

THE world is not flat, not least when measured by the emergence of the “creative class”, says the man behind the concept, American urban studies theorist Richard Florida.

The global landscapes would look spiky, punctuated by the rise of mega cities and regions where this new economic class congregates. And perched atop the commanding height would be Singapore, which owns the world’s largest creative class as a proportion to the total workforce.

A leading voice in urbanisation and creativity, Prof Florida, who is director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto, came up with the notion of the creative class more than 10 years ago. He has defined the creative class as people whose job is to “create meaningful new forms”, including new ideas, new technology, new creative content, and has since popularised the idea in a series of books, beginning in 2002 with *The Rise of the Creative Class*, followed by *Cities and the Creative Class* (2004) and then *The Flight of the Creative Class* (2005).

Grand challenge

“What we are going through, not just in America but the world, is what I said – the world is not flat. America is not flat. It’s spiky,” says Prof Florida in a telephone interview after a recent trip to Hong Kong. “What we’ve found is the concentration and clustering together in cities, in places of innovative talents, the high-technology firms, in creating economic growth. At the same time, it is also pushing away the less savvy.

“This is the grand challenge of the 21st century, not just in America, but also in Singapore, Hong Kong and Asia.”

Singapore has more than 47 per cent of its workforce in the creative class, according to his research, which draws on statistics from the United Nations’ International Labour Organisation and which follows management guru Peter Drucker’s definition of a knowledge job.

Prof Florida adds: “(Singapore) is unique among Asian nations. In general the places which have higher percentages of highly skilled creative jobs tend to be in the Scandinavian nations, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and in northern Europe, the Netherlands.”

In big countries such as Canada and the US, where a third of their entire workforce now works in creative jobs, the ratio is lower because creative workers tend to gather in big cities, especially in downtown areas, he explains.

The emergence of the “creative class” and its potential to spur growth are particularly pertinent to Asia where urbanisation is taking place at a relentless pace on an immense scale. India and China are clear examples.

Worldwide, half of the world’s population now lives in cities, a ratio set to rise to three-quarters by 2050, according to the United Nations. By then, Asia will contribute the most to this explosive growth with its urban population ballooning to 3.3 billion, up from 1.9 billion, led by India and China.



Creative cities in a spiky world

Rapidly growing Asia will be better served by a system of cities – not a dominant city, but many competitive cities. **By Shu-Ching Jean Chen**

Many Asian governments have responded by erecting a forest of skyscrapers and tower blocks in their midst. “Asia and the Middle East are in an arms race to build the biggest tower cities. That’s not a solution,” in Prof Florida’s view.

He himself has identified 13 mega regions or cities in Asia, out of the world’s total of 40. While he’s also identified cities and metropolises as the real drivers behind a creative economy, skyscrapers are not an essential part of what would constitute a creative city, he says. Prof Florida has invented a research tool, the creative index, to quantify the ingredients behind the growth of a creative city, anchored around three-Ts – talent, technology and tolerance.

“A creative city does not occur in skyscrapers; it does not occur in the new-in-

vested highways. It occurs in the old meat packing districts, where Google has in Chelsea its office in New York, in warehouses of Soho, and more in historic buildings. The great urbanists often would say new ideas require old buildings,” he says.

Google’s Chelsea office has gone so far as to turn a conference room into a mock tiny New York City apartment, complete with a cat and fictional family photos, its hallways furnished with subway grates and red fire hydrants.

Outside the offices, it’s the spurts of energy that count. “It’s the vibrant street scenes. It’s the street itself, not the character of skyscrapers and roadways that create a creative city. It’s the ability to mix and mingle that creates a creative city,” he says, suggesting that Asian cities focus on interactions on the street level, perhaps by

providing space to residents to be more interactive and less isolated.

It may also be hard for Asian cities to aspire to be New York or London, the dominant city in, respectively, the US and Europe. “Asia has many global cities – Hong Kong, Tokyo, Singapore, Seoul. The bad thing is all these cities are competing for dominance,” he notes.

