

World Knowledge Forum 2013

Creative Economy & Creative Class_Richard Florida

At the 14th annual World Knowledge Forum on Tuesday, Professor Richard Florida of the University of Toronto and NYU, brought forth his theories on the current state of urbanization. "We are going through the greatest economic transformation in all of human history." A transformation, Mr. Florida says, is centered around what he calls the Creative Class.

A common mistake when interpreting Mr. Florida's theories about the Creative Class and Creative Cities was the idea that, in order to be creative, one must be a painter, a poet, a musician, or an artist of some sort. But that is not the sort of creativity Mr. Florida is implying.

"If you meet a great CEO, you've come across a creative person," said Mr. Florida.

Creative Cities full of the Creative Class could be the key to economic prosperity, according to his theories. "As the world spreads apart, the most important economic activities cluster and conglomerate."

Mr. Florida was certain to point out the relative newness of cities, citing the change from an agricultural society to an industrial society, and finally arriving at the latest manifestation. "The city itself is the container of the knowledge economy."

But the city itself is not a perfect entity. "The grandest challenge of our time is how we achieve city building," said Mr. Florida. But he seemed quite optimistic about society's ability to meet this challenge, stating, "Periods of crisis and recovery are really about changes in the way we organize and build our physical infrastructure, and build and create new patterns of cities, new ways of life."

Possible problems cities may encounter include the need to retrofit older cities like New York and Seoul, as well as a great divide between economic classes.

"There are two kinds of jobs. The creative - the science jobs, the technical, management jobs - that pay a good deal more than manufacturing jobs," said Mr. Florida.

The importance of leadership in a city was emphasized as well. Mr. Florida spoke highly of the role city mayors play on the global scale, and cities' interdependence on one another. "Because their communities' well-being is hinged to the well-being of other parts of the global economy, their interests transcend global borders. We need to create an international league of mayors."

In order for a city to achieve prosperity in a global economy and become truly creative, Mr. Florida elaborated on what he called "the three T's." Technology is necessary, as he said, "If you don't have technology, you go nowhere." Talent, because "you have to have talented people." Mr. Florida cited a number of his students in Pittsburgh leaving the city upon graduation. Lastly, Mr. Florida said that a city needs to be tolerant. "The city has to be a magnet for all kinds of people."

Mr. Florida emphasized the allure and potential of cities, despite obvious prevalent problems such as poverty and lack of infrastructure you may find in several Asian metropolises.

But the overwhelmingly positive message was clear: "When we gather together, we improve our productivity."