Let's Audit Bohemia: A Review of Richard Florida's 'Creative Class' Thesis and Its Impact on Urban Policy

Cian O'Callaghan*
National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, NUI Maynooth

Abstract

Richard Florida contends that the key determinant of the economic growth of cities is the presence of concentrations of what he terms the 'creative class' – '[those] who use creativity as a key factor in … [their] work … ' – and that places should aim to attract these workers by endowing themselves with the 3Ts of technology, talent and tolerance. Despite courting serious criticisms from both the Left and Right, Florida's arguments continue to resonate with civic leaders and a popular audience. Building on work that questions the theoretical robustness of the concept, this review focuses on the construction of identity and ontology in Florida's work. Tracing the genealogy of the 'creativity' debates, the article seeks to explore the implications of this work on ideas about cities and urban policy. I argue that the creative class thesis successfully streamlined a number of disparate and emergent discourses (on the knowledge economy, cultural and creative industries, industrial clustering, flexible labour, etc.) into a platform upon which such processes could be seen as constitutive, and therefore provide a rhetorical 'solution' to a complex set of problems. The concept also works in terms of a personal buy-in, in that people are willing to subscribe to this world view and place themselves within this schema. Florida's texts are sophisticated polemic mobilisations of identity, which package and market a particular view of the individual and society. Ultimately, however, the concept accounts for human creativity and the dynamics of place in shallow ways that ignore geographical context, reinforce and almost glorify the growing inequalities between rich poor, and ultimately co-opt creativity into the *status quo* of neoliberal capitalism.

Introduction

Ever since the breakthrough success of his best-selling book *The Rise of the Creative Class* in 2002, Richard Florida's creative class thesis has been the subject of plaudits and praise in some circles and derision and malign in others. Florida's arguments hinge on the emergence of what he calls a new 'creative class', who are facilitating ' … deep and enduring changes in our age [that] are not technological but social and cultural' (Florida 2002, 17). This, he attributes to ' … the emergence of new economic systems explicitly designed to foster and harness human creativity' (Florida 2002, 66). Creative people, he argues ' … don't just cluster where the jobs are. They cluster in places that are centres of creativity and also where they like to live' (Florida 2002, 7). 'According to Florida the successful cities will be the ones most endowed with the 3Ts: technology, talent and tolerance' (Boyle 2006, 404). These cities will attract the highly valuable creative class, and therefore will have competitive advantage over other places. The bulk of literature that addresses the topic in a critical manner tends to find it lacking in the substantive basis and causal attributes of its broad theoretical statements (Peck 2005, 2009). Despite their failure to stand up to critical scrutiny, the creative class thesis and its progenitor have proven

exceptionally popular with urban policy-makers, and 'creativity', to a greater or lesser extent, continues to receive serious mileage within the policy, strategy, and promotional literature on cities.

Creative class arguments cut across urban, cultural, and economic geography, and their stamp can be found overtly or implicitly within a broad range of literature in the discipline. In fact, the concept has become so widespread that it is practically impossible to study cities without taking it into account. Moreover, as Peck (2005, 740) suggests, creative class agendas ' … work quietly with the grain of extant "neoliberal" development agendas'. In this way, it provides a continuation of the emerging model of post–industrial urbanism first critiqued in David Harvey's seminal paper from 1989. Its popularity has meant the concept has emerged as somewhat of a truism, and persistently so. Like the living dead, the creative class keep advancing no matter how many times they are shot down.

Building on work that questions the theoretical robustness of the concept, this study interrogates the implications that ideas about urban creativity have had on urban geography and policy. I argue that the creative class thesis successfully streamlined a number of disparate and emergent discourses (on the knowledge economy, cultural and creative industries, industrial clustering, flexible labour, etc.) into a platform upon which such processes could be seen as constitutive, and therefore provide a rhetorical 'solution' to a complex set of problems. As such, the popularity of the concept lies in its simplicity, and has as much to do with its perceived notoriety as a 'positive' policy response (at least within the framework of entrepreneurial urban agenda) as it does to its perceived effectiveness.

