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The creative class to the rescue of cities?

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The notion of a creative class has been used to shape public policies promoting urban growth by building infrastructures and developing amenities that are likely to attract the "creative workers". And yet this hypothesis does not hold up, as the results of a European study show. Developing education and infrastructures that can serve the population as a whole may be a much more productive strategy.

The "creative class": the salvation of urban policies?

According to the regional economist Richard Florida, there is a "creative class" in our societies made up of people who produce new ideas and technologies or creative contents in today's economy (Florida 20002). This class includes a whole range of professions and he mentions, among others, people who work in high technology, in the entertainment business, in journalism, in finance, or in arts and crafts. Florida links this notion of a creative class with a theory of the economic development of cities in which the attraction of members of the creative class is seen as a key to the creation of new activities. This thesis is supported by many spatial correlations between the development of cities and indices of cultural openness and tolerance.

It created a considerable stir. In academic circles, it has been abundantly criticized, but also frequently picked up, insofar as it links the question of local economic development with other dimensions, such as urban environment or cultural activities, thereby allowing the specialists of housing and culture to intervene on issues that were, hitherto, primarily dealt with by economic geography, the geography of innovation, or industrial economics.

In the world of the urban policy-makers and locally-elected officials, the attraction of "creative people" has emerged as the solution for promoting short-term city development by means of affordable and productive policies: It may seem easier to attract people than to attract entire companies or, at an even greater cost, to promote an endogenous development by encouraging education and research. Northern-American cities – lead by Toronto, whose university recruited the author of the theory of the creative class at great cost[1] – have been the first to take up Florida's ideas. Another exemplary case is that of Milwaukee, a city marked by its industrial past. The recasting of the image of the city from the year 2000 onward and the launching of ambitious development policies were explicitly conceived to attract the creative class, following consultation with Richard Florida. The results, measured at the level of the agglomeration, are nonexistent – there are no more or no less "creative" people in the

[1] see http://www.toronto.ca/culture/pdf/creative-city-planning-framework-feb08.pdf ou http://creativecitiescanada.com/images/summit/creative_economy2012.pdf

general population than 15 years ago – while the targeted investments concentrated on the city center were made to the detriment of the financing of infrastructure intended for the population as a whole, in all neighborhoods (Zimmerman, 2008). For a couple of years now, European cities have followed the same road[2]. The discourse concerning the need to attract the creative class has provided a justification for the support of artistic and cultural activities that are viewed as a source of economic development. But beside these fairly classic operations, there are also policies aimed at attracting a small scientific and cultural elite, or one coming from the world of business, thanks to direct incentives or facilities that are thought to correspond to the taste of this social class. Indeed, part of Florida's thesis consists in saying that the members of the creative class choose the cities where they settle on the basis of factors such as urban atmosphere, openness to minorities, or the vitality of cultural activities; in other words, on the basis of *soft* urban factors, rather than more traditional *hard* factors, such as employment, income, or the existing infrastructure.

One of the many criticisms that Florida's thesis has drawn is that of an inversion of causality. There is indeed a creative class, and this class is indeed present to a greater extent in wealthy cities; these cities have also better indices when it comes to *soft factors*. Florida's data may therefore seem accurate (something not everyone agrees with), but it is his interpretation of those data that is inaccurate. It is the economic development that creates both the jobs that attract creative people and the urban amenities that these indices measure. Richard Shearmur (2007) and Allen J. Scott (2005) are some of the North American authors who have raised this objection. In Europe, several researchers have tried to produce similar data and have obtained spatial correlations similar to Florida's (Boschma & Fritsch 2007). This thesis is therefore not specific to North America: it can also be applied to Europe, and Florida and his colleagues have, in fact, written a report supporting this claim (Florida & Tinagli 2004).

Testing the hypothesis

We have taken part in a European program aimed at testing Florida's thesis in 13 European cities, 11 of which are considered below[3]. This program is interesting insofar as it is not based on spatial correlations – whose causal link is difficult to interpret – but on a direct study, by way of a questionnaire, of the trajectory and lifestyle of the members of the creative class. In each city that we have considered, a team selected a minimum of 150 people who belonged to the professional categories Florida defined as the creative class, and 50 people who had studied in similar domains (Table 1).

