



Florida's Future

By Richard Florida



Florida's public policy-makers must recognize that mega-regions are the engines of the new global economy. They must support Florida's mega — the 15th largest in the world.

Thinking BIG

Every night millions of Floridians switch on billions of lights in a display that reveals a historic shift in economic power across the state and around the world — the rise of the mega-region.

When viewed from the right perspective on a clear night — from, say, a satellite in orbit — it is possible to trace an unbroken chain of urban light from Miami to Orlando and beyond, stretching west to Tampa and along two northern offshoots to Gainesville and up the Atlantic coast to Jacksonville.

That chain — and the energy consumption it represents — clearly defines the economic musculature of the state: An agglomeration of city-regions that forms the seventh-largest mega-region in North America and the 15th-largest in the world. It is home to some 15 million people, and it generates \$430 billion in economic activity each year.

Our thinking about economic growth has



long been dominated by the nation-state, yet this is no longer where the action is. The mega-region is now the true engine of the global economy and our most important social organizing unit.

Extending far beyond a single city and its suburbs, mega-regions comprise vast swaths of trade, transport, innovation and talent, often stretching across multiple jurisdictions and even national borders. They harness human creativity on a massive scale, generating a disproportionate share of global economic activity and — crucially — an even larger share of scientific discovery and innovation.

While there are almost 200 nations, there are currently only 40 significant mega-regions. Yet they account for two-thirds of all economic activity and more than 85% of global innovation. The 10 largest mega-regions in terms of

economic activity are home to about 416 million people, or 6.5% of the world's population, yet they produce 43% of global economic activity (\$13.4 trillion), are home to 57% of the most-cited scientists and create 53% of global innovation ["Mega-Regions Around the World," page 90].

The largest mega is greater Tokyo (55 million people and \$2.5 trillion in economic activity), followed by the 500-mile Boston-New York-Washington corridor (54 million people, \$2.2 trillion) and the Chicago-Pittsburgh mega (46 million people, \$1.6 trillion). Other American megas include northern California and agglomerations that run from Los Angeles to Tijuana, from Charlotte to Atlanta, and from Houston to New Orleans. Overseas, significant megas can be found around Amsterdam, London,

Night Lights:

A composite NASA satellite image shows Earth's mega-regions.

Osaka and Nagoya, Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong-Shenzhen.

The Florida Mega-Region

So what makes the Florida mega-region tick? Each component of the Florida mega has its own personality and makes a different economic and creative contribution, but obviously the Big Three are Miami, Orlando and Tampa, which together generate more than 40% of gross state product (GSP).

In terms of the creative economy, Miami's strengths include its roles as a center for Latin American business operations and finance and for fashion, design and Latin television, film and music. (Slightly to the north, Fort Lauderdale's

Mega-Regions of North America



tourism and marine industry-based economy contributes another 10% of GSP.)

There is also considerable capacity in arts and entertainment technology in Orlando — called Hollywood East by some and home, of course, to Disney World, a major incubator for pop culture. Probably best known for its tourism and convention trade, Orlando was nominated by *BusinessWeek* as a global “hot spot” for innovation in 2006. Other important sectors for the region include: Defense, engineering and the largest modeling, simulation and training cluster in the U.S. The University of Central Florida is the nation’s sixth-largest and the anchor for the neighboring Central Florida Research Park.

Over on the Gulf coast, Tampa has the nation’s seventh-largest port and ninth-largest university — the University of South Florida. An important local development group, the Tampa Bay Partnership, identifies five key industry clusters for the region — avionics, defense and marine electronics; business and information services; biomedical and life sciences; port and maritime; and manufacturing. With the Creative Tampa Bay program, the city has aggressively adopted a creative industry agenda and developed initiatives to attract and retain young people. (Interestingly, when it comes to social diversity, Tampa has the fifth-highest proportion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens of major metro areas in the U.S.)

Florida’s High-Tech Corridor, a 23-county area that runs from Tampa to the Space Coast on the Atlantic, houses thousands of creative companies in fields ranging from aviation and aerospace to microelectronics

