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### [Rural Areas in a World of Mega-Regions](#)

In his most recent book, *Who's Your City?*, Richard Florida, the often quoted author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* takes issue with Thomas Friedman's "flat world" theory. Florida points to growth and economic dominance of "mega-regions" as his premise and notes in his book's sub-title that "the creative economy is making where to live the most important decision of your life." He contends that the global economy is "happening" in a couple of dozen mega-regions (5 to 100 million people) – Greater Tokyo, London, Boston-NY-DC, Dal-Austin, Char-lanta and Cascadia (Portland-Vancouver), among them.

Using economic production, patents and other measures Florida reviews the huge "spikes" of economic power of these areas that far exceed simple concentration of human population (as significant as that is). His major contention is that it is the amassing of human brainpower, especially of those with advanced education and their ability to collaborate when in proximity, that is the driving force. While he does note some exceptions outside the mega regions – Nashville's dominance in music, for example – each exception is built around a "clustering force" – the clustering of people and productivity, creative skills and talents around a single competitive competence or sector that powers economic growth.

Florida looks at all of the economic downsides to living in mega-regions – high cost of living, especially as relates to housing; long commutes; and congestion – and notes that these are the price of creativity and economic growth. Yet, people continue to vote with their feet and relocate to these areas. One telling factor is the rapid and prolonged increase in housing costs (wealth) in mega-regions vs. the stagnation or decline seen in many rural areas. While Florida's work is just one theory – contrasted with Friedman's view that one can live, work and innovate from anywhere in a flat world – it does suggest significant support for the idea that individual rural communities will have an increasingly difficult time competing. Thus, the need to form "mini-regions" built upon clustering of potential that if not ready to compete globally are vitally linked to mega-regions in a symbiotic relationship.

At the Endowment we think that the concept of "Forest Investment Zones" (mini-regions designed around a clustering force) may hold the potential to enliven the future of certain rural areas as the move to mega-regions continues unabated.

Posted by U.S. Endowment at [6:45 AM](#)