



# digital underdogs: economic opportunity and the 'ordinary' city

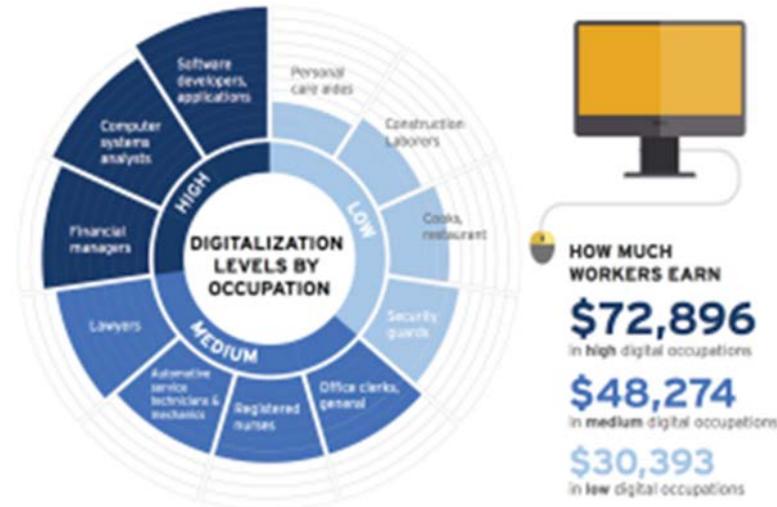
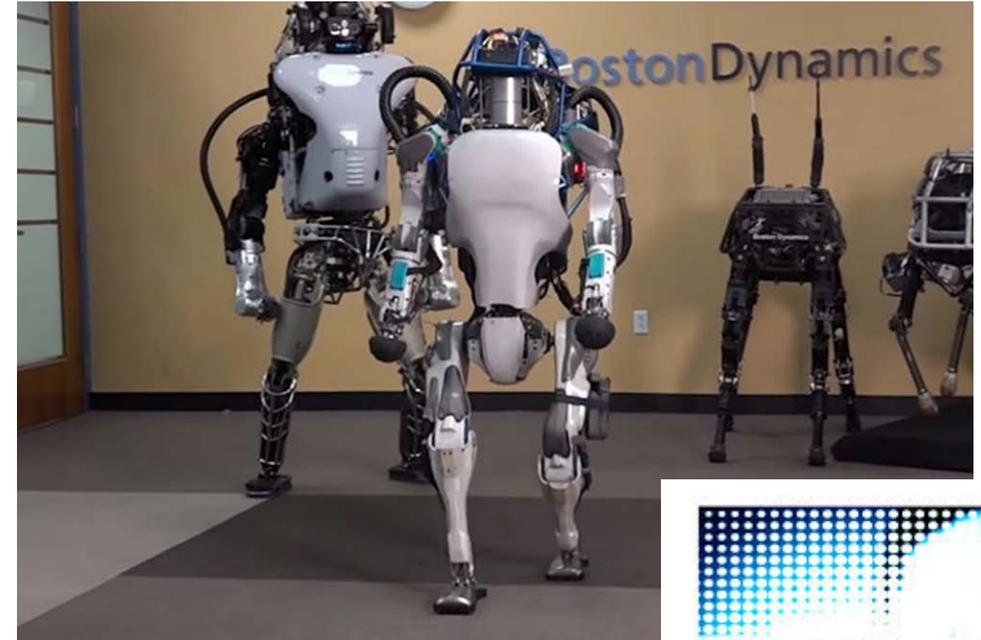
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# the meta-question...

Will the 'digital economy' more deeply entrench 'digital divides' or - with intentional (policy) intervention - are more 'inclusive innovation' pathways possible?

