

THE CREATIVE CLASS – TRUTH OR URBAN MYTH

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Vesna Tomic

Ski Resorts of Serbia
vesna.tomic@skijalistasrbije.rs

Abstract. *In the last decade, theories attempting to link culture, creativity and urban development are gaining more and more attention from the expert community and from urban policies decision makers. Strategies leaning on culture and creativity are expected to create the possibility to achieve a high level of competitiveness and compatibility with principles of sustainable development. The theoretician who has probably drawn most interest, positive and negative, is Richard Florida, a professor at the University in Toronto. This paper will analyze the concept and value implications of Florida's theory of the "creative class", with the goal to point out the positive, and that which should not be contemplated linearly as a model, but as an inspirational idea.*

Key words: *creative class, urban economic development*

1. INTRODUCTION

One could say that today the goal of anyone active in anything creative, in artistic or scientific work, is to be first in something, to be cited, and to be spoken about. Richard Florida, a professor at the University of Toronto, managed to achieve exactly this, when in 2002 he published his first book in the "creative class" series, and when he presented himself to the public as the creator of a new term and theory. It is possible that it is exactly this simple and convincing success that is one of the main reasons why Richard Florida caused tempestuous reactions among the public. His theory was praised and contested, most of all in America, also being discussed in Europe, he is criticized and supported in academic circles, journalists and politicians and the general public write and speak about him.

However we look at the ideas advocated by professor Florida, regardless of the angle and the manner, they cause never-ending controversy and the further development of theories. Maybe even more importantly, they also reflect on urban policies and development goals for large cities. The question we will attempt to answer here, by presenting and analyzing available documentation, is if the creative class theory by Richard Florida is a

contribution or is more part of the modern folklore – a new urban legend, significant only to the extent in which it is paraphrased, regardless of its accuracy.

2. RICHARD FLORIDA AND THE "CREATIVE CLASS"

Richard Florida acquired his PhD in 1986, at Columbia University, and until the mid-1990-ies he was occupied by economic topics common in academic circles, industrial productivity, and similar topics. The shift came when he was engaged to assist Pittsburgh City Administration to retain the numerous young employees working in the hi-tech industry. At that time, Florida noted that cities with a reputation for freedom of the individual to making lifestyle choices, attract new hi-tech companies. At the same time, other investigations were also implemented, the results of which he had access to, and which indicated that cities with a higher percent of homosexual population have more artists, workers in creative industries, but also in the hi-tech industry [1]. The idea, at the time only budding, has already come to resemble a new paradigm [14], and acquired the epithet, both in the positive and the negative sense.

It did not take long for the book "The Rise of the Creative Class" to appear, and become a bestseller, to be awarded the annual Washington Monthly's Political Book Award, and be proclaimed by the Harvard Business Review as the bearer of the most significant new, progressive idea. It was followed by other books: "The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent", "Cities and Creative Class", "Who's is YOUR City", and "The Great Reset".

In fact, what does this theory say? The basic idea is that the economy is changing, and that in the 21st century creative city dwellers are the wave of the future [10]. Florida proves that in metropolitan regions the concentration of employees in hi-tech industries, artists, musicians, the homosexual (gay) population and the "Bohemians group" are in direct correlation with economic development. He calls these groups the creative class, able to develop only in an open, tolerant, dynamic and highly professional environment. A suitable environment attracts the creative class, which then additionally attracts investments. Florida claims that it is better to invest in such environments, because these investments promise multiple years of prosperity, than to focus only on building stadiums, iconic buildings and shopping malls [13].

Two main premises can be recognized within this theory [21]:

- for the most part of human history, natural resources were the basic capital, today these are creative people,
- the basic economic resource – creative people – is highly mobile, gravitating toward places distinguished by tolerance and diversity,
- to achieve economic development and vitality, regions need to nurture and understand Florida's three "T" – talent, technology and tolerance, which together form the creative index.