Rather than attempting to replicate existing work that seeks to understand and critique the creative class thesis, this review focuses on how Florida constructs and mobilises his arguments, and their implications for cities and urban policy. The study begins by examining the emergence of the creative class concept by way of earlier related concepts such as culture-led regeneration and urban branding. This is followed by a closer look at the earlier 'creative cities' concept. The remainder of the article then critiques the 'creative class' arguments, focussing on the discursive construction and marketing of ideological and ontological positions within Florida's texts. I argue that the creative class concept offers a rhetorical solution to the urban 'problem' and provides its audience with a positive validation of their lifestyles. Ultimately, however, the concept accounts for human creativity and the dynamics of place in shallow ways that ignore geographical context, reinforce and almost glorify the growing inequalities between rich poor, and ultimately co-opt creativity into the *status quo* of neoliberal capitalism.

The Rise of the Creative Class Concept

The intellectual arguments concerning the creative class have their origins in the post–Fordist restructuring of the global economy. The breakdown of Atlantic Fordism had dramatic impacts upon the functioning of the global economy and its spatial expression in cities (Castelles 1989, 1996; Harvey 1989, 1990; Soja 2000). As Harvey (1989, 6) suggests the ' … conception of the urban and of "the city" [was] likewise rendered unstable'. In the aftermath of deindustrialisation, Harvey (1989) argued that western cities have moved from 'managerialism to entrepreneurialism', with local government having ' … to be much more innovative and entrepreneurial, willing to explore all kinds of avenues through which to alleviate their distressed conditions and thereby secure a better future for their populations' (Harvey 1989, 4). Importantly, his analysis implicated the increased

collapsing of culture and economy, in that cities were beginning to be characterised by a ' … shift of emphases from the production of goods (most of which, like knives and forks, have a substantial lifetime) to the production of events (such as spectacles that have and almost instantaneous turnover time)' (Harvey 1990, 157), and by a growing emphasis on urban branding (Albet 2004; Neill 1993; O' Callaghan and Linehan 2007; Paddison 1993).

The production of cultural spectacles was increasingly viewed as a key economic activity. Urban projects of a cultural bent, such as Baltimore's Harbour Place (Harvey 1989) or the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992 (Albet 2004) became an accepted means for urban authorities to stimulate investment and tourism markets. The transformation of the global economy and systems of governance, and the resultant rise of the entrepreneurial or competitive city paradigm, has led to the creation of new urban spaces and the mobilisation of new versions of urban culture (Alves 2007; Binns 2005; Bunnell 1999, 2001; Chang and Hoang 2005; Donald 2005; Gibson and Stevenson 2004; Gospodini 2006; Hannigan 1998; Harvey 1989; Miles 1997; Soja 2000).

This was mirrored by transformations in the global economy and the business world, whereby ' … *knowledge* has come to be seen as a resource in its own right' (Thrift 2000, 676), and where the intensification of turnover times has placed a new emphasis on flexibility and creativity as part of doing business (Castree 2004; French and Leyshon 2003, 2004; Harvey 1990; Leyshon 2001; Smith 2003; Thrift 2000; Thrift and Olds 1996). Inspired by the new flexible labour practices in emerging economic spaces like Silicone Valley, corporations began to fetishise a 'creative' approach to business that stripped away bureaucracy and encouraged 'thinking outside the box' (Scott 1997, 2006a). Thrift and Olds (1996, 314) view this in terms of the increased socialisation of the economy; viewing ' … the economic and social as incorrigibly intertwined'. In such a business climate '[k]nowledge becomes an asset class that a business must foster, warehouse, manage, constantly work upon in order to produce a constant stream of innovation' (Thrift 2000, 676). Thus, firms began to incorporate practices more often associated with 'creative' industries.

This collapsing together of culture and economy has had a number of broad societal outcomes. Traditional business has become increasingly enamoured with the practices of the creative industries (for example, the use of project teams who come together for discrete projects before dissolving partnership to form the next: a practice used in film and television industries, Turok 2003), the creative industries themselves have become more central to the economy and regeneration of cities (Bianchini 1990), and in general there has been a simultaneous movement from views of culture as ' … aesthetic excellence to the whole way of life of a community' (Flew 2002, 13). As Gibson and Klocker (2004, 427) succinctly put it;

> Two central components have emerged: how 'creativity' operates as a generator of economic activity, and how the 'creative' industries (sometimes referred to as 'cultural industries') have become an increasingly important component or urban and regional economic development.