“The exact nature of the change will be determined by the social, **political**, and business **choices** that **we make**”

(Kenney & Zysman, 2016)



WE Can't

we need to know a lot more about the people & places – and people IN places - on the wrong side of the digital divide

Survive

8.27



# economic opportunity & the 'digital divide' in 4 cities

(Greensbro, US; London, Canada, St. Etienne, FR; Tilburg, NL):

## 3 analytical entry points & 3 research questions

### 1. **spatial: mid-sized, 'ordinary' cities outside 'digital corridors'**

(Wolfe & Bramwell, 2008, 2016; Clarke & Gaile, 1998; Kodryzicki & Munoz, 2014; Erickcek & McKinney, 2006; Kotkin, 2003; Bell & Jayne, 2006; Markusen et al, 2008)

### 2. **socio-technical: digital inequality & work**

- **literacy, skills, & tech career pathways** (Lowe, 2008; Chapple, 2006; Giloth, 2004; OECD, 2017)
- **entrepreneurship** (Porter, 1997; Kauffman, 2016, OECD, 2017)

### 3. **institutional: policy & local governance**

(Bradford & Bramwell, 2014; Benner & Pastor, 2015; Savitch & Kantor, 2002; Rodriguez-Pose, 2013; Gertler, 2013; Harrison & Glasmeier, 1997)

### 1. **Creating digital opportunity?** (tech-based innovation or conventional attraction strategies?)

### 2. **Expanding digital opportunity?** (inclusive development from within or talent attraction from elsewhere?)

### 3. **Governing digital opportunity?** (leverage policy & coordinate local efforts or fragmentation & competition?)

# main findings

- **policy and/or governance innovation in 3 out of 4 cases**
  - Saint Etienne (innovation) – DesignTech
  - Greensboro (inclusion) – Innovate GSO
  - London (governance) – Community Economic Road Map
- **but none are ‘success’ stories**
  - variation in durability & impact
  - trade-offs – no instance of sustained local govt, nonprofit, business governance
  - changing civic leadership – driven by local government &/or non-profits
  - business participation weak
- **‘ordinary’ cities are not ‘resilient’**
- **public policies with socio-spatial and socio-technical implications *will fail without attention to local politics***

# implications for understanding digital opportunity in Canada?



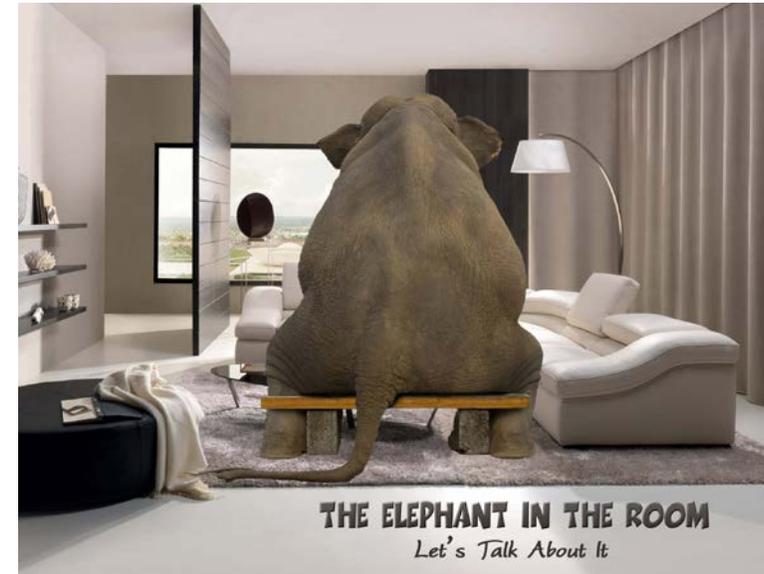
The Canadian (Ontario) case demonstrated the weakest performance on all 3 research questions.

There are **a lot** of 'ordinary' cities in Ontario ...

# policy implications:

## 'ordinary' cities can't do it alone

- urban policy innovation is required alongside technological innovation
- governance challenges are due to a complex mix of economic structure, policy context, and local political choice
- **urban policy innovation is hard** - will fail without attention to local politics
- public policy needs to support **local** institutional capacity building
  - place-based policies
  - Inclusive innovation policies
  - build local policy capacity
  - incentives & disincentives to collaborate



**BUT HOW?**

Is one of the most pressing and wide open questions of our time ...