

## Ingenuity is Revolutionizing the Global Economy, Richard Florida tells ULI Europe

by Lauren Parr

June 7, 2012



*Internationally acclaimed urban theorist Richard Florida, author of numerous books on the 21st century urban evolution including *The Rise of the Creative Class*, *Who's Your City*, and *The Great Reset*, has been named a senior visiting fellow for the Urban Land Institute (ULI). The institute, with nearly 30,000 members worldwide, is a nonprofit education and research institute dedicated to responsible land use and the creation of thriving communities around the globe.*

*As a ULI senior visiting fellow, Florida will speak at four of the institute's major meetings, collaborate with ULI members and staff, and contribute content and thought leadership to ignite dialogue and discussion on city building. His first presentation in this role was on Wednesday, May 30, at ULI Europe's "Creating a Legacy" real estate trends conference in London, which explored the long-term investment and development opportunities related to the 2012 Summer Olympic Games.*

The advanced world is undergoing a powerful shift known as the "Great Reset" that is reshaping virtually every aspect of the way we live and work, according to Richard Florida, a professor at the University of Toronto and

senior editor of *The Atlantic*. Evidence of this lies in everything from the increasing pedestrian-friendliness of towns and cities, to the conversion of commercial space into residential uses.

Driven by the continuing decline of manufacturing jobs in favor of knowledge-based economies emphasizing such things as software and gaming, this shift is bigger than the transition from agricultural times to the industrial age, in Florida's opinion.

Speaking at ULI Europe's Trends Conference, in London on May 30, Florida described the emergence of a creative class that is empowered by human ingenuity—a force that is revolutionizing the global economy. "We [workers] are the stewards of our economic future," Florida said. He noted that cities always have represented the access point to the future, and they will continue to do so. Cities are the venue of job creation, and the ultimate economic driver. After all, he said, it is new work, not making things more efficient, that fuels growth.

Research shows that economic activity is organized around 40 megaregions that produce two-thirds of the world's economic output. At the same time, cities are growing wealthier but also more uneven. For example, a place like London is 1.5 to 2 times more productive than the U.K. as a whole. In poorer places there is even greater polarization.

"We are going to see the rise of these megaregions, which will become denser," Florida said. "Young people want to live in a city of opportunity. And what makes a great city? Something called 'quality of place.'" This constitutes a

preserved past, in terms of existing architecture, as well as investment in infrastructure that, in turn, creates emotional attachment. He cautioned, however, that density should not be synonymous with wall-to-wall skyscrapers, but should place an emphasis on the people who live and work there.

By default, affluent megacities are better positioned to host a major event like the Olympic Games. It is important, therefore, that such an occasion should “work for, not against, quality of place,” Florida noted. Given the opportunity it presents to improve infrastructure, he believes London could very well profit from the Games in the same way that the Great Fire of London of 1666 allowed the capital to reinvent itself to become the economic center of the world it is today.

ULI—the Urban Land Institute