[2] For example, Nice : http://www.nicecotedazur.org/la-metropole/comp%C3%A9tences/la-m%C3%A9tropole-et-le-d%C3%A9veloppement-%C3%A9conomique.

[3] See http://acre.socsci.uva.nl/. The program was conceived (and coordinated) by Sako Musterd (Amsterdam) and Alan Murie (Birmingham). The cities in question are Amsterdam, Barcelona, Budapest, Dublin, Helsinki, Leipzig, Milan, Munich, Poznan, Riga, Toulouse, Birmingham and Sofia. These last two cities have been excluded from the following analysis because of coding issues. The analysis concerns therefore 11 cities. More comprehensive results can be found in the following article: Martin-Brelot Hélène, Grossetti Michel, Eckert Denis, Gritsai Olga and Kovács Zoltan, 2010, « The spatial mobility of the 'creative class': a European Perspective », *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 34, n°4, p. 854-870.

Table 1: The making of a representative sample (11 cities)

	Sectors (NAF/NACE classification)	Number of individuals	%
Industries of Knowledge	People who have a degree in engineering, industry and civil engineering, the social sciences, business, or law	301	12.8
	Finance (65)	302	12.8
	Corporate lawyers and other services to companies (741)	350	14.9
	Higher education (803) + Research and Development (73)	267	11.3
Creative Industries	Degrees in the arts and the humanities	315	13.4
	Video games, software programming, electronic publishing (722)	316	13.4
	Advertising (744) or architecture	277	11.8
	Video, music, photography (921) + Radio and TV (922)	227	9.6
	Total	2355	100.0

Source: Enquête Acre (2007)

In the first part of this article, we will examine the earlier trajectory of the professionals who were selected, setting aside those chosen because they obtained their degrees in that city[4]. We want to assess the extent to which the members of the creative class are, as the theory predicts, established professionals who have settled in each of our chosen cities in the course of their career. This will allow us to isolate those who correspond to this pattern. In the second part of the article, we will focus on the reasons these professionals put forward to justify their move to each of the cities in the study. We will conclude by going back to Florida's thesis and giving our interpretation of the fact that our data in no way validate his thesis.

A creative class that is not very mobile

The first striking result of the study has to do with the *geographical origin* of the people interviewed, recorded typically in terms of birthplace. The first surprise, considering the thesis that we are examining, is that more than half (53.3%) of the people interviewed were born in the town where they currently live, or in its immediate surroundings. This proportion varies from 31% (Dublin) to 76% (Barcelona). Among the cities where the people interviewed are the most "local" we find – right after Barcelona – Milan (75%), Poznan (72%) and Budapest (62%), while among those in which they are the least local, we find Toulouse (36%), Amsterdam (37%) and Helsinki (42%). The majority of "non-locals" come from the same country (35%), which leaves a little less than 12% of foreigners, the latter being in greater numbers in Dublin (50%) and Riga (24%). Of course, the fact that one is born locally does not necessarily imply that one has led a sedentary life. Those who do not fit this pattern may have come back after studying or working elsewhere. Nevertheless, it seems difficult to attribute this return to a choice based on factors like urban atmosphere, without taking into account the presence of family, long-standing friendships, and local networks.

The second result has to do with the *place where the highest diploma was obtained*, and this result is even more striking: 63.6% of the participants in the study have studied in the

[4] This in order to avoid overestimating the number of those who have studied in the city. This survey was not initially designed to study trajectories, as we are doing here, hence the presence of this part of the sample involving former students.

town where they currently live or nearby. This ranges from 47% (Toulouse) to 91% (Poznan). Among the cities with the greatest number of people educated locally, we find Barcelona (86%), Milan (73%) and Helsinki (67%), and among those with the smallest Amsterdam (51%), Munich (52%), and Leipzig (52%). For those who have studied in that city, Florida's interpretative scheme also seems farfetched. These people have networks and habits, and we can reasonably assume that they did not choose to live in that city by comparing it to other cities in terms of urban amenities.

