

# 'Great cities speed up their metabolic rate to defy the previous generation's imagination'

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- [Ian Wylie](#)
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### Why are cities becoming more, not less important?

1. **Who's Your City**
2. **: How The Creative Economy Is Making Where You Live The Most Important Decision Of Your Life**
3. by Richard Florida
4. Basic Books,
5. £12.99

1. [Buy Who's Your City from the Guardian bookshop](#)

Every period has its own geographic expression, such as the agricultural village, mercantile town, factory town, industrial city etc. But the current geographical remaking is global.

We've identified 40 cities, or megaregions, that have become the growth poles of the world economy, sucking up resources not only from their countries, but from the world. And for every thriving burgeoning city, there's a declining city. Young kids who used to work in the downtown hubs of Pittsburgh, Detroit and Cleveland are now moving to Chicago. If Chicago pulls its talent from all over the mid-west, London and New York pull talent from around the world.

### Doesn't technology reduce our reliance on cities?

At the very time that technology should allow us to decentralise, we're becoming more concentrated in urban centres than at any point in human history. Thomas Friedman

[author and New York Times columnist] has this idea that the world has been "flattened" — and yes, lots of economic activities are decentralising. But lots of others, particularly the high value added ones, are recentralising.

I talk to people every day who have tried to live in rural areas, but they had to move back; they needed to be part of a network in order to develop work, customers and clients.

### **Cities can't carry on growing larger, can they?**

You'd think cities would hit diseconomies of scale such as congestion and expensive housing. Economists would expect a city to decentralise, but the great cities speed up their metabolic rate to defy the previous generation's imagination. The advantages and densities and concentration of people outweigh the diseconomies.

### **Any advice for urban planners?**

When cities try to have top-down plans they usually wreck themselves. When I lived in Pittsburgh, almost every neighbourhood that was interesting was one that the city had either ignored or that the residents had protected. Just like Toyota became the greatest car company in the world by tapping the knowledge of its shopfloor workers, the best cities are those that tap the knowledge and energy of their residents to continuously build neighbourhoods.

- Richard Florida is a professor at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. His latest book, *Who's Your City?* (Basic Books), examines urban renewal and talent migration