Such processes have intensified over time. As Leslie (2005, 403) argues ' … metropolitan areas are engaged in a frenzied attempt to differentiate themselves, and sell themselves as centres of culture'. If the mantra of 'culture and economy' had become a byword for new manifestations of cities and industry, the causal attributes of these formations were less assured. The formation of industrial clusters, cultural quarters, and the mobilisation of culture-led regeneration strategies were understood to be important

in terms of bolstering investment in cities (Flew 2002; Garcia 2005; Roberts 2006; Russell 2001; Scott 2006a,b). However, the perceived success of such policies was primarily based on anecdotal evidence concerning places deemed to have implemented successful models. The causal arguments were therefore somewhat circular and after-the-fact. Moreover, these initiatives remained disparate and emergent attempts by places to spatially fix the new global economy. While there were certainly endeavours within the critical literature to grapple with these complex transformations (Amin and Thrift 2002; Castelles 1996; Dear 2000; Harvey 1989, 1990; Soja 2000), they remained just that: a set of interdependent but discrete variables, not easily reducible to a simple equation.

Creativity Is the Answer?

> [The] modern urban malaise it was felt cannot be solved by traditional urban planning and policy. The science of urban planning and management thus needs to be reformed and enriched by bringing in new ideas and people currently marginalised in decision making.(Landry et al. 1996, 4)

'Creativity' emerged in the popular academic literature as some sort of elixir that would solve the problems associated with cities in late capitalism. Prior to Florida, the major proponent of this agenda was Charles Landry, whose Comedia consultancy has become a paradigm-defining watchdog for delineating 'best practice' in creative urban planning structures. The definitive synthesis of his arguments was laid out in his book *The Creative City: A toolkit for urban innovators* (Landry 2000). Landry starts with the assumption that we are experiencing an 'urban crisis', and in order to 'make cities desirable places to live and be in … ' we must implement a ' … range of approaches and methods to "think creatively", to "plan creatively" and to "act creatively" … ' (Landry 2000, xii–xv).

Although less polemic in its privileging of human agency than the creative class thesis, the creative city thesis relies on the belief that '[c]ompetitiveness no longer lies in immobile, physical resources like coal, timber or gold but in highly mobile brain power and creativity' (Landry 2000, 33). The majority of the book then is devoted to the identification and analysis of policy responses to enable the use of creativity, to mobilise cultural infrastructures in 'appropriate' ways, and to market cities in ways that that express this creative ethos, replete with anecdotal case studies of creative responses in various places.

Despite its tendency towards a quasi-mystical belief in the revolutionary capacity of creativity, Landry couches his arguments within a business model. Cities are described as 'brands' that ' … need glamour, style, and fizz' (Landry 2000, 31), the cultural industries are emphasised as ' … perhaps the fastest growing in modern urban economies' (Landry 2000, 6), and in the main cities are encouraged to find their unique selling point and brand and market themselves accordingly. As such, this work marks a continuation of the increasingly commodified form of the post-industrial city.

The creative city concept underlines an evangelistic view of creative values as the solution to societal problems. Healy (2004, 90), for example, speaks of the Sage Musical Centre in Newcastle as combining ' … high levels of social access with an appreciation of excellence', while Landry's work is full of such stories of art overcoming animosity, ambivalence, and atrocity to restore a sense of community. The concept degenerates then into a series of fluffy and cuddly terms like 'fluid', 'diversity', 'tolerance' and 'self-regulating', which offer in Healy's (2004, 97) words a 'diagnostic tool' for re-establishing certain

guiding principles for governing cities. 'Creativity' became the solution to a series of as-yet-defined problems, and in some ways became merely rhetorical. Consider the following statement; 'One constraint to future-oriented city region development is the lack of creativity' (Kunzman 2004, 5). What Kunzman is really referring to is a lack of willingness to plan around flexible-functional urban boundaries, and advocating a number of measures to promote regional branding and support R&D. But 'creativity' stands in for these actions instead – many of which are the usual feathers in the cap of post-industrial urbanism – simultaneously validating them and reducing their complexities to a simple equation.