In his book "The Flight of the Creative Class", Florida emphasized that tolerant cities enable all to better use their capabilities. In addition, he emphasized that in his opinion, his main contribution is the answer to the question – why certain places are better at attracting and holding on to talented people, and that most of the answer lies in tolerance [2].

3. CURRENT PROBLEMS OF URBAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE CREATIVE CLASS THEORY

At a moment when everyone is dealing with globalization, information and sustainable development from their own aspect, Professor Florida appears with an attractive, affirmative theory based on acknowledged strategies, attempting to offer a part of the answer to current problems and processes. How did Florida position his theory within the current context?

Today, states are directing development strategies toward fields deemed to be able to secure continuous economic development for a longer time to come. Such strategies are required to have an optimal and acceptable influence on social development, social justice, and environmental preservation. Strategies of economically developed countries are positioned in the fields of science, culture and human resources development [8], which become capital or industry. In the domain of social justice, in addition to generally accepted human rights [18] rights of minority communities are also proclaimed [20].

Having in mind the above, it is easy to conclude that Florida's creative class theory is current since it recognizes exactly science, culture and social equality as the bearers of economic development. According to his theory, today's main driver of economic development are human resources with their creativity, which he recognizes in specific social groups: the younger population employed in the hi-tech industry, artists, Bohemians, and part of the homosexual population. In short, the "creative class" is in its essence within the spirit of the paradigm of sustainable development [19] because part of the answer to problems of urban economic development is sought in development of the human potential, not in development at the expense of unrenovable resources.

Richard Florida's theory appeared as a "logical extreme" [17] and a continuation of what was already taking place in theory and in practice. Namely, there came a turning point from "cultural industries", which proved to be insufficiently flexible and dynamic, and led to serial products, toward "creative industries", with a broader scope of action and linked to innovations [17]. In his first book from the series, "The Rise of the Creative Class", Florida says that cities must be places of events, and that only those that are always ahead of others prosper [10]. City administrations that had engaged Florida as their expert consultant adopt plans and programs of reconstruction for historical sections of the city, for introducing various contents unto city spaces, for constructing recreational contents designated for the younger, active population, and for financing new cultural events [14], [5], [2].

4. CRITICISM OF THE CREATIVE CLASS THEORY

Criticisms aimed at Florida come from very disparate directions and with various motives. Criticisms come from scientific circles, from various vocations, vocational associations, and from politics. These criticisms have been published in journals, electronic and paper publications, in books, as essays, scientific papers, but also as letters from readers, and on electronic forums. The author mostly responds to criticisms, internet page "creativeclas.com" is very accessible, very well ordered and full of information, but there are also many people of like minds who have joined the debate.

Some reproach the fact that this theory is appearing at a time when the "dot.com" market, after tremendous expansion, was reaching its peak, and that it in fact took off on a wave that was already on its descent [14], [5]. Revitalization plans, prepared according to Florida's principles and under his leadership, are criticized in advance as a hazardous financial adventure of already indebted cities [14], [2]. On the other hand, there are those who feel that current political events in the US have unequivocally and in the most positive way confirmed this theory (Kotkin, 2008). Now there is impatient anticipation to see what would be Florida's response to the economic crisis that has happened in the meantime, which will most probably reignite the discussion [16].

4.1. General criticism

Florida is generally criticized as being methodologically superficial, that he wrote his books without using relevant data, that he is insufficiently familiar with the subject of his research, that he is overly simplifying when formulating his conclusions, and that for this reason his theory has no importance for science, and should not be lightly applied in practice. Several expert texts and books were published with the goal to confirm this thesis [5], [15].

He is especially criticized for using unreliable data and drawing conclusions about the importance of correlative concepts, which he introduces in order to explain and state the influence of human resources on the development of cities – the creative index, gay index, and Bohemian index [14]. In any case, the introduction of such parameters can, in the context of research implemented by Florida, be regarded also as part of creative thinking, depending on whether you have opted for or against the creative class.