“My hunch in advising Asia might be try to think about making that grouping of cities work together and think about the complementarities of those cities. Maybe Asia, because it is so populated, so rapidly urbanised, could help us redefine what we think of the system of cities by having not a dominant city, but many competitive cities.”

Apart from Singapore, the other countries that have a large creative class in

their workforce are the Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Germany, in that order. China, with only 7.4 per cent of its workforce in the creative class, ranks 75th.

Singapore’s ranking

Overall, globally on the combined measure of his 3-T world creative index, Singapore ranks 9th – after Switzerland, the US, Finland, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, Canada (tied with Norway on the 7th) and edging out the Netherlands. No other Asian country has a higher ranking.

Singapore’s ranking is supported by its leadership as the world’s top spot for having, in relative terms, the largest creative class and talent. It ranks 10th on the technology metric but loses out on the tolerance index where it scores 17th globally. Specifically, it is hurt by its 34th placing on a sub-index, the gay index, for the treatment of gay and lesbian communities.

Prof Florida, who teaches business and creativity at both the University of Toronto and New York University, is also founder of a consultancy boutique, the Creative Class Group.

“I’ve built my career completely on my own. I didn’t work under the tutelage of any great social scientist,” he says. But his work has been shaped by powerful influences of several intellectuals, notably Karl Marx, not on the notion of socialism but

TOP CLASS

Singapore is the world’s top spot for having, in relative terms, the largest creative class and talent. PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

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Richard Florida

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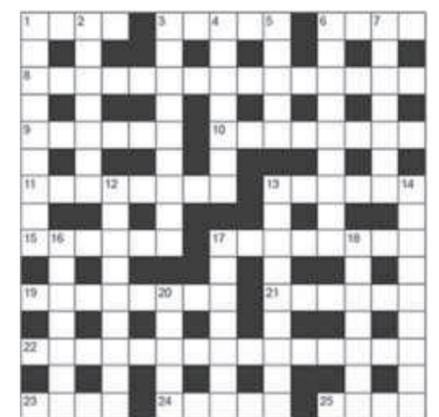
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SATURDAY with Ludwig



CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

- Across**
- Harvey’s struggling — he’s lacking change (4)
 - Biscuit, Western fare cooked (5)
 - Select participant in Olympic kayaking (4)
 - The precise item (8,7)
 - Leg ring available if required (2,4)
 - Bedmaker in nursery? (8)
 - Fill with Courage, popular drink (8)
 - One making cuts, resetting an exam (6)
 - Large number of stockings with a hole in — 6 perhaps! (6)
 - A call for help about finest incombustible material (8)
 - Peacekeeping type, we hear, is not requested (8)
 - One doesn’t consciously go into it (6)
 - Get real land (4,4,2,5)
 - It’s in taste to allow it to stand (4)
 - Faithful promises to repay, pence first (5)
 - Must cast out piece of soot (4)



- Less common initially, Art and English being interspersed among reading, writing and arithmetic (5)
- It could be free or highly valuable — that’s amusing (9)
- Volcanic crater plays a part in topographical derangement (7)
- Champion rugby player’s single set of books (9)
- High-flier that’s unusually below par (9)
- Shelter is closed, welcoming in French after November (6,3)
- Leaflet from worker on strike (7)
- Venetian merchant and soldier held up by ten (7)
- So much French spirit causing uncontrolled outburst (7)
- Band take off, covering Queen (5)

YESTERDAY’S SOLUTION

- Across:** 1 Dive-bomber, 6 Echo, 10 Caret, 11 Sellopate, 12 Malaria, 13 Nebular, 14 Condescended, 18 Transferring, 21 Arc-lamb, 23 Presume, 24 Grotesque, 25 David, 26 Tutu, 27 Deep-seated.
- Down:** 1 Decamp, 2 Virile, 3 Bathroom scales, 4 Mishandle, 5 Ellen, 7 Charlady, 8 Over ride, 9 Double entendre, 15 Scrapheap, 16 Straight, 17 Watchout, 19 Curvet, 20 Headed, 22 Pique.