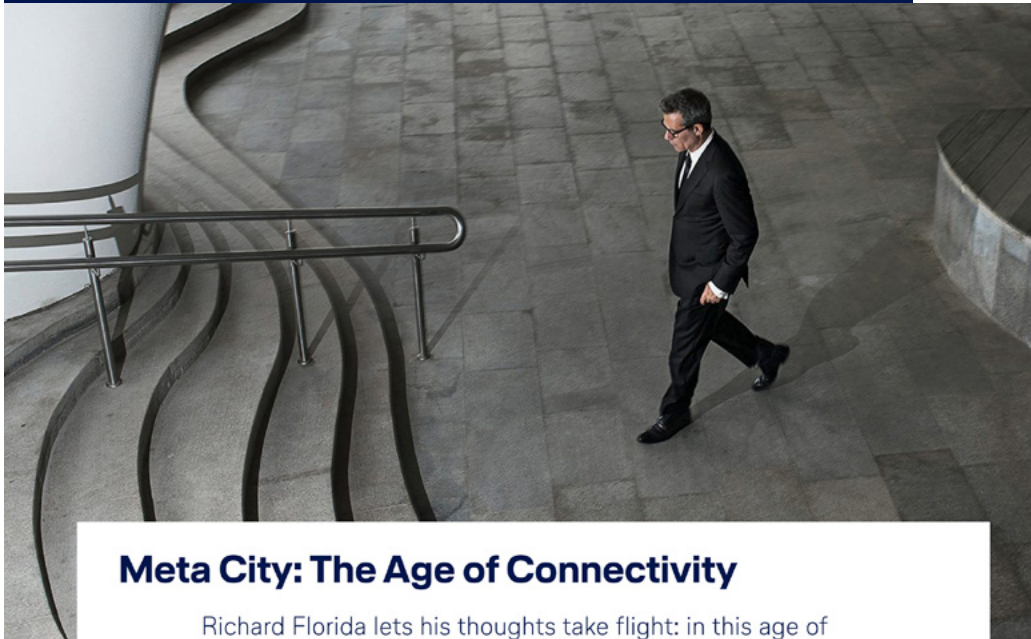




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Meta City: The Age of Connectivity

Richard Florida lets his thoughts take flight: in this age of Meta Cities and digital connectivity, the need to meet face-to-face has only intensified, writes the best-selling author and urbanist

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Right now, you're likely reading this on a plane, as you wing your way to a destination that is hundreds or thousands of miles away from your home. Maybe you're a businessperson who lives in Lisbon and works for a company in London. You visit with clients in Paris and Amsterdam regularly and with your colleagues in London once or twice a month. Or you're on your way to a much-needed vacation in Miami.

The resurgence of business travel

Remember just a few years ago when business travel was written off for dead? Why travel when you can Zoom, or so the story went. Time after time, pundits have predicted that this or that world-shrinking communication technology – the telephone, the fax, the Internet – would render business travel obsolete. And every time, they've gotten it wrong.

By the end of 2023, global travel had surpassed its pre-pandemic levels. That's because we humans love to connect with each other. In fact, we require it. A good deal of business is best done face-to-face. And of course, we just like to meet people and experience new places.

Paradoxically, the more technology enables us to live and work apart, the greater our need to connect. Consider this: though far fewer workers are going to their offices, the urban centers of major cities like New York, London and Paris are surging back. Why? Because of visitors – not just tourists, but businesspeople who come to them to meet, collaborate and do deals. Visitors account for more than 60 percent of the activity in the downtowns of US cities, according to a recent study, while workers and residents combined make up just 40 percent.

"Travel gives us the best of all worlds, enabling us to live in a place we love, work in places we are most productive, and play in places where we can have the most fun."

Richard Florida



Richard Florida knows why traveling will not go out of fashion in the future (© Daria Malysheva)

The rise of Meta Cities

Driving all of this is the rise of what I call Meta Cities, a new type of city which combines digital and physical connectivity. Like the hub-and-spoke systems of airports, great global cities have eclipsed their physical boundaries and borders, and now function as veritable hubs of much farther-flung networks.

The spokes that connect these hubs to the satellite cities in their orbit may cross different time zones and even continents, but taken together, they form coherent wholes that are defined by the ever-greater flows of people between them.

Some of those hubs and satellites are specialized for work, some for living, and some for entertainment. The biggest and most important, like London and New York, provide all three; they are cities of everything. But the most rapidly rising Meta Cities – places like Dubai, Singapore, and Miami – have bolstered their global trajectories by investing in world-class airports, hotels and entertainment attractions. The very existence of these cities of connection turns on travel.

Social animals, after all

We are social animals after all. If digital technology has enabled us to live and work in more places, it has massively increased our need to connect and collaborate in person. Travel gives us the best of all worlds, enabling us to live in a place we love, work in places we are most productive and play in places where we can have the most fun.

This new age of connectivity also benefits society writ large, as greater connectivity between places spurs greater innovation, bolsters productivity and adds to our overall economic potential.

About:

Richard Florida is a leading urbanist and business consultant, and the best-selling author of "The Rise of the Creative Class" and other books.
