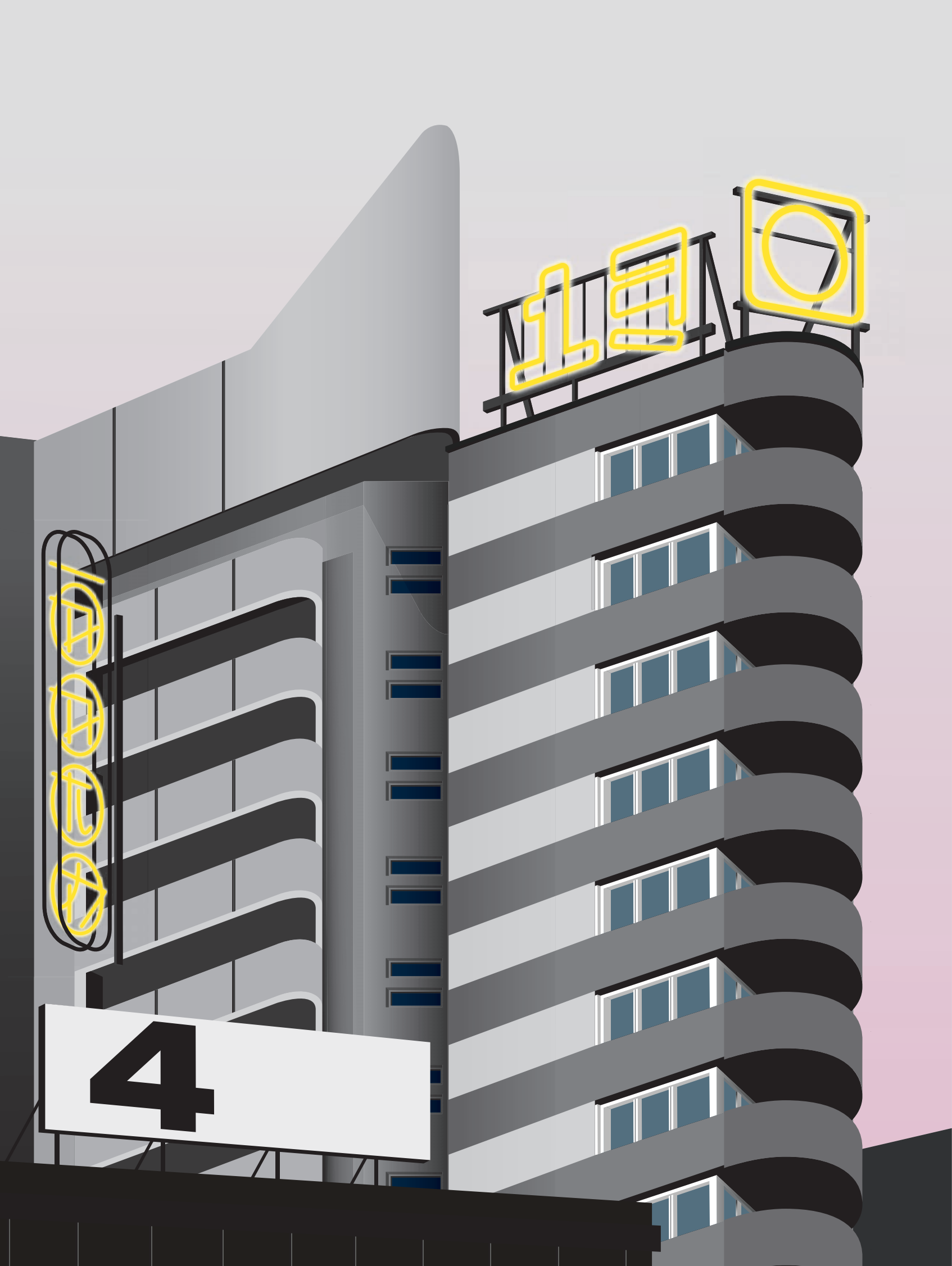


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INTERVIEW



Richard Florida, Professor at the University of Toronto and NYU, Senior Editor, The Atlantic

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Richard Florida: The Creative City

In 2002, the American economist and sociologist Richard Florida published the book “The Rise of the Creative Class”, which became a bestseller. Florida made a close connection between the future development of cities and the development of the “creative class”: Cities will flourish if they are able to attract these rising stars of the 21st century and persuade them to be long-term residents. The definition of the “creative class” (a group of qualified staff whose activities involve creative work in the broadest sense of the term) is not restricted to artistic professions, but also includes consultants, researchers, IT specialists, producers of culture and freelance professionals. According to Florida, it includes people who are not only the driving force for the economic success of cities, but are also particularly attracted to an urban lifestyle. It is therefore necessary to create appropriate living and working conditions in cities to support and gain the loyalty of the “creative class”. Florida summed up the most important conditions for holding on to the “creative class” with the “three Ts”: technology (“How much high-tech does the city have?”), talent (“How many creative innovators live in the city?”) and tolerance (“How tolerant and open to new ideas is a city?”).