Mega-Regions Around the World

Region	Population (millions)	Mega-region economy (billions)	Innovation/patents (rank)	Star scientists (rank)
Greater Tokyo	55.1	\$2,500	2	24
Bos-Wash	54.3	2,200	8	2
Chi-Pitts	46.0	1,600	9	14
Am-Brus-Twerp	59.3	1,500	22	18
Osaka-Nagoya	36.0	1,400	7	22
Lon-Leed-Chester	50.1	1,200	25	10
Rom-Mil-Tur	48.3	1,000	34	23
Char-lanta	22.4	730	16	9
So-Cal	21.4	710	13	4
Frank-Gart	23.1	630	21	12
Barce-Lyon	25.0	610	24	20
Tor-Buff-Chester	22.1	530	19	7
Seoul-San	46.1	500	6	32
So-Flo	15.1	430	17	17
Fuku-Kyushu	18.5	430	23	19
Paris	14.7	380	4	16
Dal-Austin	10.4	370	14	13
Hou-Orleans	9.7	330	15	5
Mexico City	45.5	290	35	32
Cascadia	8.9	260	10	3
Rio-Paulo	43.4	230	32	32
Hong-Zhen	44.9	220	28	31
Sapporo	4.3	200	27	32
Vienna-Budapest	21.8	180	26	29
Tel Aviv-Amman-Beirut	30.9	160	31	21
Prague	10.4	150	12	25
Buenos Aires	14.0	150	33	32
Denver-Boulder	3.7	140	5	6
Phoenix-Tucson	4.7	140	11	15
Shanghai	66.4	130	30	32
Taipei	21.8	130	36	30
Lisbon	9.9	110	36	28
Beijing	43.1	110	29	32
Delhi-Lahore	121.6	110	36	32
Glas-burgh	3.8	110	18	8
Berlin	4.1	110	1	11
Singapore	6.1	100	36	27
Madrid	5.9	100	20	26
Bangkok	19.2	100	36	32

Source: Richard Florida

Mega-Regions of Europe



Mega-Regions of Asia



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and optics to medical technologies.

Other highlights within the mega include Gainesville (home to the University of Florida — the nation's second-largest); Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville (the Space Coast — site of NASA's Kennedy Space Center, the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station and a multitude of defense and high-tech companies); and Palm Beach (another emerging high-tech center).

Tallahassee lies a little beyond the light-defined borders of the mega but is intimately connected to it through trade, politics and economic development. It is also home to the graduate research-focused Florida State University, one of the state system's flagships. For the past year, my Creative Class Group has been involved with the Knight Creative Communities Initiative in an innovative effort to foster the creative environment in Tallahassee and to attract and retain young professionals. The success of that initiative to date and the Creative Tampa Bay program demonstrates how such community-driven efforts can make a big difference.

In my own Creativity Index for U.S. regions with more than 1 million people, West Palm Beach (23), Tampa (26), Miami (29), Orlando (32) and Jacksonville (37) all rank in the top 40. Melbourne makes the top 10 for regions between 250,000 and 500,000 people, and Gainesville comes in at No. 2 for regions with fewer than 250,000 people.

But, of course, the key point about these creative centers is their collective power, and this is what makes the Florida mega-region a global player.

The Talent Quest

In today's world economy, the real competition is not between the U.S. and China, India or Brazil. Instead, specific regions in the U.S. and Canada are battling specific regions based around Shanghai, China; Bangalore, India; and São Paulo, Brazil. Mega-regions are now the engines of growth, and we must do all we can to maintain and improve their competitiveness with the rest of the world.

The global system of cities and regions is going through the same kind of consolidation that once reshaped industries like steel, car manufacturing and electronics. Many second- and third-tier city-regions in the U.S. are likely to be hit hard, as both global and domestic mega-regions up the ante, accelerating rates of innovation and drawing in the most skilled workers. This last point is crucial, as what matters most today is not where most people settle but where the greatest number of the most skilled people settle. This is a global competition for talent.

And increasingly the most skilled people get to choose where they live, drawn by the aesthetic qualities of a place, the standards of basic services and the openness, diversity and tolerance of a community.

With its beaches, temperate climate and highly diverse population (third-most diverse in the U.S., behind only California and Nevada), Florida has many advantages in this regard. But what is needed — in Florida and across the U.S. — is public policy that recognizes the rise of the mega-regions and works to support them.

The Florida mega needs to improve the connectivity between its hubs and

satellites. (This spring my wife and I were blown around like a kite on a puddle-jumper flight from Tampa to Miami. In Europe or Japan that would have been a pleasant ride on a fast train.) Florida must also try to increase urban density — without going overboard — as a population's concentration is a key driver of innovation and productivity. And each of the mega's cities and communities must identify and hone unique strengths and assets, for two reasons. In the wake of globalization, economic activity is specializing and clustering — think Nashville for music; High Point, N.C., for furniture; or Silicon Valley for high-tech. Also, people with the freedom to choose their location seek the authentic and run away from the generic.

Most of all, long-term success will rely on developing new structures and methods to help all the pieces of the Florida mega-region work together. Why not make it the first mega-region in the U.S., indeed the world, to organize itself for the mega-competition? Every place, every resident stands to gain. And the mega, all its cities and regions, will be better-positioned to thrive in the new global economy. 



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