Table 2 summarizes the types of trajectory that we have obtained on the basis of this information about birthplace and place of study. We notice that the proportion of those who fit Florida's thesis, as far as spatial mobility is concerned, is about one quarter.

Table 2: Types of trajectory

		Type of trajectory			Total
		Born in the city or nearby	Born elsewhere but studied in the city or nearby	Born elsewhere and studied elsewhere	
City	Amsterdam	39.0%	20.6%	40.4%	100,0%
	Barcelona	77.9%	10.0%	12.1%	100,0%
	Budapest	62.4%	18.8%	18.8%	100,0%
	Dublin	32.6%	20.0%	47.4%	100,0%
	Helsinki	45.9%	28.8%	25.3%	100,0%
	Leipzig	53.8%	12.5%	33.7%	100,0%
	Milan	77.1%	6.9%	16.0%	100,0%
	Munich	52.1%	12.6%	35.3%	100,0%
	Poznan	74.3%	19.9%	5.9%	100,0%
	Riga	46.7%	21.0%	32.4%	100,0%
	Toulouse	36.8%	27.9%	35.3%	100,0%
Total (N=1402)		55,2%	18.3%	26.5%	100.0%

Source: Enquête Acre (2007)

Why they come

Let us now look at what the respondents[5] of this study say about the reasons why they have decided to settle in the city where our researchers have met them. For this, we have at our disposal the question that is asked at the beginning of the questionnaire: "Please, classify by order of importance the four main reasons for which you chose to live in [the city considered] (from 1 to 4: number 1 indicating the most important reason, and number 4 the least important)". A list of 26 possible answers follows, covering a variety of reasons listed in Table 3. It turns out that the answer which is the most frequently chosen as number 1 concerns issues of personal trajectory, which correspond to answers 1 to 4. These reasons represent 55.2% of the answers ranked number 1. The answers 5 to 11 and 25 refer to

[5] In this case, all the respondents were taken into account. We have verified that the population of former students did not modify the proportions in any significant way.

traditional *hard* factors and represent 35.9% of the items checked in first position. This leaves 9% only for lines 10 and 12 to 24, which are the factors that correspond to Florida's theory.

Table 3: Reasons for living in this city (totality of the respondents, N=2008)

Reason	rank 1	rank 2 or more	Total number of quotations
1. I was born here	**19.7%**	**10.8%**	**30.6%**
2. I have family here	**17.2%**	**23.0%**	**40.2%**
3. I studied in [city considered]	**11.6%**	**18.5%**	**30.1%**
4. Proximity of friends	**7.6%**	**30.7%**	**38.3%**
5. I moved here because of my job	**21.1%**	**12.3%**	**33.3%**
6. I moved here because of my spouse's job	3.5%	6.3%	9.8%
7. Job opportunities	**7.5%**	**30.4%**	**37.9%**
8. Higher income	0.7%	9.0%	9.7%
9. Size of the city	1.7%	**19.2%**	**21.0%**
10. Weather/climate	0.3%	7.0%	7.3%
11. Good public transportation	0.8%	11.0%	11.8%
12. Proximity of nature (sea, mountain, countryside)	1.5%	14.2%	15.7%
13. Affordability of housing	0.8%	5.6%	6.4%
14. Availability of housing	0.5%	4.9%	5.4%
15. Quality of housing	0.4%	4.5%	4.9%
16. Safe city for children	0.1%	3.8%	3.9%
17. Inhabitants open to people coming from different geographical areas	0.3%	4.4%	4.7%
18. Open and tolerant city	0.7%	6.7%	7.4%
19. Gay and lesbian-friendly city	0.1%	1.7%	1.8%
20. Language (ability to communicate in the local language)	0.2%	3.4%	3.6%
21. Conviviality of the city	1.2%	12.7%	14.0%
22. Recreational amenities	1.2%	**22.5%**	**23.7%**
23. Cultural amenities	1.2%	15.3%	16.5%
24. Diversity of buildings	0.3%	5.7%	6.0%
25. Presence of good universities	1.1%	8.7%	9.8%
26. Other reason	0.0%	2.9%	3.0%

Source: Enquête Acre (2007)

The *Soft* reasons are rarely ranked 1 (9%) or 2 (18%). Most of the time, they are ranked 3 (26%) or 4 (17%). They seem to reflect what the respondents enjoy about the city, rather than the concrete reasons that brought them there in the first place. This became obvious when we crossed the type of reasons ranked number one and the type of trajectory (Table 4). Those who were born in the city mention *soft factors* as much as those who come from elsewhere.