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UNIPLAN

In 2012 – ten years later – “The Rise of the Creative Class – Revisited” was published, a completely updated edition of your best seller. When you look back today: What is still valid today, and what has developed differently from your forecasts at that time?

RICHARD FLORIDA

When I re-read the book in preparation for the revision, I was surprised at how far granted we now take some of the “new” things I wrote about back then, like tolerance for gays, the advent of flexible hours, the decline of dress codes, and the urban resurgence. I didn’t ignore the issue of inequality in 2002, as some have accused me of doing, but I admit I didn’t anticipate how powerful the urban clustering force would be, both as a force for technological and economic innovation and growth and for economic and cultural polarization as the job market has increasingly split between high-pay, high-skill creative class employment and low-skill, low-pay service work.

UNIPLAN

During the last ten years, city planners across the world have developed new concepts of urban development. Today the talk is of “creative quarters” or “creative clusters”: Urban areas where infrastructures and opportunities are concentrated, which are particularly conducive to creative work and in addition ensure a positive image. When you visit cities today, do you see a difference in quality to ten years ago? Is urban life understood differently and seen more positively today?

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GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

The concept of the “creative class” and the three Ts is not an American phenomenon: The Global Creative Index (GCI), which reflects the three key factors of technology, talent and tolerance to secure long-term economic prosperity, examines worldwide which countries are in the lead. As well as the three Ts, key figures for economic and social progress – including conventional data on economic performance and competitiveness, but also indicators regarding income discrepancies, wealth and happiness – are systematically taken into account. Here, Sweden is in first place, the USA comes second, followed by Finland, Denmark and Australia.

In recent years, Asia has clearly been gaining ground. In addition to Hong Kong in twentieth place, cities such as Shanghai and Beijing in Greater China have been able to improve their position dramatically through large-scale measures to enhance the creative economy.

Cities in Germany too (in 15th place) are competing more and more for the best creative brains. Here the assumption is that Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Cologne and Stuttgart will be in ever-increasing competition with one another.

Source: The Martin Prosperity Institute “Creativity and Prosperity: The “2010 Global Creativity Index”, 2011 and “Understanding the Creative Economy in China”, 2011.

RICHARD FLORIDA

Crime rates were falling and property values were already rising ten years ago in creative cities like Boston, New York, Washington, DC, and San Francisco, and the most desirable suburbs, the Birmingham, Michigans, Maplewood, New Jerseys, Bethesda, Marylands and Brookline, Massachusettses of the world, were getting denser, more walkable, and more filled with mixed uses. The tide had already shifted, even if home builders and city planners didn’t recognize it yet. The crazy-high real estate values in Brooklyn and San Francisco today show that the process has continued apace; walk through any urban downtown – even in struggling rustbelt cities like Cleveland and Detroit – and you’ll see young creatives at work and play. The developers didn’t create this phenomenon – they followed it. What’s hard to remember is that thirty years ago, when I was just starting out as an academic, America’s cities were largely given up for dead. For all their continuing troubles, the change has been astounding.

UNIPLAN

In your book you write that a “people climate” is much more important for cities than a “business climate”. What exactly do you mean by that?

UNIPLAN

People today make a conscious choice of where they want to live. Today’s important criteria are not only the job, but also the city where that job is based. What is the ideal city like, in your opinion? What are important factors that attract creative people?

UNIPLAN

In your opinion, what will be the global effects of the future? Will the cities continue to grow? Will the trend towards flight from the land continue, because more and more well-educated people wish to move to a metropolis? Or will the trend towards “digital nomads” – that is, employees who use digital technologies (laptop, smartphone etc.) for almost all their work and whose lifestyle is not dependent on a specific location, and who therefore function completely separately from urban areas – continue to accelerate?

RICHARD FLORIDA

Handing out tax rebates and building subsidized industrial parks may be one way to attract businesses, but it isn’t the best way to keep them – if that’s all you have to offer, they’ll go looking for a new deal from another city that’s willing to give them even more. But if a city is aesthetically attractive, safe, open-minded, tolerant, and has a lively singles and arts scene, high-quality talent will want to live there and businesses go where the talent pools are deepest. Of course you can’t transform a job desert into a paradise by opening up an art gallery or two – it’s a complex, organic process.

RICHARD FLORIDA

The short recipe is density (but not too much), mobility (walkability, bike trails, transit), diversity, inclusivity (a place where everyone earns a living wage and there are career ladders for all); low crime; green spaces and sustainable practices; and family friendliness (good schools, affordable housing). (More: <http://goo.gl/YkDdg1> “Richard Florida’s 10 rules for a city’s ‘quality of place’”, The Globe and Mail)

RICHARD FLORIDA

It’s something of a paradox. As globalized as we may be, wealth and power are more concentrated and clustered than ever before. Yes, communications are instantaneous and journeys that used to take months now take hours, but the world is anything but flat; it is spiky. This clustering is a fundamental fact of life. Over the course of the next century, the world’s urban populations are projected to increase by as many as 5 billion people. Our biggest and richest cities will get even bigger and richer.

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