From Creative Actions to Creative People: The Rise of the Creative Class

If Landry simplified a set of complex issues into a catch-phrase, Richard Florida's creative class arguments crystallised these further into a rhetorical nugget that even those without the use of opposable thumbs could grasp in their palm: That ' … new technologies, new industries, new wealth and all other good economic things come from … [human creativity]' (Florida 2002, 12) and therefore, in order to produce these 'good economic things' cities should aim to attract creative humans. Florida has been criticised variously for his 'glib treatment of diversity', for ' … lumping together disparate occupations' (Markusen 2006, 5–27), his pandering to ' … young, tech-oriented workers and entrepreneurs' (Malanga 2004, 3) and validation of the lifestyles of these 'Chosen Ones' (Peck 2005, 745). Overall, the creative class thesis has weathered critique badly.

As Markusen (2006, 28) argues, '… the 'creative' literature is so anecdotal and lean on analysis, [civic leaders] are often at a loss to know what to do with such intelligence beyond using it as window dressing for tourism marketing and downtown development strategies'.

Accordingly, critics have suggested the limitations of attempts by policy-makers to 'build' creative cities, stressing that ' … creativity is not something that can simply be imported' (Scott 2006b, 15). While The Rise of the Creative Class is seen as ' … quite a lightweight academic work' (Boyle 2006, 410), it has nevertheless found a popular audience and ' … has proved to be a hugely seductive [idea] for civic leaders around the world' (Peck 2005, 740).

The creative class concept is primarily tailored towards a core audience of urban elites and young high-earning professionals. Thus, the version of 'creativity' that is extolled fits neatly with the lifestyles and work practices of this group; it exists primarily *within* capitalist and consumer society and not in tension or opposition to it. In contrast to a view of creativity as a force of liberation from the confines of societal structures (Bey 1985), Florida's creative workers are more often than not engaged in forms of creativity that are inextricably linked to the production of economic value (Murphy 2009). Florida's focus group respondents want ' … outdoor sports, extreme sports, rollerblading, cycling, art scene, music scene', not necessarily to use these amenities but just ' … to know it's there' (Florida in Drether 2002). They want the gambit of leisure and consumption opportunities at their doorstep, available quickly and efficiently (for a fee). Meanwhile, cultural practitioners such as artists, musicians and writers remain in a precarious financial limbo, often supporting themselves through part-time work in the service-sector, while the gentrifying effects of creative city strategies push up property rental prices, forcing them into more marginal areas of the city (Markusen 2006). They are the creative class without the fringe benefits.

Auditing Creativity, Standardising Place

Through his consultancy, Florida acts as a 'creative auditor' of the city; the most obvious case in point being his creative city league tables. This is a system of classification to rank cities as creative places (Florida 2002, 72–77), which ' … allow some city leaders to congratulate themselves on a job well done, even if this had been achieved subconsciously, while the rest have something, or somewhere, to aim at' (Peck 2005, 747). The content and form of these rankings have been taken to task by a number of commentators who refute Florida's claims (see for example Hoyman and Faricy 2009; Markusen 2006; McCann 2007; Peck 2005, 2009; Scott 2006b). Nevertheless, as Peck suggests, investment ' … in the ''soft'' infrastructure of the arts and culture are easy to make, and need not be especially costly', while validating a set of middle-class lifestyles (Peck 2005, 749; 2009). Florida's analysis skims over the two-thirds of the US population in the working or service classes (Peck 2005), reasoning that while the creative class is smaller ' … its crucial economic role makes it the most influential' (Florida 2002, 9). Thus, the creative class agenda offers a set of priorities that privilege the competitive city model and the lifestyle choices of the middle classes, which can be ' … bolted onto business–as–usual urban-development politics' (Peck 2005, 760). Critics have also noted how creative cities are characterised by widening inequality (McCann 2007). Florida himself (2003, 17), views this as one of the 'drawbacks' of the creative age, contending that this will one day be 'figured out' by 'some place' giving it competitive advantage; completely eliding both the reciprocity between creativity agendas and burgeoning inequality and the role of actors and institutions beyond the regional level in economic and social reproduction (McCann 2007, 193).