Table 4: Trajectories and reasons

	Reasons ranked first			Total
Trajectory	"trajectory" (1-4)	*hard factors* (5-9, 11, 25)	*soft factors* (10, 12-24)	
Born in the city or nearby	68.5%	23.3%	8.2%	100.0%
Born elsewhere but studied in the city or nearby	54.8%	33.0%	12.3%	100.0%
Born elsewhere and studied elsewhere	19.6%	70.1%	10.3%	100.0%
Total (N=1696)	55.7%	34.7%	9.6%	100.0%

Source: Enquête Acre (2007)

This analysis is reinforced by the results presented in Table 4, which compares the reasons invoked by the respondents, relative to how long they have been residents of the city. If the reasons linked with the trajectory and those linked with classic factors of attraction vary inversely (the longer one has lived in a city, the more likely one is to provide reasons linked to that trajectory), the *soft factors* do not vary significantly one way or the other.

Table 5: Duration of the presence in the city and reasons for it

		Reasons ranked first			Total
Time spent in the city		"trajectory" (1-4)	*hard factors* (5-9,11, 25)	*soft factors* (10, 12-24)	
	Less than a year	20.5%	75.9%	3.6%	100.0%
	Between 1 and 2 years	20.4%	66.7%	12.9%	100.0%
	Between 2 and 5 years	33.3%	60.9%	5.7%	100.0%
	Between 5 and 10 years	44.2%	43.7%	12.2%	100.0%
	More than 10 years	66.6%	24.4%	9.0%	100.0%
Total (N=1696)		53.9%	36.8%	9.3%	100.0%

Source: Enquête Acre (2007)

To better understand the reasons why those who were not born in a particular city and have also not studied there decided to settle there, we have collected their answers in Table 6. Unsurprisingly, the reasons linked with trajectory are much less important, but they still represent 19.8% of the reasons ranked first. This shows that the criteria that we have used (birthplace and place where the highest diploma was obtained) do not take into account people who were in the city before their professional career (who have studied there, for instance, but have obtained their highest diploma elsewhere), and that, therefore, we slightly

overestimate the proportion of those who are mobile, in the sense of Florida's thesis. Their main reason for coming to a particular city is a job (51.2%) and, more generally, *hard factors* (69.9%). The *soft factors* represent only 10.3% of those reasons, hardly more than in the population as a whole. Among the reasons that most often appears, we notice proximity to nature (hardly likely to be the object of local public policies), the size of the city (*idem*), the general "conviviality of the city" (a little more likely to be promoted by local policies), and finally, recreational amenities, which is the only element that corresponds directly to Florida's thesis, but which often only comes up in 2nd, 3rd, or 4th position. This particular answer was ranked number 1 by only 6 people.

Table 6: Reasons to live in this city (respondents who were born elsewhere and have studied elsewhere, 328 people)

