

The image shows a screenshot of the website 'Barcelona Metròpolis' with the subtitle 'Capital en transformació'. The navigation menu includes 'Home', 'Editorial', 'Interview', 'Dossier', 'Miscellany', and 'Videos'. The article is titled 'Barcelona can offer everyone a creative environment' by Marta Marin-Dòmine. It features social media sharing buttons for Facebook (1 Like), Twitter (0 Tweet), and Google+ (0 +1). The article text states: 'For a place to harness creativity, it must be open to the creativity of all. Not just techies or the creative class, but everyone,' argues Richard Florida. For the author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, openness is a key factor in a city's economic growth. A sidebar on the right contains a graphic with the text 'Barcelona Metròpolis Capital en transformació' and 'Marca Barcelona'.



Richard Florida (Newark, New Jersey, 1957) is a professor of economic and social theory at the University of Toronto, and is regarded as one of the most influential intellectuals in the United States. Florida coined the concept of “creative class” in his seminal essay, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, in which he holds that the creative classes are key to cities’ economic growth and urban vitality. A place’s prosperity is directly proportional to the density of creative people who live there. According to Florida, the creative classes choose their city of residence depending more on the levels of tolerance and cultural attraction than on the job market.

Richard Florida, a pioneer in the design of the new geoeconomic mapping of the 21st century, argues that growth and innovation in this century will come from the new mega-regions and urban corridors. In *Who’s Your City?* (Basic Books, 2008), Florida argues that Barcelona is the epicentre of the world’s 11th mega-region, which straddles the Mediterranean arc, a hub of economic activity that is not confined to a country’s borders. Florida calls it the *Euro-Sunbelt*: it extends from Alicante to Lyon, with three underpinning cities: Lyon–Barcelona–Valencia. According to Florida, in the future, the mega-region will be more important than the megalopolis, and city networks more relevant than state borders. Beyond its tourist appeal, Barcelona’s great business opportunity lies in the transformation of the port into the gateway for incoming Asian trade with Europe.

Marta Marín-Dòmine has discussed all these topics with Richard Florida, as well as the concept of the brand applied to cities, since the Barcelona brand enjoys the main focus in this issue of *Metropolis*. Florida argues that “a brand must reflect the place’s authenticity. A top-down approach only works when the brand conveys the city’s uniqueness and soul.”

Throughout history, the groups that you regard as “creative talent” (artists and bohemians) have been key in fostering all kinds of dissent against political power and domination. How do you see this potential seed of dissent in the city renewal process?

Creative talent, like artists and bohemians, has always been the driving force behind cities. A city’s ability to develop an ecosystem that is supportive and attractive to creative talent is one of the defining issues of the creative age. It is critical to remember that economic prosperity relies on cultural, entrepreneurial, civic, scientific, and artistic creativity. Cities receptive to new views on social status and power structures are ultimately the ones that will thrive in the creative age.

The urban movements of resistance against what we can roughly define as neo-liberalism that have appeared in cities such as Barcelona and Madrid have demonstrated the creative power of local grass-roots associations and their willingness to redefine relations between neighbourhoods. From your perspective, are these movements a positive or a negative development for city renewal? Could they create a problem when attracting capital and growth to the city?

I do not see this as a negative aspect for Barcelona or Madrid. I have always said that we have to create cities that are representative and open to everyone. For a place to harness creativity, it must be open to the creativity of all. Not just techies or the creative class, but everyone. My mantra is simple: “Every single human being is creative.” Creativity does not recognise or tolerate the social categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or others which we have imposed on ourselves. Openness is key to economic growth, not an add-on or afterthought.

While it is true that many western European cities have attracted tourism and foreign capital due to their concentration of culture, it is also a fact that this situation has affected local richness. How do you envisage the protection of the local against the global and the role of the creative class in this?

Many people believe it’s about building the next cool or hip community, but it’s not. The real key to attracting and retaining talent is about creating and building sustainable communities that are authentic and representative of the city’s values. We know through our research that creative workers want and need environments that allow them to thrive and freely be themselves.

As you know, the conservation of historical heritage is a key factor within the debate of urban renewal, not only in European cities but also in North America. How can creative talent and economic growth benefit from the conservation of this heritage, often perceived as an obstacle for the renewal of city centres?

According to a recent happiness and place study from Gallup, both a community's aesthetics and authenticity are extremely important. Conserving a city's heritage can play an important role in maintaining a community's overall appeal. Our research indicates that the higher a community's beauty is rated, the higher the overall level of satisfaction of the community's residents. Human beings crave physical beauty. We look for authenticity, beauty and uniqueness in so many of the things that surround us, and especially in the communities and places we live in. I believe conserving history and heritage can go a long way to helping achieve this.

In your book *Cities and the Creative Class* (2005), you place Barcelona at the centre of the world's 11th-biggest mega-region. How do you see Barcelona today in the context of the new crisis that is scourging southern Europe? What challenges will Barcelona face in the next 20 years?

As a creative centre, Barcelona's challenges in the future are like those of many of its peers, brought on by an urban environment in expansion: congestion, the growing divide between the haves and the have-nots, etc. That said, I believe Barcelona's greatest potential lies in its ability to tap into the creativity of everyone. The biggest challenge of the creative age for cities like Barcelona is to lift the bottom up and encourage a prosperous, sustainable community for all. This includes not just creative class jobs, but also jobs in the service and production sectors as well. As I wrote in my recent book, *The Rise of the Creative Class – Revisited*, I believe every job can and must be creatified; every worker must be empowered to harness his or her own inner entrepreneur. By doing so, we'll build a stronger economy, enhance social cohesion and create the demand that can help drive the economy forward.

Barcelona has a strong city brand whose attraction comes from its Mediterranean climate and cuisine, Gaudí's architecture, its football team, the Gay quarter (GaiEixample) and from its status as the host city for the Mobile World Congress. Do you think that having a defined brand could limit Barcelona's possibilities for further renewal?

Effective city branding has to be about real authenticity. A top-down approach only works when the branding captures the authenticity and soul of the city. In Barcelona's case, this is about building a reputation that is inclusive of everyone – a brand that embraces Barcelona's creativity and differences and does not squelch them. As one of the most creative centres in the world, Barcelona has an ethos that speaks to creative people; Barcelona's brand has to boldly reflect that.