The league tables also serve to universalise the creative class concept. As Gibson and Klocker (2004, 428) suggest, books by Florida and Landry are in some respects ' … merely the latest in an on-going series of titles on ''big picture'' economic themes, seeking popular, non-academic markets'. Their popularity lies in the ways they seemingly offer a simple solution to urban problems, even if this solution is merely rhetorical. Florida's thesis presents the argument that through appropriate governance decisions at the urban and regional level that attract sufficient numbers of the creative class, places can overcome their historical identities and their national and super-national regulatory frameworks. He credits the growth of Shanghai, for example, to regional factors (Florida 2008, 35–36), despite China's strong central state control over many aspects of economic and social life (Ong 2007). As Scott (2006b, 13) argues ' … place itself … [acts] as a stockpile of traditions, memories, and images that function as sources of inspiration … ', which impact upon a city's ability to perform in economic and cultural terms. Florida claims to prioritise the power of place, but in reality his work does not take place seriously in that it constructs a type of urban analysis that seeks to sell an intellectual idea that is transferable between all places.

Gibson and Klocker (2004) see Florida's work as part of a discourse that privileges the centrality of US and UK contexts, constructing these places as 'global' and therefore cultural exemplars of universal reach, while explaining little in the line of local knowledge and the translatability of these contexts between places. They liken Florida to a touring rock star, hitting a city to 'perform' his material before quickly rolling on to the next. In the performance, the 'set' remains the same, augmented only a handful of local references thrown in for good measure. Thus, the messiness of geographical, social and political context is glossed over, in favour of the unifying theme of human creativity. As Scott (2006b, 17–18) suggests, geography '… is not simply a passive frame of reference, but an

active ingredient in economic development … [which can only be grasped] in terms of structures of direct and indirect interdependence that play out in many different ways in different geographical and historical circumstances'.

The 'big picture' view fails to account for the messiness of place; the historical, emotional, and sticky *oeuvre* that Lefebvre (1996) speaks of. The creative class thesis reduces the complexity of place to a singular factor.

Despite their rather obvious shortcomings, Florida's ideas continue to fly off the shelf. I argue this has much to do with Florida's ontology, which foregrounds agency of over any structural, historical, or political barriers. It has already been argued convincingly that creative class arguments allow neoliberal urbanism ' … to cuddle up to a soft liberal looking veneer' (Boyle 2006, 442). However, the thesis also works in terms of a personal buy-in, in that people are willing to subscribe to this worldview and place themselves within this schema. The idea supports an individualist view of society that contrasts markedly with the harder structuralist agendas for industrial development. In this way, it offers an alluring package for both civic leaders and the alleged creative class.

Recruiting the Creative Class

The Rise of the Creative Class opens with the repeated refrain from Bob Dylan's 'Ballad of a thin man' – 'Something's happening here but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?' – rhyming the sixties counter-culture movement with the creative class 'movement'. There is a level of complicity involved, in that those reading the book are expected to identify themselves within its pages: those who 'get it' (as Florida has been apt to say) are part of the creative class identified with Dylan and the hipsters, while those who 'don't get it' (or are in disagreement with Florida's contentions) are identified with the square Mr Jones.

In terms of the book's target audience of middle-class professionals, it is alluring in its open and vague discursive construction of a new social class. 'If you are a scientist or engineer, an architect or designer, a writer, artist or musician, or if you use creativity as a key factor in your work in business, education, health care, law or some other profession, you are a member' (Florida 2002, ix).

The picture of this group that is painted is unashamedly positive. Crucially to this end, Florida constructs the individual as an agent and not a subject of the global economy, in that ' … while people can be hired and fired, their creative capacity cannot be bought or sold' (Florida 2002, 5). 'Creatives', therefore, *choose* where they want to live and work based on 'values' of 'individuality', 'meritocracy', and 'diversity and openness' (Florida 2002, 77–80). The creative class are not envisioned as the alienated slaves of neoliberal capitalism – trapped in a cycle of endless consumption, ping-ponged between temporary contracts, working way beyond the 40-h week – but are viewed as the architects of this system. Society, Florida (2002, 4) suggests, ' … is changing in large measure because we want it to'. The restructuring of cities and capitalism is seen as a response to this 'bottom–up' desire for change.

