the way that edgy bohemian areas produce interesting urban developments: colonies of artists at the cutting edge of change.

This has widespread application to business activity.

In a Global Business interview a year ago the noted management guru Gary Hamel asked why corporate headquarters were (on the whole) so boring, so unlike the creative parts of cities: Notting Hill in London or Soho in New York?

It's a fascinating question.

Great cities vibrate with confusion and diversity, muddle and chaos.

Great big companies look for uniformity.

The huge silicon chip makers Intel (for example) insists that its buildings all use the same layout, paintwork and lavatory fittings.

"Copy exactly," is the corporate watchword, designed to make fabulously complicated production processes easier to roll out and ramp up on a global basis.

An error in one place can be corrected using the experience of somewhere else, immediately.

A global similarity of doorknobs or lavatory doors emphasises this as a corporate virtue.

That may be OK for chip making, but it is stultifying for almost everything else.

Most big companies seem engaged in a constant quest to unify the world they move in and make it conform to their own, quantifiable values.

The human spirit exhibited by their customers runs counter to this, and they should try to respect and reflect it.

Companies should learn from the cities they have fled from.

As the chaos and complexity experts tell you, the most interesting things happen on the edge.

That's where the life is.

**Contributor**

Professor Richard Florida of the Rotman School of Management in Toronto, Canada

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