In any case, in addition to the theoretical disagreement, most critics from academic circles have a dominating sarcastic and too emotional tone. The invested effort is evident, however criticisms are still based on a superficial or wrong interpretation of Florida's work. Richard Florida has written a bestseller, and such a book should not be expected to be absolutely precise relevant to sources used and data, or to offer answers to all issues of urban development [10]. It is also obvious that he has presented the whole idea fully in accordance with principles of modern marketing, making it receptive also for the broader public (thus causing suspicion in the expert community), as it should be with creative ideas having the goal to also encourage changes.

4.2. Criticism of the political starting point

To understand criticism of the political starting point of the creative class theory, it is indispensable to know the role/positions of the main actors, where interests of individual groups and centers of power are. The main actors of the creative class theory are social groups regarded as more inclined toward left oriented political parties, therefore it can be expected that the most denial comes from another side, from the Republicans. Data analysis shows that since the year 2000 the percentage of Democratic voters has significantly grown in cities with developed hi-tech industry, while Republicans were still in the lead in rural areas [1], [12]. Joel Kotkin, a Forbs magazine analyst and lecturer at Chapman University, California, says that right wing individuals are criticizing Florida since they do not find their interests in his theory. He recognizes the victory of the other political option and Barak Obama at the presidential elections in the USA exactly as a confirmation of the

potential of Florida's "creative class" and an unequivocal confirmation of the foundation of his theory. According to him, the crucial point for the election of Obama – the first Afro-American US President, were exactly the votes of Florida's creative class. Kotkin is of the opinion that this is a sign of a shift of the center of economic power from the hands of the military, agro, pharmaceutical and energy industry into the hands of, as he puts it, "new players", the creative class from Silicone Valley, Hollywood, and new companies – entrepreneurs, who have a more self-conscious attitude toward the environment [12].

Steven Malanga, a publicist and senior associate at Manhattan Institute, notes that criticism is coming also from left oriented political options, where the theory of the creative class is regarded as a new elitism and he considers that it favors only one social group at the expense of others [14]. A part of the left option regards the theory as but a new "mantra" of capitalism, and that it offers only hope, not a solution for economic problems [2].

Criticisms coming from politics of course have an ideological hue. Those who do not find their interest in the "creative class" regard and interpret the theory exclusively, demonstrating linear thinking, where unfortunately, they are not alone. An independent observer could conclude that different political options after all find their interest in this theory, and that therefore it must also hold some universal values.

4.3. Criticism from the aspect of economists

The biggest opponents of the "creative class" theory may in fact be Florida's colleagues, economists and urban economists. In addition to general objections primarily pertaining to the methodology used, the basis for criticisms from this vocation comes from positions of an opposing theoretical opinion [10], [14]. Richard Florida is not the only one or the first who has come to the conclusion about a correlation between the lifestyle in cities and the representation of certain social groups [1]. Another political current is distinctly against the theory of the significance of certain groups of the work force for the development of the economy, being of the opinion that the basic way of economic development is to attract investments by low taxes [14].

Also, the subject of dispute is the direction of action of causality between human capital and urban economic development. While one side, where professor Florida also belongs, is proving the causal link acting from the direction of human capital toward urban economic development [9], [10], the other side, for example Malizia and Feser, Hill, explains that it is exactly urban economic development that attracts and maintains the concentration of human capital [15].

That it really is not easy to understand and explain urban economic development is shown by analyses used by opposing sides to confirm their theses. Florida is blamed by saying that certain data speak the opposite of that which he is explaining by applying the creative index, for example the population increase of some cities [10], unemployment trends [14], etc. The problem appears when parameters set by Florida need to be viewed together (Florida's three "T", the share of certain social groups and economic development), and then in fact no one gives an answer which would unequivocally refute his theory.

Glaser analyzed the same data that was also used by Florida, but by using a somewhat different methodology. He came to the conclusion that it can be proven that creativity in general, and not the representation of specific groups, is important for economic development of cities [10]. A group of authors, Donegan, Drucker, Goldstein, Lowe, and Mal-

izia do not contest the theory fully. They satisfy themselves with the conclusion that traditional economic strategies should not be changed on account of this new one, because the theory about the influence of the creative class on economic development is still not fully proven [6].