The popularity of Florida's agency-oriented approach partly lies in his ability to construct intellectual problems and concerns into simple and effective narratives, which are scripted with the precision of a seasoned Hollywood screenwriter. For example, the generational transition from his father's work in manufacturing to his own 'knowledge' work is used to exemplify the general reformation (as Florida sees it) of the American class system. These narratives offer 'epiphanies' that dramatically re-shape Florida's ontological perspective. Similar techniques are used in cinema to guide the audience briskly through

the narrative without excessive exposition. For example, the film *A Beautiful Mind* contains a scene which shows mathematician John Nash coming up with the basic principles of 'Game Theory' through observing the etiquette of barroom flirtation. Imagining his friends trying and failing in their pursuit of a blonde in the company of brunettes, then failing to impress her friends who resent being 'second best', Nash reasons that the best result for the 'team' (in contrast to an earlier model by Adam Smith) would come from each individual working for the best interests of both themselves and the team (i.e. nobody goes for the blonde), and sets about working on an equilibrium concept to prove this mathematically. The scene acts as a way to simply explain Game Theory to the audience and to ground it in practical reality, while also advancing both character and plot. Florida's 'epiphanies' fulfil a similar function. Note, for example, how he describes coming to his conclusions on the creative class:

> I went to Rutgers, got a Ph.D. at Columbia looking at housing and urban dynamics. Then once I became a professor at Ohio State and later at Carnegie Mellon, I really studied the behaviour and dynamics of high-tech industries … I had heard about [the company] Lycos when it was formed, this company that really seemed to define what we then called the 'Internet age'. And when I heard Lycos was moving all its operations to Boston, that was the trigger event … you had everything it would take to make Pittsburgh a high-tech center − yet that company was being moved wholehog to Boston, and the question was why. The reason, as I came to understand it more and more over time, is that human capital, the creative people, were in the Boston metro area, that there weren't enough of them in Pittsburgh.(Florida in Drether 2002)

Academic analysis often relies on such 'epiphanies' to express shifts in perception, and constructs arguments within similar narrative tropes and rhetorical devices. The way in which Florida deploys these devices, however, functions largely as a way to market the 'creative class' lifestyle. The narrative outlined above, for example, demonstrates Florida's academic credentials and his application of these skills in 'real-world' scenarios. 'Creative class' is a registered brand and it is marketed as such. It sells a product to the individual in the form of a particular way of seeing themselves and the world. In this regard, Florida constructs a role for himself within his work as a fellow 'creative'. This ability to locate himself within a sort of middle-ground between academic rigour and social commentary is further reinforced by his personalised writing-style, which is often structured as one 'creative' imparting knowledge to another. In *Who's Your City?* (2008, 12), for instance, he promises to ' … share with you more than twenty-five years of personal research … '.

 Florida has courted criticism from both the left and the right, which he deals with in an astutely political manner. He validates the theorists he uses through the use of loaded adjectives; ' … Nobel-prize-winning economist [Robert Lucas] … ' (Florida 2003, 6; 2008, 61), ' … Peter Drucker was just brilliant … ' (in Drether 2002), ' … the great economist Alfred Marshall … ' (Florida 2008, 63). He similarly qualifies his detractors. In an article from 2004, he uses Jane Jacobs' term 'squelchers' to describe ' … those political, business, and civic leaders that divert human creative energy by posing roadblocks and saying "no" to new ideas'. He therefore constructs his opponents as having a political agenda (after all, who else could be opposed to 'new ideas'?), while he is '[i]nnocently aloof, or tactically sitting on the fence' (Peck 2005, 741). Hence, ' … Steven Malanga of the neo-conservative Manhattan Institute … ' or '[f]rom the left, Joel Kotkin and Fred Siegel' (Florida 2004). Within this context, he uses these supposed political positions to set up proxy debates without actually engaging with these criticisms beyond a superficial level.

But if social conservatives can't turn back the moral clock to a time when every family resembled the Cleavers, neither can the left magically restore a time when forty or fifty percent of the workforce toiled in blue-collar factory jobs. The creative economy is not going away. My advice to my colleagues on the left is simple: Deal with it. (Florida 2004)

The Rise of the Creative Class and Florida's subsequent writings are self-consciously constructed to suggest that he is attempting to grapple with the understanding of a discrete social movement that is having dramatic impacts on society, while at the same time he has commodified and marketed these ideas through a range of commercial activities. It thus suffers from the contradiction of being presented as academically rigorous, yet holding steadfastly to the set of assumptions that generally support his major contentions (and his bank balance), despite being widely disputed. Thus, the view that considers creativity as the central driving force of social and economic transformation is privileged as the only valid ontology. Furthermore, the creative class society is hierarchically stratified, both within the creative milieu (super-creative core, creative professionals, Bohemians) and outside of it, thus reproducing and justifying social divisions (McCann 2007).

