

## Province can get creative: theorist

Published Wednesday October 1st, 2008

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For the Telegraph-Journal

New Brunswick may be lightly populated and relatively rural, but the province is well positioned both economically and geographically to do well in a continually shifting fiscal and social climate, says prominent social theorist Richard Florida.

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The Associated Press

Richard Florida, the social theorist and professor at the University of Toronto's Joseph L. Rotman School of Management who has written a number of best-selling books exploring the notion of cities, speaks tonight at the Saint John Trade and Convention Centre in a celebration honouring four New Brunswick researchers funded by the New Brunswick Innovation Fund.

Austin, Texas (36.4 per cent).

Florida said all three New Brunswick cities also have 15 to 20 per cent of their workers in the creative core, a part of the creative class that includes scientists and engineers, professors and writers, artists and architects, and think-tank researchers and opinion makers - people who produce new forms or designs that can be broadly used.

Thirdly, the province is in a nice part of the country, situated along the eastern seaboard, and more importantly, in close proximity to what Florida has deemed the second-largest mega region on Earth.

"It's small in terms of population and it's mainly a rural province, but it's in a pretty darn nice part of the world," he said in anticipation of today's visit to Saint John that will see him the featured speaker at the R3 gala, a celebration honouring four New Brunswick researchers funded by the New Brunswick Innovation Fund, at the Saint John Trade and Convention Centre. "And it's in a part of the world - and I'm thinking east - that is really one of the major constellations of the creative economy in the world."

Of course, Florida is talking about the 800-kilometre Boston-Washington, D.C. corridor that he has found generates \$2.2-trillion in economy activity.

New Hampshire and Maine, from Portland south, are considered the northern edge of this mega region which he defines as a geographic area that hosts business and economic activity on a large scale, and generates a lion's share of the world's economic activity, innovation and technological discoveries.

Florida - whose previous two books, *The Rise of the Creative Class* and *The Flight of the Creative Class*, became bestsellers - said this puts New Brunswick in a desirable location, only a day's drive away from Boston.

"I think that New Brunswick, the more it links to that the better," he said.

"I know New Brunswick is a little farther north, but if you think of the kind of development that occurred in Maine and particularly southern Maine - as it became an extension of the greater Boston economy - I think there are real opportunities for that creative economy to migrate north."

Florida, who is now compiling data for the Canadian version of *Who's Your City?*, said the province has these assets on which it needs to capitalize.

"I think the key thing is figuring out how to do that. That's what is so important for much of Canada: shifting from a natural resources and raw materials kind of economy, and using that wealth to become more of a creative economy, and linking there to what I think of as the broad eastern seaboard, is really the key."

Florida did provide some advice on how New Brunswick could accomplish that.

Firstly, it needs to attract immigrants, and capitalize on Canada's role in a mosaic society.

"Begin to become a place where all of this influx of global talent can find and make a home, that would be something that I would really stress."

Secondly, it needs to make its cities more attractive to its college and university students, who hail from across Canada, the United States, and around the world.

"Put them more on the radar screen beyond their educational experience," he said. "And also, make sure those colleges and universities up their share of foreign students. Those are students that are very keen to give it a go in a new country. They are looking to migrate, they are looking for a better life than

where they come from for them and their families.

"I think really trying to attract and retain foreign students is a huge potential area of opportunity for New Brunswick."

The province also needs to harness their energy and use their connections to their native countries to expand the province's markets.

"The Diaspora provide a fantastic way of opening those markets and gaining access and developing partnerships," Florida said. "I would say that is one area that I would think there is enormous opportunity for New Brunswick because it's now becoming global on the inside, with its foreign students, to be more connected to the world economy by proactively utilizing that as a resource."

Florida hopes to provide his New Brunswick audience tonight an outline of the way he sees the world and how he sees the economy evolving from a natural resource-based, raw materials-based, blue-collar economy "to one really where the source of value and economic growth comes from the human mind and its creativity.

"You would think that would make place less relevant," he said, "but it in fact it makes place more relevant because people are clustering for economic reasons, social reasons, lifestyle reasons into geographic areas - cities."

Instead of dictating a pathway for New Brunswick, however, Florida wants to give his New Brunswick audience a framework to think about.

"Then, if people are interested, we can do follow-up work in trying to understand better trends and weaknesses. I think that requires a much more applied approach, and really building a team of people in New Brunswick and its constituent metros who really want to dig in."