

The Vancouver Sun

<http://www.vancouversun.com/>

Richard Florida's take on Vancouver: Poised for success except for the problem of housing costs

Richard Florida was in Vancouver for the first time this week, speaking at the Congress for the Humanities and Social Sciences. I wrote a [story](#) about his take on Vancouver, based on a short interview.

But I also listened to his speech and got to watch the line-up of people getting their books autographed interact with him afterwards. Whatever else, he certainly provokes a strong reaction from people. His speech was a performance art tour de force, as Florida, just a boy from Newark, N.J., wove stories about his working-class boyhood ("right smack in the middle of Sopranos country") with urban economics statistics and soaring pronouncements about how we are going through a social/economic revolution at the moment that's as profound as the transformation of the medieval agricultural economy to the 19th-century industrial one. He even threw in a few references to Marx, but that didn't appease more than one of the PhD students there, who made derogatory references in their questions to the way his approach seemed to be all about "valorizing cities" and "successor economics." Huh? Florida, while maintaining his charm offensive, made a plea after one of those interventions for people in academia to please, please speak English.

This was my first exposure to Florida and, like many people, I was entranced by the ideas but ended up having many niggling questions at the end and an instinctive squeamishness about the use of the phrase "creative class." Others have written endlessly about this, so I won't go into it, but I have to say that it certainly didn't prevent about 50 people from lining up to get their books signed by him. And, while they were there, they asked for his advice on everything from which career track they should take to what he thinks the impact of large immigration is having on cities. My favourites: One was a young woman named Kate, who described herself as living in multiple cities. She wanted Florida's reassurance that this was an okay thing to do and that she wasn't just "offshoring" herself. Oh, no, said the always affable Florida. I like gritty and sometimes I like the sun. I think more and more we're going to live in multiple locations. But we can still be connected to all those cities, not just transients. The other was a young man from Belgium, who said, You know, this is so foreign to me. Where I come from, people grow up in one town, they go to school in one town, they live there and they die there. Well, Florida said brightly, maybe they should become more like us.