

Winnipeg Free Press

Canadian manual for successful urbanism

Reviewed by Michael Dudley

Who's Your City?

How the Creative Economy is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life -- Canadian Edition

By Richard Florida

Vintage Canada, 392 pages, \$22

PLACE matters. It affects your career chances, your choice of life partner, and, according to transplanted American economist Richard Florida, your chances for personal happiness and fulfillment.

In fact, place matters so much to Florida that, upon his arrival in Toronto (to assume his post as professor of business and creativity at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto), he decided to revise for a Canadian audience his most recent book, *Who's Your City?*, released a year ago.

This is no quickie "Canadian edition" with token references to Toronto thrown in: it is extensively rewritten, so much so that it almost constitutes a new book.

To be sure, Florida's principal ideas remain much the same. We are still dealing with a "spiky" world of concentrated talent and economic clustering, not Thomas Friedman's "flat" world in which location is of little consequence.

Florida describes how the "clustering force" tends to draw people and economic activity into certain key regions rather than to others. As a result, we are becoming segregated according to economic class and chosen urban lifestyles.

To demonstrate how talent, opportunity and quality of life criteria are distributed (and concentrated) north of the 49th parallel, Florida and his team of collaborators generated (or took advantage of) new data, new maps and new analysis. These are augmented by more than 40 life histories by Canadians describing their own place-finding experiences.

Unsurprisingly, Canada's main mega-regions of Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa-Gatineau, and Montreal are most frequently cited as the best places to live. In fact, Florida's new home of Toronto appears in the index no fewer than

57 times. Montreal follows with 31 page references, and Vancouver with 28.

Winnipeg, alas, is mentioned a mere three times, though two of these references emphasize our city's creativity (did you know we boast 12 per cent of the country's musicians with only 2.25 per cent of its population?).

While Florida has taken the opportunity to update a few of his observations in light of the current economic crisis, some of his arguments have been undermined by recent events. For example, to illustrate the specialized professions that make London and New York so productive he cites investment fund firms, which now reads like a poor joke. As with most observers, events have outpaced his pen.

However, Florida has just this past month directly addressed our crashing economy in the pages of *The Atlantic* magazine, and concludes that while our already "spiky" regions will fare reasonably well, this crisis represents an opportunity to be smarter about urban growth and to make these "elite" cities more affordable and diverse.

Similar good advice waits in these pages. The Canadian version of *Who's Your City?* is not only a highly engaging portrait of our very urban country, but, like the first edition, a manual for successful urbanism.

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