



Be sure to read [Part I](#) of the LAS feature on economist (and amateur psychologist) Richard Florida's *Who's Your City?*.

One of the most interesting and relevant aspects of *Who's Your City?* is the interdisciplinary nature of Richard Florida's research. In the latter half of the text he includes results from a survey, conducted in conjunction with the Gallup organization, polling a cross section of adults regarding place and happiness. The results of Florida's study have left psychologists somewhat stunned, as an economist has finally handed them an olive branch and, at the same time, also realized that psychological research has widespread implications in the world of economics. Interdisciplinary research has taken hold of the academic community in the past decade as more and more researchers attempt to explain their findings through not only their primary disciplines, but auxiliary fields as well. Hopefully this is not some ephemeral phenomenon in academia. If *Who's Your City?* is any indication, it won't be; Florida has finally found a supplementary feature that will expand his audience and in turn make his groundbreaking research relevant to much larger segments of the population.

In researching the background of his theories, Florida and the Gallup organization

performed one of the largest (if not *the* largest) studies ever on the relationship between place and happiness. Throughout the relevant literature on happiness, Florida considers place the "missing link" in the chain of determinative factors. In fact, he believes place forms the third part of the triangle of well-being, along with personal relationships and work. In perhaps the main finding of the study, Florida found that place is *more* important to happiness than either income or the level of education a person has attained. Some other interesting findings from the survey include:

- Income only has a relatively small effect on how happy people are with their communities.

- Older people, for the most part, are happier with their communities than younger people.

- Renters were more satisfied with their communities than homeowners.

- Married couples are happier than singles with the place they live.

- People are much more concerned with economic security than physical security in regard to overall community happiness.

One of the findings that Florida's research most strikingly accentuates is that, on the whole, people are happy with where they have chosen to live. Citing such findings, the author goes on to suggest that whether it be conscious or not, we tend to seek out places that fit our psychological needs. While our choices of place may satisfy our desires, however, those choices may not always be the most positive outcomes for the communities themselves, as certain regions can as a result become increasingly homogenous over time. Some revealing patterns from Florida's research show that different regions tend to have their own personalities which, given the indications of the survey, may be more rooted in people than place. For example, the American Deep South is largely filled with extroverted, agreeable and conscientious people. The Northeast has the largest concentration of neurotic people, and a good portion of those "open to experience" as well. "Open to experience" is a personality trait also concentrated along the West Coast, and in Colorado, Southeast Texas and Southern Florida. Sure, you all different types of people can be found in locations all over the United States, but, as Florida points out, regions take on distinctive personalities and many areas have larger concentrations of particular personalities than others.

While the cyclical relationship between personality and place is an interesting phenomenon, it is also a bit ominous. What happens when regions become increasingly distinct and homogenous over time? Answering this and other important questions is certainly beyond this writer's analysis, and in many regards also beyond Florida's book, which does a respectable job of presenting the phenomenon but can only scratch the surface of such complex issues. Being surrounded by people who share common interests, sense of community and lifestyle choices is desirable, but at what point does such a collective personality begin to exclude others who do not subscribe to the same

interests or lifestyles? Creativity certainly thrives within and through diversity, not homogeneity.

The old adage by William Cowper, that "variety is the spice of life," addresses the potential pitfalls of communal homogeneity nicely, but the other side of the issue is perhaps even more troubling: Florida's finding that areas which contain the most diversity and creativity tend to be the areas where the inhabitants possess decreased levels of social capital and community commitment. Thus, policy makers, businesses, and other leaders in these cities and regions have extremely difficult problems to address, those of which tend to have multi-layered and even more complex solutions.

Beyond the statistical findings, another impressive aspect of *Who's Your City* (and all of Florida's books, for that matter) is the author's writing style. One major problem in academia remains: the inability of most researchers and analysts to relate their work to the lay population. Academia is similar to Law in that to be able to understand how a system operates one must first understand the common principles and terminology used. One fundamental reason that many academics are not afforded a substantial amount of publicity and media interest is that they are often reluctant to break from their haughty vocabulary, and thus tend to alienate both journalists and the wider public. Florida, however, handles the transition from research to relation with ease and grace; he willingly decreases the academic jargon and replaces it with understandable, easy to read and intelligent writing. Taking this into consideration (listen up, academics), it's no wonder that Florida has multiple *New York Times* best-sellers to his credit.

In addition to the wealth of information on his creative class theories and the results of his place and happiness studies, Florida also provides categorical breakdowns of the best places for singles, married couples, and empty-nesters to consider settling. Once again the author is very thorough, as he breaks each of these down by large, medium and small regions, examining which places would be the best fit for each category. He also provides the same place information for gay and lesbian singles, couples and empty-nesters as well. Not content to simply number a list of overall rankings, Florida also lists places in each category that are "best buys" - those regions that tend to have the same amenities, but require less of a financial outlay. Whether you agree with his selection of places or not, the tables provide a decent starting point for those looking to relocate to a place that better fits their interests and lifestyle.

Before considering *Who's Your City?*, Florida's previous research had already factored in to my own life to a large extent. Several years shy of my 30th birthday, I've already made three major moves in my life. My first move was to college, where I trekked from Dallas, Texas to the University of Missouri, in Columbia. After my undergraduate studies I relocated again, to Washington, D.C., where I pursued my MA degree. This move was especially important to me, particularly because I attended George Mason University, where Florida taught at the time, and where I began to pay more attention to his work. My most recent move was across the pond to Stirling, Scotland, where I am currently pursuing my PhD in Law. All three moves were the result of a difficult decision making process, yet all of them worked out splendidly in the long run, mainly because of the

opportunities and environment each place provided. Currently, I'm smack in the middle of the Glasgow-Edinburgh mega-region, and couldn't be happier, but the time to relocate will likely come again. One thing is certain: for the next move I make, I'll be consulting more of Florida's work beforehand.

VIDEO: Author Richard Florida speaking as part of the [Authors@Google](#) series. SEE ALSO: www.whosyourcity.com
SEE ALSO: www.creativeclass.org
SEE ALSO: www.perseusbooksgroup.com/basic/

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[Brian Christopher Jones](#)

A student living in Scotland and working toward a PhD in law.

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