Florida argues the significance of his theory by citing acknowledged authorities, primarily Nobel Prizes laureates for economy. In his book "Cities and the Creative Class", for part of his theory (two of the three "T" – technology and talent), he sets a foundation reminding that Robert Solow was awarded the Nobel Prize for scientifically grounding the theory of correlation between technological development and economic growth, and that Robert Lucas, also a Nobel Prize laureate had proven the correlation between "human capital" and economic growth. The third "T", the effect of social and political tolerance on the development of the economy, forms part of theory which still leans on a different interpretation of data, however Florida cites independent authors from various milieus – Canada, USA, Australia, and Italy [9].

4.4. Criticism from the aspect of artists

If art has become an industry, the position of the artist has considerably changed. New possibilities have opened up, but more and more, the marginalization, primarily economic, of artists is being pointed out.

Professor Ann Daly, renowned as a culture critic, consultant and motivation trainer, when criticizing the creative class theory states that this is just another way for others to earn on the account of artists, leaving artists "happily hungry" [5], in order for others to prosper. Also, she states as an argument that Florida is a consultant to numerous organizations, especially the state administration, but to no organizations of artists, and that he has himself confessed that he knows very little about artists [5].

Ann Markusen, professor at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, criticizes the creative class as a jumbled causal logic linked to urban growth, which does not provide the creators of urban development policies with a clear picture of who in fact are the constitutive groups of the creative class and what are the actual needs of these groups. Via a case study, where she viewed artists who are among the main actors of the creative class, she criticizes professor Florida of knowing very little about this group, and especially points out that this theory identifies creativity with the level of education [15]. As in the case of most critics, Florida immediately responded with an article on his internet page where he explains that the creative index, which he introduced in his research, is in fact based on data about employment, not on data about the education of subjects, and that in his opinion he was not discriminatory, but in fact affirmative [2].

Even though himself admitting to not knowing much about artists, Richard Florida has done more for this group than they have managed to do for themselves on their own [5], because he has attracted additional attention of politicians, investors and the media to culture and artists [14], [2].

4.5. Criticism of the individual

When Florida's critics run out of arguments, they resort to personal criticism. These criticisms are directed at his ability and success. He is faulted for knowing how to offer and sell his idea, for his eloquence, his convincing performance, style and refined dress

[5]. Facts that his books are bestsellers, that there are many of them, that they are very voluminous (in total over 1000 pages), that they are in hard cover, and thus even more expensive, etc., also become problems [14]. That is what happens when you want to be popular.

Florida is really a successful, highly sold author, a sought after lecturer and consultant. In the period from 1980 to 2010, he has signed seven own published books, as editor and coeditor another six, with 54 articles in expert journals, has been the author of chapters in 30 books, and has also published 45 texts in various publications and over 60 articles in newspapers [3]. Very soon after it appeared in March 2009, the book "Who's is YOUR City" became the bestseller of the month in one of the largest Internet bookstores – "Amazon.com" [4]. Twice already the reputable Business Week magazine has proclaimed him the bearer of innovative ideas ("Voices of Innovation" award for 2006 and 2010), and in 2009 he was awarded the title of European Ambassador for Creativity and Innovation [3]. He receives invitations from all sides, at least once a week he is a visiting lecturer and city administrations in the US and Canada are racing to engage him as their consultant. How renowned Florida is can also be noted by searching the Internet. If we were to measure the popularity of this author by the number of pages that appear when searching by his name, Florida would convincingly surpass the number accumulated together by all the other authors mentioned in this text [11].

5. PRAISES FROM CRITICS

Wise critics emphasize advantages of their opponent, however it is completely unproductive for proving their argument if these praises offer too good arguments of support, which does happen in certain cases. On the other hand, those who are skilled and hold the same opinion will praise you while at the same time systematically searching for your faults.

