

## 'Stop being so humble' urban expert urges Canadian cities

BY SHANNON PROUDFOOT, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE APRIL 5, 2009



Richard Florida, director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto.

**Photograph by:** Canwest News Service, Canwest News Service

This recession is a "great reset" that offers Canada a chance to emerge from the shadow of its reeling southern neighbour, says a leading urban theorist.

Richard Florida, director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto, says Canadian cities need to "stop being so humble" and see themselves as global models of exactly the sort of livable communities the U.S. desperately needs.

"Canadian cities have already achieved many of the things that Barack Obama would like to see American cities achieve," he says. "Our cities are dense, they have a middle class, they have good public schools, our people have health care, the social safety net we have enables people to adjust, we're open to immigration."

Florida has just released the Canadian edition of his latest bestseller, *Who's Your City?*, which is part urban study and part self-help guide to finding the right place to live.

The book's central tenet is that location is more important than ever and the world is getting "spikier," not flatter. Florida argues that global economic and creative output is increasingly driven by "mega-regions" to which he's assigned Seussian names like Tor-Buff-Loo-Mon-Tawa (stretching from Toronto and Waterloo to Ottawa and Montreal and south to Buffalo and Rochester) and Cascadia (Vancouver down to Seattle and Portland).

"I think those are really the key strong, world-class hubs of the Canadian economy," Florida says.

"Other regions like Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, they're all going to do fine, but those are really the hubs. Our challenge has to be to make them stronger."

He's probably best known for his concept that the "creative class" - a broad category he defines as those who create for a living, whether in engineering, the arts, biotech or small business - wields the greatest clout in today's economy.

Ottawa is perceived as a "sleepy government town," but research for the new book revealed it's in fact home to the highest proportion of creative class workers in Canada, he writes, with 43 per cent of workers in creative fields of some kind - a higher percentage than New York, London or San Francisco.

Singles should take note of the finding that Calgary and Edmonton are home to thousands more single men than women, while Toronto boasts 22,500 more unattached women. Several remote northern communities scored high on the singles ranking because there are so many singles there and lots of bars and restaurants per capita in which they can meet, says Kevin Stolarick, research director for the Martin Prosperity Institute.

"Whitehorse, Yellowknife and Iqaluit tended to do just phenomenally for singles," he says, adding, "We can't tell everybody to move to Iqaluit - it's not going to work."

Overall, Canada is a more urban country than the U.S., Florida says - something that seems "bizarre" given our massive land mass. Eighty per cent of the Canadian population lives on two per cent of the land, he says, and while the five biggest American cities account for 23 per cent of the country's economic output, Canada's five major centres crank out 53 per cent of this nation's GDP, he says.

"I think the fact that we have weathered this recession well and we don't have a financial crisis and our banks are stable gives us an opportunity now to really reposition ourselves," says Florida, who relocated to Toronto a year and a half ago from Washington, D.C. "I think that Canada's cities have some of the biggest upsides in this economic reset."

He advocates linking Canada's mega-regions by high-speed rail that will transform them into long-distance suburbs of each other. Creative class workers are most "buffered" from the recession fallout, he says, but Canada also needs to create more and better service industry jobs because they're not as susceptible to outsourcing as manufacturing jobs.

"I think we owe it to the Windsors of the world, who have lost their core industries or are rapidly losing them, to connect them to new growth centres," he says. "So instead of Windsor being a connection to Detroit, it really needs to be connected to a more growing, thriving area like Toronto."

This economic crisis will put a halt to the "brain drain" of Canada's best and brightest seeking opportunities in the U.S., he predicts, and may soon shift to a "brain circulation" that will see many return home.

"I do think the era of Canadians going elsewhere to find their fame and fortune is over," he says. "Canada's big cities are at that moment now and we just have to take advantage of it and we have to stop being so humble, we have to go out and get it."

How Canadian cities stack up (Florida has developed several indexes to rank the diversity and strength of different communities):

#### CREATIVE CLASS

Percentage of workers who are "paid to think" and create in fields such as the arts, education, small business and engineering

Ottawa-Gatineau 43

Victoria 33

Vancouver 33

Montreal 33

Calgary 36

Toronto 34

Edmonton 29

Regina 31

St. John's, N.L. 34

Saskatoon 30

Winnipeg 29

Windsor, Ont. 25

Saint John, N.B. 29

Halifax 33

Cape Breton 24

#### BA AND ABOVE

Percentage of population age 25 and up with at least a four-year degree

Ottawa-Gatineau 32

Victoria 26

Vancouver 27

Montreal 23

Calgary 28

Toronto 30

Edmonton 21

Regina 21

St. John's, N.L. 21

Saskatoon 22

Winnipeg 21

Windsor, Ont. 20

Saint John, N.B. 15

Halifax 26

Cape Breton 12

#### BOHO INDEX

Florida correlates a high number of artists, musicians, writers and performers (bohemians) in a city with high property values and a burgeoning high-tech industry. The average across Canada and the U.S. is expressed as a value of 1.00 and each city's ratio indicates how it compares to that baseline.

Ottawa-Gatineau 1.26

Victoria 1.60

Vancouver 1.82

Montreal 1.54

Calgary 1.31

Toronto 1.75

Edmonton 1.03

Regina 1.14

St. John's, N.L. 0.94

Saskatoon 1.01

Winnipeg 1.11

Windsor, Ont. 0.65

Saint John, N.B. 0.73

Halifax 1.32

Cape Breton 0.27

#### GAY INDEX

Florida correlates a high number of gay and lesbian couples in a city with high property values and a burgeoning high-tech industry. The average across Canada and the U.S. is expressed as a value of 1.00 and each city's ratio indicates how it compares to that baseline.

Ottawa-Gatineau 1.60

Victoria 1.62

Vancouver 1.64

Montreal 1.79

Calgary 0.97

Toronto 1.42

Edmonton 0.78

Regina 0.63

St. John's, N.L. 0.94

Saskatoon 0.81

Winnipeg 0.85

Windsor, Ont. 0.67

Saint John, N.B. 0.67

Halifax 1.62

Cape Breton 0.15

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