

Creative Studies: Responding to claims made in Statement 3

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In this essay Richard Florida's creative class theory will be explored in depth. Subsequently, it will also be evaluated and critiqued upon. Especially, in regard to the privileges afforded to the creative class and whether or not this prioritization is justified. The consequence of gentrification and the role of the creative class in this predicament will also be reflected upon. Furthermore, the effect creative clusters have on stakeholders within particular communities will be discussed, in addition to its distribution of wealth. In line with this, potential governmental solutions will be presented to further sustain value creation for all. Moreover, the historical aspect of Hoxton becoming a creative hub will be underlined as opposed to oversimplification of regeneration policies. It must also be noted that the glorification of certain aspects of creative labour will be addressed. Finally, ethical concerns and racial discrepancies concerning the Creative Class will be highlighted. To conclude, its various claims will be evaluated, utilizing aspects drawn upon throughout the essay.

According to Richard Florida, the paradigm in which we previously perceived economic growth in global economies has shifted. The modern-day society places less emphasis on traditional social and cultural forms and when coupled with the reliance on innovative technology; has altered the lens of what we deem as valuable (Florida, 2012, p. 5). Florida believes the radical change of perspective derives from human creativity, which does not merely hold implications for the economy but society as a whole. He identifies a sub-group called the creative class, which in simplistic terms encompasses those that "add economic value through creativity" (Florida, 2002, p. 68). To illustrate, this can include scientists, engineers, artists and entertainers, although this list is not exhaustive. As Florida firmly believes creative capacity is an intangible force that resides within creatives, he lays out a strategy set to attract this group of people. To elaborate, the creative class is said to be the driving force behind economic renewal and prosperity. Therefore, cities, corporations and industrial clusters that essentially meet criteria of the creative class; will subsequently bring forth regional growth. These criteria can include aspects such as adequate transport, entertainment, and communication infrastructure. Moreover, Florida explains that although the creative class may differ in occupations, they are likely to share similar progressive values (Florida, 2012, pp. 56-59). To exemplify, an area which is liberal, free-thinking, and

contains a significant number of bohemians would stand a good chance of attracting high-quality employees. Florida identifies that communities that embrace bohemia - those at the fringes of society (Davies & Sigthornsson, 2013, p. 112), coupled with diversity and tolerance towards differing sexualities, are spaces where the creative class thrive. Subsequently, he uses the bohemian-index, diversity-index and gay-index as indicators to gauge where the creative class flourishes. It must be noted that these indexes are merely meant for indication and therefore don't necessarily imply causation. Another value that is said to encapsulate the creative class is meritocracy (Taylor & O'Brien, 2017, p. 34), the idea that people are selected according to merit, therefore favouring hard work and in turn boosting the economy. All in all, Florida recognizes the paradigm shift from human capital, based on education to creative capital which recognizes talent regardless of qualifications. His plight is for firms, cities and countries to be able to enable the creative class to operate in their individuality, consequently pioneering economic growth and innovation across the globe.

Although creative class theory provides an optimistic approach that could potentially bolster economies all around the world, it has received substantial backlash. For many it can seemingly be an oversimplified and somewhat celebratory view on modern day capitalism, maybe even a tone-deaf form of neo-liberalism. The main critique of Florida is that prioritizing certain groups of people does not suffice when needed housing, education, transport and economic opportunities are not in place (Davies & Sigthornsson, 2013, p. n.p). The creative class will essentially not be able to operate as it "should" without the needed infrastructure (Nathan, 2005) (Pratt, 2008). Nathan therefore believes that struggling post-industrial cities do not need overpaid consultants "doing a Florida thing" (McGuigan, 2009, p. 298) when fundamental factors of those regions are neglected. A viable alternative is for policy initiatives to look at the core issues instigating a stagnant economy; hence securing a more permanent solution, as opposed to luring creative workers to its shores first-hand. In Florida's defence, and also in line with Kate Oakley when talking about Sheffield, he cannot be blamed for how others utilize his work on a local level (Oakley, 2009) However, McGuigan still critiques Florida's "global copy-paste consultancy", referring to over usage and oversimplification of complex ecosystems (McGuigan, 2009, p. 298). He argues that the articulation of neoliberalism "cool culture" is problematic, possibly referring to ties with the

side effects of gentrifications. Personally, upon hearing terms like “creative-nation”; the ramifications of Florida’s work cannot and should not be underestimated (Beukelaar & Spence, 2019, p. 10). In that same spirit, I believe he should have foreseen some of the most evident shortcomings, perhaps reflected upon them in the first edition of his book, rather than attempting to clarify his stance in the preface of later editions. Florida goes on to explain that he rejects the notion of being neo-liberal and does not place blind faith in the markets (Florida, 2012, p. xi). Regardless, I believe Florida should have initially attempted to do everything in his power to limit the possibilities of his research to be misunderstood or even misused, especially due to the fact that disenfranchised people are being affected by gentrification.