Criticizing Richard Florida, professor Dali emphasizes as positive his approach to research: careful and direct observation of reality, interviews with focus groups, asking various and new investigative questions, search for alternative answers, merging of quantitative and qualitative methods, and the ambition of vision. In addition, although somewhat doubting the outcome, he acknowledges as his merit that for creators of urban development policies and urban planners art has become more important than before [5], [14], and that regardless if the theory is correct or not, it has set the basis for a serious discussion about the role of culture in urban economic development [5].

Emil Malizia, professor at the Department of City & Regional Planning, University of North Carolina, feels that Florida's unequivocal contribution is that he has directed attention to tolerance as the basis for social progress, although on the other hand he feels that the effect of tolerance on the economy is uncertain [2].

Edward Glaeser, professor at Harvard University, Department of Economics, criticizes, as the only fault, the originality of the idea of Richard Florida. He is of the opinion that Florida was not the first to recognize the significance of knowledge and creativity in the field of economy, and that also in the domain of sociology he is not the first who hit upon the idea about the link between a Bohemian lifestyle and social liberties in the USA, but he still is the first who has tied all this together. Glaeser has only praises for the

structure, and the writing style of the book, which he sees within the genre of popular science. He says that it is interesting, easy to read, and full of adequate anecdotes to hold your attention. He also supports presented ideas as essentially true and accurate, that the development of cities really depends on creative people [10]. Glaeser has also presented a very interesting assessment, that Florida has not become popular by criticizing globalization, but "because he told the world things about itself that are fundamentally correct " [17].

6. CONCLUSION

All mentioned criticisms, even those the foundation of which could be subject to discussion, are in essence superficial because they observe only one, possibly two aspects of the theory – which almost intuitively – links and explains several social processes and phenomena. Critics make the mistake of positioning their starting point in the search for problems that the theory has not supplied answers to. The best part of the "creative class" theory is ideological or tainted by professional jealousy.

In fact, none of the critics have to date convincingly overturned Richard Florida's theory, while he has realized his goal, to inspire and propel. Florida has caused tempestuous reactions, which is good because he has encouraged the expert community to dwell more on the current changes in society and the life of cities. It is apparent that we are living in a period of numerous and rapid changes, and that we will need all our efforts to find our way in all of this. However many the controversies around Richard Florida and the theory of the "creative class", it cannot be denied the influence on current policies of urban development in America, and on the initiation of new research in sociology and urban economy.

It can be concluded that professor Florida has offered much more than an urban legend, even though it would not be a wonder if this theory were to acquire such a name, either as an expression of gratitude from the younger, urban generation, whose potential he has recognized, or as another way of belittling by those who think differently. What is important today, that Florida has noted and which places him among progressive thinkers, is that culture and creativity need to hold the central place in social development, as an essential response to problems of globalization and the consumption of unrenewable resources. As opposed to his critics, Florida has managed to see the whole picture and to draw from it that which is today competitive on the global market. With this goal, he has set the very center of gravity of his theory of the human resource, technology development, culture, and has offered all this as an idea in an appealing and modern way, to those prepared to be quick and ahead of others.

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KREATIVNA KLASA – ISTINA ILI URBANI MIT

Poslednjih desetak godina teorije koje pokušavaju da povežu kulturu, kreativnost i razvoj gradova privlače sve veću pažnju stručne javnosti i onih koji odlučuju o urbanim politikama. Od strategija koje se oslanjaju na kulturu i kreativnost se očekuju da stvore mogućnost postizanja visoke kompetitivnosti i kompatibilnost sa principima održivog razvoja. Teoretičar koji je možda izazvao najviše interesovanja, pozitivnih i negativnih kritika, je Ričard Florida, profesor Univerziteta u Torontu. Ovdje će se analizirati koncept i vrednosne implikacije Floridine teorije "kreativne klase", sa ciljem da se da ukaže na ono što je pozitivno i što ne treba posmatrati linearno kao uzor i model, već kao na inspirativnu ideju.

Ključne reči: *kreativna klasa, urbo-ekonomski razvoj.*