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Nordic nations have means to attract the most talented

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Nordic countries have the potential to attract the world's most talented workers, giving them the competitive edge and eventually spurring stronger growth, according to a report published today.

It suggests these countries are challenging the economic power of the US and "old Europe", and could become "talent magnets" for innovative immigrants deterred by the US's increasingly hardline entry policies.

"The key to competition in the future is who can attract creative people on a global scale," said Professor Richard Florida of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, who conducted a similar study in the US.

By measuring the "creativity" of European Union countries, Prof Florida and his colleague Irene Tinagli found Sweden was the most creative place in Europe - scoring better than the US - followed by Finland, the Netherlands and Denmark.

The report judges the countries on "the three Ts of economic growth" - talent, technology and tolerance - that the authors say indicate a country's creative potential and bear a strong correlation to economic growth.

They attributed Nordic countries' pre-eminence to their generally open immigration policies, liberal attitudes and wide use of the English language.

The report is predicated on the idea that the ability to compete and prosper in the global economy goes beyond trade and capital flows, and increasingly turns on a nation's ability to attract, retain and develop creative people.

A third of workers in the advanced industrial nations work in the "creative sector" as defined by the International Labour Organisation (arts, music, culture and design); in science, engineering and research; or in the knowledge-based professions of healthcare, finance and law. Although the US is the world leader in technology and its ability to attract top talent, the authors said this cluster of northern European nations appeared to have the technological capabilities, creative talent and values associated with attracting outside creative talent.

The researchers said the US was squandering its advantage with "overly aggressive" policies on security and immigration that discouraged creative people.

But the report also suggests that the traditional European powers, especially Germany and France, are losing ground to their northern neighbours. Italy, Spain, Austria, Portugal and Greece scored lowest on the creativity index.