TODAY'S ZAMAN

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'The Flight of the Creative Class'

Richard Florida's "The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent" is a thought-provoking book.

Florida discusses global competition, which was once a contest between countries, and now belongs to cities. In today's world cities are in competition in terms innovation and creativity.

A similar article titled "The World is Spiky" presents Florida's understanding of global competition with four world maps that help to show a new perspective regarding the production of ideas. The first map shows the distribution of populations; nothing is new on this map. Most of us already know that people live in coastal areas and the most crowded countries are China and India. The second map is much more interesting, it shows artificial light emissions as a proxy for economic activity. Certain parts of the world are full of light and other parts are pitch black. When we compare the first two maps, the distributions of populations and lights have little in common. Some cities in the US, Japan, Korea and Europe are full of light, but the remaining lands are generally dark. Cities with 24 hours of production and consumption are bright with light, as in New York and Boston.

The third map shows the distribution of patent filings. This map is different; we can see that most of the patents were filed in cities such as New York, Boston, Stanford, London, Berlin, Tokyo and Seoul. Florida argues that patent filings directly correlate with the level of creativity and innovation in a city. The final map shows the locations that produce the scientific articles which are most frequently cited in the indices of academic journals. Florida explains that "the world is spiky," meaning that the most important aspects of competition are not diffused, but concentrated in the major cities of the world. Florida has reflected this concentration in a new type of graphic illustration, which is spiky.

Using a sort of topographical map, Florida divides the world into three categories. Peaks are the cities that generate innovations, hills are “the industrial and service centers that produce mature products and support innovation centers” and valleys are “places with little connection to the global economy and few immediate prospects.”

The map showing citations of scientific articles displays a dramatic disparity between the centers of innovation and the regions of stagnation. Florida explains that when it comes to economic output, the 10 largest US metropolitan areas combined are third on the list, behind only the United States as a whole and Japan. New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Boston have a bigger economy than all of China. If American metropolitan areas were countries, they would make up 47 of the biggest 100 economies in the world.

So today’s world cities, not countries, are in competition. Magnet cities -- such as New York, Boston, London, Tokyo and others -- attract talented people. In “The Future of Management” Gary Hamel explains the free-form structure of these cities: “In progressive cities, aptitude counts for more than provenance, and today’s dropouts, misfits, and goofballs may well be tomorrow’s media mavens, property kingpins, and cultural icons. Cities are filled with people on the make, scrambling up and skidding down the slippery slope of fame and fortune. …. In cities, elastic social conventions and permeable hierarchies create space for personal growth and reinvention.”

Robert Parck, a pioneer in the field of sociology, said in the 1920s: “In a small community, it is the normal man, the without eccentricity or genius, who seems most likely to succeed. The small community often tolerates eccentricity. The city, on the contrary, rewards it.”

There are some cities like New York, Boston and İstanbul that provide space for creativity, eccentricity and innovation. In tomorrow’s world the cities that are supportive of creative and talented people will be the winners.

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