What is most problematic is that the 'creative class' thesis ceases to seriously engage with academic debates, but rests cynically instead upon an uncritical ontological position. Many studies have demonstrated that Florida's contention that 'jobs follow people' simply is not true (Boyle 2006; Hoyman and Faricy 2009; Marlet and van Clemens 2005; Murphy and Redmond 2009). While human agency certainly plays a role in the production of urban space (Massey 2004; Simone 2004), it is constrained by a range of other factors that are structural, historical and cultural (Lefebvre 1991), and which produce outcomes that are complex and in continuous flux. Florida's analysis waives this complexity.

Conclusion

Look at the world around you, David. What do you see? An endless theme park, with everything turned into entertainment. Science, politics, education – they're so many fairground rides. (J.G. Ballard, *Millennium People*, 62)

In J.G. Ballard's novel *Millennium People*, the middle-class residents of Chelsea Marina are revolting against what they see as the mechanisms of social control; the placating power of the BBC, the Tate Modern and other bastions of British middle-class culture. In their view, the safe and tasteful consumption of art is a biopolitical technique (Foucault 2003) used to keep the middle-class 'proletariat' docile and subservient to the rules of civil society. Culture is imagined in similarly dead-end ways by Florida. The 'creative life', he tells us is ' … packed full of intense, high-quality, multi-dimensional experiences' (Florida 2002, 166). These experiences, however, are almost uniformly those provided within the cultural and recreational economy of cities. While Florida contends that creativity in all its forms should be supported and 'harnessed', the result has nevertheless been the streamlining of creativity with an economic rationale. This draws social and cultural life into alignment with a consumer-oriented neoliberal vision of society and space. Culture merely becomes a fairground ride, something to spin you around and make you dizzy, euphoric but fundamentally unchanged.

In this article, I have argued that a broad consensus around creativity in cities has been achieved by the way in which Florida constructs an ontological position in his writing through the use of rhetorical devices. While nominally preaching a doctrine of diversity and tolerance, the creative class thesis is at the same time highly divisive in that it constructs dichotomies between those 'enlightened' individuals who 'see the truth' about the

'creative age' and others who do not. Countless cities are now using art as a central part of their development strategies, and urban planners increasingly view cities as spaces of consumption and cafe culture. Similarly, urban ranking classifications have pushed cities into competition within frameworks devised with an almost total disregard for the differences between places. The popularity of these ideas with urban elites has subtly altered some of the ways in which cities are imagined, but ultimately they reaffirm the principles of entrepreneurial urbanism.

Despite its progressive elements, the creativity thesis deadens place and flattens culture by conscripting them into a global template. Florida's creativity thesis presents a 'quick-fix' solution to the complex question of urbanity. As cities struggle to differentiate themselves in world characterised by increasing global connectivity and complexity, the quick-fix is alluring to urban policy-makers. While promoting diversity, improving the urban realm and supporting the cultural industries are all undoubtedly positive, the implementation of urban policies guided by the creative class thesis has often created and reinforced as many problems as it claims to alleviate. Cities are not reducible to a single factor that binds their multiplicity together. Cities are dynamic entities and place is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted, produced 'through interactions at all levels' (Massey 2004, 1). A quixotic focus on creativity as an urban elixir does not unlock their inscrutability. Their oblique complexity may give cities their problems, but it also provides whatever magic they possess.

Short Biography

Cian O' Callaghan is an urban and cultural geographer. His PhD research, which focussed on urban and cultural geographies of transformation in Cork, Ireland, through plans to regenerate the city's industrial docklands and its year as European Capital of Culture, was completed in University College Cork in 2008. Since then, he was worked at the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis in NUI Maynooth as a researcher on a range of projects, including work on urban regeneration, agglomeration economies, and Ireland's housing crisis. He is also a regular contributor to the Ireland after NAMA blog.

Note

* Correspondence address: Cian O' Callaghan, National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, Humanities and Social Sciences Building, NUI Maynooth, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland. E-mail: cian.ocallaghan@nuim.ie.

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