

## Choosing home

The current advice? Find a city with a strong creative class

**Stephen Eaton Hume**

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Economists like Steven Levitt, Thomas Schelling and Gary Becker have shown that economics thinking can be applied to the way we behave and all aspects of our lives. Pop economist Richard Florida has been in the news (he was given a good-natured skewering on TV's Colbert Report) for his ideas on the "creative economy" and the "bohemian-gay index."

Formerly at Pennsylvania's Carnegie Mellon University and now teaching at the University of Toronto, Florida has drawn a correlation between bohemian and gay populations and healthy cities. His 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, was a bestseller; according to its thesis, talent, innovation and tolerance for diversity drive vibrant cities and it's the creative class that has the real economic power, not the working or service classes.



CREDIT: Kimberly White, Reuters

In San Francisco, well regarded by author Richard Florida, the St. Stupid's Day parade, poking fun at U.S. political events, is an April 1 tradition.

His new book, *Who's Your City?*, is a self-help manual for people on the move. Florida says we spend a lot of time agonizing over what we do for a living and whom we make our life partner, but not enough time considering where to live. His book has more than 20 pages of chapter notes and more than 30 of appendices that include key results from the Gallup Organization's recent place and happiness survey.

Despite the consensus that new technologies have freed us from the constraints of location, Florida says it is still a key factor in the global economy. "I wrote this book," he says, "to help you pick the place that's right for you." To fulfil this promise, he provides a 10-step plan -- for example, "Step Eight: Come on City Light My Fire" -- and a five-part "place finder" where you can rate your community.

Like many other self-help books, *Who's Your City?* has a rather forced exuberance and an earnest tone that can become monotonous. It also seems hurried: Tim Harford is a leading author and economics thinker, but Florida misspells his name, putting a T in the middle, in both the text and the index.

Although he focuses on American regions, he mentions Vancouver, writing about a couple who chose it as home because it is "physically stunning" and combines West Coast lifestyle with East Coast energy.

Using light emissions to define innovative economic regions, he sees the tallest "spikes" around Tokyo, Seoul, New York and San Francisco; however, Vancouver and a dozen other cities also stand out.

He says only a few dozen places in the world make the cut as mega-regions of economic

activity, and that behind this economic power lies "the tendency of creative people to seek out and thrive in like-minded groups, and the self-perpetuating economic edge that comes from their doing so."

Despite its upbeat salesmanship, *Who's Your City?* brings to mind Fritz Lang's 1927 silent movie classic, *Metropolis*, in which a dystopian society is divided into two classes, the underground workers and the creative individuals who live and play above ground.

*Who's Your City?* raises questions. Is an agglomeration of creative, innovative people always optimal? What if I actually prefer living in a funky, run-down neighborhood? Do I want the newly rich to inflate real estate prices or gentrify my surroundings with Apple, Banana Republic and Starbucks? Are mobile hipsters using their resources to procure economic gain without giving back? Creative people have to be lured from somewhere -- is there a loser in this game?

Still, it's clear that some places in North America (Michigan and its Cool Cities Initiatives, for instance) are making a deliberate effort to attract urban pioneers and hip young workers to renew city ecosystems.

Florida wrote the core of *Who's Your City?* in a 2005 article for the *Atlantic Monthly*. If you'd like to know more about him, visit [Creativeclass.com](http://Creativeclass.com), his website. You'll find a cool BMW video ad that employs his ideas about the creative class. But don't forget to watch *Metropolis* to see what may be the unintended consequences of those ideas.

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