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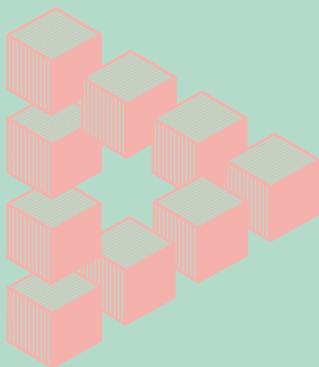
EXCERPT

ABSTRACT

IDEAS, FACTS AND FICTIONS

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THE END OF KNOWLEDGE

A user's manual for the 21st century



*And other stories on
DNA hackers, white gold and the
formula for happy cows*

W.I.R.E.

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Business | Society | Life Sciences
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TALENT, TECHNOLOGY AND TOLERANCE

Interview with Richard Florida

Creativity, argues Richard Florida, the bestselling author of “The Rise of the Creative Class” and “Who’s your City” is the major requirement in the 21st century for nations, enterprises and individuals. Florida talks about the creative potential in every one of us, the importance of the choice of place and what there is to be learned from the current economic crisis.

By Simone Achermann

What are the most important skills to be successful in the 21st century, for a nation, an enterprise and an individual?

I believe that every single human being is creative and maximizing that creativity is critical to an individual’s happiness and to economic growth. As economic growth is driven by creativity, if we want to increase it, we have to tap into the creativity of everyone. And for the first time in human history, the basic logic of our economy dictates that to further economic development is to further the development and use of human creative capabilities. That’s what makes me optimistic. So to come back to your

question: the great skill of our time – for nations, enterprises and individuals – is to find ways to tap into every human’s creativity.

And who will possess that skill?

The mega-regions, which act as 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 discoveries. Worldwide there are 40 significant mega regions – such as Greater Tokyo, the area of London-Leed-Chester or Mexico City – which are home to 1/5 of the world’s population, 2/3’s of the global economic output and 85 percent of all worldwide innovation. Places driven by innovation and creativity are the ones that will matter economically in the future – making the choice of place more important than ever before. Globalisation is not flattening the world, on the contrary, it makes it spiky. The decision of where to live is nowadays as important as choosing a spouse or a career.

So should we all live in mega-regions in the future?

If a mega-region or not, we should live in a creative environment, which is to say an environment that fulfils the 3Ts: Talent, Technology, and Tolerance. If all three criteria are fulfilled, individuals, organizations, cities, regions and countries will be able to compete and prosper. The first T Talent represents the fact that the force behind any effective economic strategy is talented people. We live in a more mobile age than ever before. People, especially top creative talent, move around a lot. A community’s ability to attract and retain top talent is the defining issue of the creative age.





Technology means that technology and innovation are critical components of a community or organization's ability to drive economic growth. To be successful, communities and organizations must have the avenues for transferring research, ideas, and innovation into marketable and sustainable products. Universities are paramount to this, and provide a key hub institution of the creative age. Tolerance represents the fact that economic prosperity relies on cultural, entrepreneurial, civic, scientific, and artistic creativity. Creative workers with these talents need communities, organizations, and peers that are open to new ideas and different people. Places receptive to immigration, alternative lifestyles, and new views on social status and power structures benefit significantly, now and in the future.

Is tolerance learnable?

Absolutely. It's the responsibility of governments to set a better climate for tolerance. Creative talent defies classification based on race, ethnicity, gender, appearance, or sexual preference. If a community is viewed as a place less open to gays and lesbians, immigrants, or young people, it will fall considerably behind other creative global giants. Governments can do this with its policies as well as the tone it sets in its messages. Places like the U.S. are falling more and more behind. Remember, America's willingness to welcome those who the rest of the world rejected during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s is what made the country so great. During that time, the U.S. embraced some of the best and brightest scientists – Enrico Fermi to Albert Einstein. But the U.S. is no longer communicating that same message to the rest of the world. And also places like Switzerland cannot victim to the same trap, if they want to competitively compete in the global creative age.

What can we learn from the current economic crisis?

Economies and societies invariably remake themselves in the wake of a crisis. Outmoded industries and tired consumption habits make way for new goods and services, new forms of employment and population and lifestyles realign themselves in the landscape. The reset of the post-war, post-Depression era in America for example had to do with the rise of a high-powered consumer economy in which it seemed like every worker had been handed the keys to the American Dream – a house and everything to fill it, cars, and college for their kids so that the next generation could live even larger. We saw a massive shift in the way people worked. Manufacturing jobs – the bulk of employment in America – transformed from low-paying and generally oppressive menial jobs to jobs that weren't just respectable but actually desirable. Now, most of those jobs have gone overseas and the majority of America jobs are now service jobs. We thus need to find ways to transform the more than 60 million service jobs, which make up 45 percent of U.S. employment, in the same way: rewarding workers financially, encouraging and empowering creative participation and creating professional communities. We can look to any number of new companies – from Zappos, to Starbucks, to American Apparel – for examples of how this idea might play itself out. A basic skill for the 21st century thus is to make service jobs into higher-paying family-supporting jobs of the future.

Richard Florida is one of the world's leading public intellectuals on economic competitiveness, demographic trends, cultural and technological innovation and one of the world's most sought after speakers on global trends, economics, prosperity, competitiveness and growth. Florida is Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute and Professor of Business and Creativity at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto. Previously, Florida has held professorships at George Mason University and Carnegie Mellon University and taught as a visiting professor at Harvard and MIT. Florida earned his Bachelor's degree from Rutgers University and his Ph.D. from Columbia University. His research provides insight into the social, economic and demographic factors that drive the 21st century world economy. His works include the global best seller "The Rise of the Creative Class" (2002) and "Who's Your City?" (2008) a national and international best seller and amazon.com book of the month. His new book "The Great Reset" is dealing with how new ways of living and working will promote post-crash prosperity.

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