Regardless of criticism; Florida’s concept of the creative class has been imperative in regeneration strategies and governmental policy encompassing the social and economic transformation of urban areas. When looking at the rejuvenation of declining areas there are clearly positive outcomes as well, substantial progress has been made in the neo-bohemia of Chicago, the filmmakers of Nigeria (Nollywood) or even the Shoreditch area in London (Davies & Sigthornsson, 2013, p. n.p). In line with (Heur, 2009) it also provides an arena for social networks and informal knowledge sharing. However, this does not necessarily mean that his policies are sound, evidence shows that the arrival of the creative class drives up rent and property forcing low-income residents and businesses out of the area. In Florida’s defence, this can be a consequence of creative clusters as well which entails industry sectors grouping together geographically in order to pool labour and make create an effective supply chain. This can provide extreme profit maximizing opportunities for the economy, such as “successful” creative clusters in Wicker Park in Chicago or Silicon Valley in California. At the same time, it is still linked with social and economic inequality as the wealth is not spread across the wider community (Pratt, 2009) as cited in (Davies & Sigthornsson, 2013, p. n.p). Although I see the economic benefit of creative clusters and more specifically the creative class, there has to be a feasible way for both creatives and creative firms to reinvest in the community that provided them a space to express their individuality to begin with. Personally, I believe that oversaturation can be problematic, there needs to be a sustainable plan in to integrate the creative class into communities, perhaps regulation that ensures

profits do not solely go to the shareholders but other stakeholders as well (Lazonick, 2014, pp. 1-11). Government policies rooted in Florida's concept need to protect all its citizens, if it fails to do so the creative class can quickly become an elitist group which is afforded privileges and exemptions, at the expense of low-income citizens. In a sense, furthering inequality in access to housing but also between regions and even within the creative labour market itself.

The notion that the creative class is heavily glamorized is not new. The downsides of the creative labour market are especially apparent when discussing precarity, which embodies workers taking on business risks and responsibilities that normally would be undertaken by an employer (Davies & Sigthornsson, 2013, p. n.p) The uncertainty of work and sometimes sporadic occurrences of projects causes an economic and psychological uncertainty which in many ways is not represented in Florida's "beatific notion of creative work" (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p. 6). One needs to take into account the unethical freelance practices and exploitation of zero-hour contracts. Florida's work does not take into account the often underpaid, insecure and destabilizing work-life balance, in which creatives are expected to raise their families and make a living. The blatant omission of these downsides raises serious questions about the credibility of the creative class theory. Moreover, exposing the hectic nature of creative work truly casts doubt on the "build and they will come approach", there seem to be more pertinent factors at play (Beukelaar & Spence, 2019) as cited in (Davies & Sigthornsson, 2013, p. n.p). Maybe the creative class is not as unified as it is made out to be, maybe their values differ more than we think. When using Hoxton in East London as a case study, one can see that the creative class has made it a hub, but this so-called "hipsterization" did not happen overnight. History tells us that Hoxton was a neglected area often left unregulated and therefore exposed to undesirable activities. It housed people on the fringes of society, which consequently brewed a bohemian environment which eventually gave rise to the iconic punk scene. In the 1990's it emerged as a creative cluster for music, visual arts. Moreover, it was known for "prostitution, drinking and the establishment of England's first theatre" (Pratt, 2009, p. 1053). Pratt illustrates that the reason why creatives gravitate towards Hoxton is rooted in history. I recognize that regardless of adequate infrastructure, good health care and accessible transport, historical events can ultimately determine whether an area is

attractive to the creative class or not. This is potentially a blind spot which Florida's model fails to measure, regardless of metrics such as diversity-index, gay-index and bohemian-index

When reading *The Rise of The Creative Class* by Richard Florida, he was quick to deny it being elitist, he admits that the creative class enjoys vast privileges but states “to acknowledge that fact is not to endorse it”. Furthermore, he says that his key thesis is basic: “every human is creative”. SOURCE On a personal level, him absolving himself from any form of responsibility was distasteful. Especially when learning that he barked the following statement at a reporter: “I will not apologise. I do not regret anything” (Wainright, 2017). My opposition predominantly stems from the indifference towards racial disparities throughout his research. Even stating that the creative class enjoys privileges, fails to address whom within the creative class truly does. Even though I can agree to the fact that every human is creative, we need to look at who is given a platform to display their creative capabilities, meritocratic values are not necessarily open to workforce diversity (Taylor & O'Brien, 2017). Florida states that he does not necessarily endorse the privileges afforded to the creative class, but actively prompts governments to attract the same group. This is especially problematic when he himself states that: “More than eight in ten (80.9 percent) of Creative Class jobs are held by whites”, essentially furthering not only an elitist agenda but a tone-deaf approach to race disparities by pushing out low-income families from their homes, often people of colour and replacing them with essentially mainly white creatives. I therefore strongly believe that merely acknowledging the privileges afforded to predominantly white creatives, without adequate action whilst I quote being: “middle-aged, white, Italian-American, married, and straight” is directly harmful (Florida, 2012, pp. 59, 319).

To conclude, Richard Florida's concept of the creative class, although heavily criticized, has been actively used in governments across the globe. Furthermore, it has produced economic boosts to previously deprived areas, nonetheless, when implemented without adequate investment, wealth is often not distributed evenly between stakeholders. Policy makers should therefore look to integrate creative class in a sustainable way and cater it to the needs and ecosystem of that particular region, as one policy does not fit all. When done effectively, it also creates hubs for cooperation, networking and informal information sharing. In

addition, Florida recognizes the paradigm shift from human capital to creative capital which is extremely valuable. However, attracting the creative class does not continuously provide economic growth, adequate infrastructure needs to be in place first. Finally, it must be noted that concerns regarding gentrification, the glorification of creative labour and race disparities still remain.

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