Reason	rank 1	rank 2 or lower	Total number of mentions (?)
1. I was born here	0	0	0
2. I have family here	7.3%	8.8%	16.2%
3. I studied in [city considered]	4%	4.3%	8.2%
4. Proximity of friends	8.5%	16.2%	24.7%
5. I moved here because of my job	**51.2%**	**13.1%**	**64.3%**
6. I moved here because of my spouse's job	7%	8.5%	15.5%
7. Job opportunities	7%	**29.3%**	**36.3%**
8. Higher income	1.8%	12.5%	14.3%
9. Size of the city	**1.5%**	**22.6%**	**24.1%**
10. Weather/climate	0.6%	11.3%	11.9%
11. Good public transportation	0.6%	11.6%	12.2%
12. Proximity of nature (sea, mountain, countryside)	**2.1%**	**17.7%**	**19.8%**
13. Affordability of housing	0.3%	7.6%	7.9%
14. Availability of housing	0.3%	4.9%	4.6%
15. Quality of housing	0.6%	4.9%	5.5%
16. Safe city for children	0.3%	4.9%	5.2%
17. Inhabitants open to people coming from different geographical areas	0.6%	6.1%	6.7%
18. Open and tolerant city	1.2%	6.4%	7.6%
19. Gay and lesbian-friendly city	0	1.8%	1.8%
20. Language (ability to communicate in the local language)	0	7.3%	7.3%
21. Conviviality of the city	**1.5%**	**17.4%**	**18.9%**
22. Recreational amenities	**1.8%**	**26.5%**	**28.4%**
23. Cultural amenities	0.9%	17.4%	18.3%
24. Diversity of buildings	0	5.5%	5.5%
25. Presence of good universities	0.6%	7.6%	8.2%
26. Other reason	0	2.1%	2.1%

Source: Enquête Acre (2007)

Conclusion

Should we definitively reject Florida's thesis? We could discuss further the weaknesses of our own study, but its results are so overwhelming that we will content ourselves by forestalling the main criticisms. For one, our sampling is in Europe, where mobility is less extensive than in the Unites States, which is Florida's starting point. But he has defended the idea that his thesis could be applied to Europe. Has he simply underestimated the difference in mobility? Boschma and Fritsch (2007) have shown that the European data for spatial correlations of the same type as the ones used by Florida in North America produce exactly the same results, and a recent survey led to a similar conclusion to ours (Scott, 2010). Likewise, even if our survey only includes "medium size" cities on a world scale, there is, among them, a city like Amsterdam that Florida himself considers as one of the most « creative » on the continent.

Florida is therefore mistaken when it comes to the issue of mobility. He assumes that the professionals of the creative class are very mobile and looking for the best possible destination, like vacationers who choose a holiday resort by comparing various amenities. In fact, the members of the creative class are like the rest of us: they have a history, a family, networks, and job opportunities that constrain their spatial choices to a great extent. Most of the time, they do not choose a city: they stay or they come back to a city where they have lived in the past, or they accept an interesting job offer in an "acceptable" city. Florida's thesis is therefore wrong, because the social logic it presupposes is wrong, and this not only true in Europe, but also in North America, and probably everywhere else on the planet.

Still, his thesis brings to light some interesting elements. The idea of a creative class, even if it is highly debatable as a whole (Is this class sufficiently homogeneous? Does it make sense to its members, as well as to everyone else? See Bourdin's criticism, 2005) underscores current economic trends, which rely increasingly on activities that we can generally assemble under the notion of creation. This point deserves further consideration. The idea of including the artistic and cultural sectors among factors of economic dynamism is also very fruitful. Finally, the idea that *soft factors* play an important role in the economic dynamism of cities must not be totally abandoned: If it is clear that they do not *attract* professionals, they can still play a role in their decision to *stay* in a given city. This possibility, suggested by our study, would need to be tested on people belonging to these social classes who were born into a city but have left it, rather than those who have remained in it. Also, it is not out of the question that these *soft factors* play a role as far as the mobility of students is concerned, and this is not an insignificant aspect of the constitution of a local creative class. A study of students' choices with respect to mobility would allow us to test this hypothesis.

If our conclusions are correct, we must draw the appropriate implications for public policy. Many European elected officials or technicians have inferred from Florida's thesis that they had to concentrate on attracting an international elite, and they have focused on lifestyle and major financial incentives to reach this objective. This type of cargo cult (Worsley, 1957) is similar to the policies of the 80's and 90's, which were aimed at attracting companies through the creation of activity parks or fiscal incentives (Grossetti, 2006). If a large part of the creative class in a given city comes, in fact, from that city or nearby, we must first of all bet on the quality of their training. To retain, rather than to attract, members of the creative class also implies policies aimed at raising the general standard of urban amenities (the quality of public transportation, healthcare, cultural offerings in general, and urbanism). These

measures will undoubtedly be more effective than policies of prestige that benefit only a very narrow elite.

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