

Talking Travel with Richard Florida, author of *Who's Your City?*

by [Aaron Hotfelder](#) May 1st 2008 @ 8:20AM

The Age How did you decide where you'd call home for your adult life? If you're like most people, the decision wasn't much of a decision at all. Chances are, you found yourself in a particular place through a combination of career inertia and personal attachments.

It seems that not many people give a whole lot of thought to the question of where exactly they're going to spend most of their lives. But economist, author, and [Colbert Report](#) guest [Richard Florida](#) argues in his new book, [Who's Your City](#), that this is one of the most important and underrated decisions people will ever make.

Recently, I interviewed Prof. Florida about this thought-provoking idea, and he explained why the choice of where to live is more important than ever, why it's a decision so often overlooked, and how to find the perfect city for you.

AH: People take great pains in considering what careers to pursue and whom to marry, but little thought is given to *where* they will spend the bulk of their lives. Why is that?

RF: When making life decisions, we have always thought of two questions: the "what" and the "who." What will I do (i.e. job, career path, educational training), and "who" will I do it with (i.e. life partner, friends, etc.) Without question, both of those decisions – the "what" and the "who" – mean a great deal to our lives. But there is another decision that has an equal, if not greater, effect on our economic future, happiness, and overall life outcome. The question of "where."

Finding the right place is as important as- if not more important than- finding the right job or partner because it not only influences those choices but also determines how easy or hard it will be to correct mistakes made along the way. Still, few of us actually look at a place that way. Perhaps it's because this seems so obvious that people overlook it or, most likely, so few of us have the understanding or mental framework necessary to make informed choices about our location. In *Who's Your City*, I provide my readers with a guide for making their place decisions the most successful they can be.

AH: In your new book, you write that, rather than technology "flattening" the earth, the world is actually becoming "spiky." If technology essentially allows people to work from anywhere, why do you claim that the choice of where to live is now more important than ever?

RF: The place we choose to live is the most important decision we ever make, largely because it influences and shapes all the others: from job opportunities and career options

to our investments, the friends we make, the people we date, the mates we ultimately choose and the way we raise our families. Place remains the central axis of our time-more important to the world economy and our individual lives than ever before.

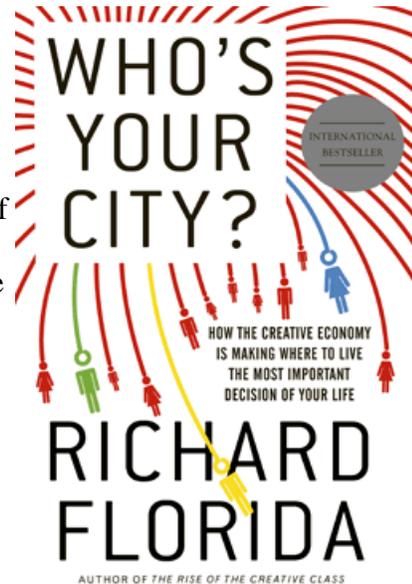
AH: What are the best ways to discover whether I'll enjoy living somewhere *before* I actually move there? Just visit and walk around?

RF: The thing to remember is that when it comes to place, like most other important things in life, we can't have it all. There are real tradeoffs to be made. Many, if not most, people who move for their careers will give up the joy of being near family and lifelong friends. Those of us who choose to stay close to family and friends may give up economic opportunity. It's important to determine what's important to you and your lifestyle.

When making a place decision, here are a few steps to think about -

1. Get your priorities straight – determine what's important to you and your lifestyle.
2. Generate a short list – which places fit your needs and wants? Think about using a place calculator.
3. We have one at www.whosyourcity.com
4. Do your homework - how's the job market? What's the public sentiment in newspapers? Talk with people from city.
5. Evaluate – what do your places offer you? Good access to jobs (if that's important to you) or top-notch quality of life (i.e. access to arts, outdoors, public transportation)
6. Check the basics - does your place offer the basic health and safety, education, and housing needs?
7. Check values. Do the values of place match yours?
8. Tally up - How did your short list stack up against each other?
9. Go visit the places. Talk to people on the streets.

AH: By and large, people make their lives in the towns in which they were raised. Most people *don't* move, even when they'd rather be living somewhere else. Is this because people have a sense they'll be abandoning their friends and family, a bias towards the status quo, both?



RF: You have to think of this question through an additional dimension of socioeconomic class that I outline in *Who's Your City* – the "mobile" and the "rooted." The "mobile" possess the means, resources, and inclination to seek out and move to locations where they can leverage their talents. They are not necessarily born mobile, nor are they inevitably rich. What the mobile understand is that the pursuit of economic opportunity often requires them to move.

A far greater number constitute the rooted-people who are tied to place. Some, of course, have the good fortune to be rooted in places with thriving economies and optimistic futures.

But many others are essentially trapped in areas with limited resources, moribund economies, and declining financial opportunities. Of course, many are born poor and do not possess the resources to move. But not all of those who are rooted are stuck because of economic circumstance. Many people with the means to move choose to stay rooted. Sometimes they are satisfied with the lives they lead, even if they know they could potentially do better elsewhere. This isn't always a bad thing; research indicates that being near to family and friends and seeing them regularly can increase our well-being and happiness.

AH: You write that the world is not flat, but that it is flat and spiky at the same time. Can you explain what you mean by that?

RF: Economic activity is concentrating in a select group of mega-regions, which are new and incredibly powerful economic units. A mega-region is an area that hosts business and economic activity on a large scale, generating a lion's share of the world's economic activity and an even larger share of the world's innovation and technological discoveries. Worldwide there are just 40 significant mega regions, which are home to 1/5 of the world's population, 2/3's of the global economic output and 85% of all worldwide innovation.

Comparatively to each other, these regions are relatively flat – competing with each other for technology and a higher state in the global economy. However, the gap between the mega regions and the rest of the world is extremely spiky.

AH: Why are people migrating to these spiky regions?

RF: Because megas are the driving forces of the global economy, talented people are flocking to these areas. As the creative economy continues to drive forward, we are going to see an even greater concentration of creative talented. Regions and communities that want to compete for talented workers will have to provide a community that has all the features of a complete, authentic community – a good job market/ economy, thick amenities (restaurants, arts, parks, etc.), safe neighborhoods, viable public transportation or connectivity, etc. More than ever before, creative types the ability to choose a community where they want to live and region's must understand that if they want to be competitive in the global battle for talent.

To see Richard chatting with fellow Gadling interviewee [Will Wilkinson](#), go [here](#). Buy Richard's book [here](#), or read an excerpt [here](#).