

WHO'S YOUR CITY?

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[Richard Florida speaks at the Workplace 2017 conference ...](#)

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Thriving economies best grow from places that benefit from tolerance, inclusiveness in culturally rich, creative environments

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WATERLOO

Tomorrow's thriving economies will be built in places that value tolerance and inclusiveness and have what creative people want, including art, culture, good schools, parks and trails, participants at a future of work conference said yesterday.

"It is not enough just to be a great company. The community you are in makes a difference," said Richard Florida, director of the Prosperity Institute at the Rotman School of Management in Toronto and author of several books including *The Rise of the Creative Class*, and an upcoming book, *Who's Your City?*

Florida was speaking at Sybase in Waterloo during 2017: The Workplace, a three-day conference that draws together the world's experts on work, and also marks the 50th anniversary of the University of Waterloo's co-op program.

Florida said a profound shift is happening, from an industrial to a creative economy that includes workers in technology, arts, media, entertainment, and professions such as law, finance and health care.

"This change from an industrial society to a creative economy is bigger in scope and magnitude than the previous shift from an agricultural to an industrial society," he said.

Waterloo Region is part of a "mega-region" corridor from Buffalo to Toronto and Waterloo that has about 22 million people and an economic output of about \$550 billion a year, Florida said.

Waterloo Region, in particular, is in the middle of the shift from the industrial to a creative economy, he said.

But that means it has also a tremendous opportunity to reshape itself, by harnessing creative potential that is inherent in all its individuals and building a truly great community, he added.

"Too many places around the world are concerned simply about competitiveness. They are concerned simply about being economically bigger, and being more innovative," he said.

But when surveys are done to ask people how they feel about where they live, factors such as openness, tolerance, inclusiveness, green spaces and good services are more important, he said.

"We asked people: is your place a good place for young people, old people, families, gays, lesbians, ethnic and religious minorities? The places where people were happiest are the places where the residents of the community saw it as being open to everyone," Florida said.

This is especially important because of the rise of the creative class, he added.

Prior to 1980, only about 12 per cent of working people were part of that sector that includes technology, arts and the professions. But today, 35 to 40 per cent of workers in developed economies of North America and Europe are in this sector, he added.

"It is the growth force in our economy."

It is also "literally changing every facet of our lives," such as leisure trends, Florida said.

"In the old industrial economy, we worked with our backs, legs, arms and physical strength. The last thing my dad wanted to do, when he came home from working in the factory, was to go for a run. But I ride my bike, because I work with my head," he said.

But workers in the creative economy are not motivated simply by money. The place they live in is important to them, and they tend to cluster together in certain communities, Florida said.

Florida said one of the reasons that he moved from the United States to Toronto was because he saw in his own country a tendency toward more closed borders and the growing divide between the haves and the have-nots.

Every individual can be part of the creative class and has something to offer, Florida said. The key is "to find ways of activating people's skills," he added.

Florida encouraged Waterloo Region to invest even more in post-secondary and other institutions that nurture the creative economy.

He said Waterloo Region has tremendous potential to thrive, and the biggest threat it faces is "a failure to act with a big enough and bold enough vision."