

creating *inclusive* digital opportunity?  
the politics of digital transformation in the 'ordinary' city

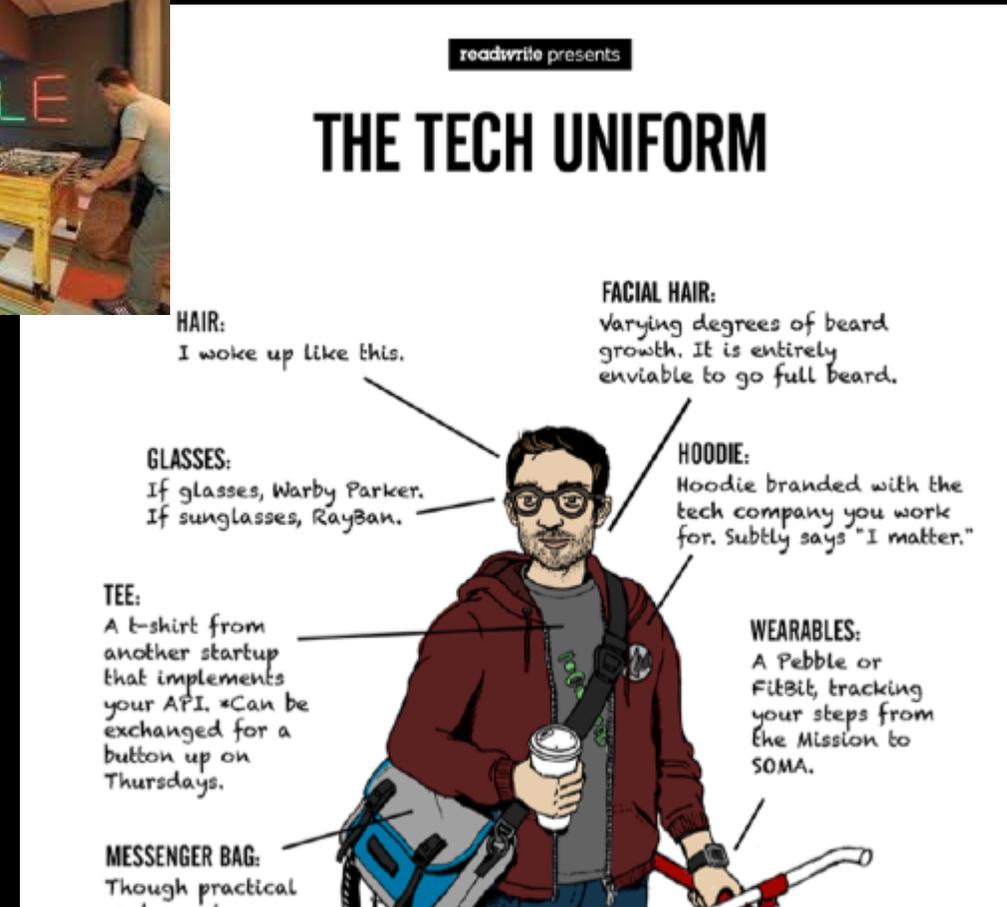
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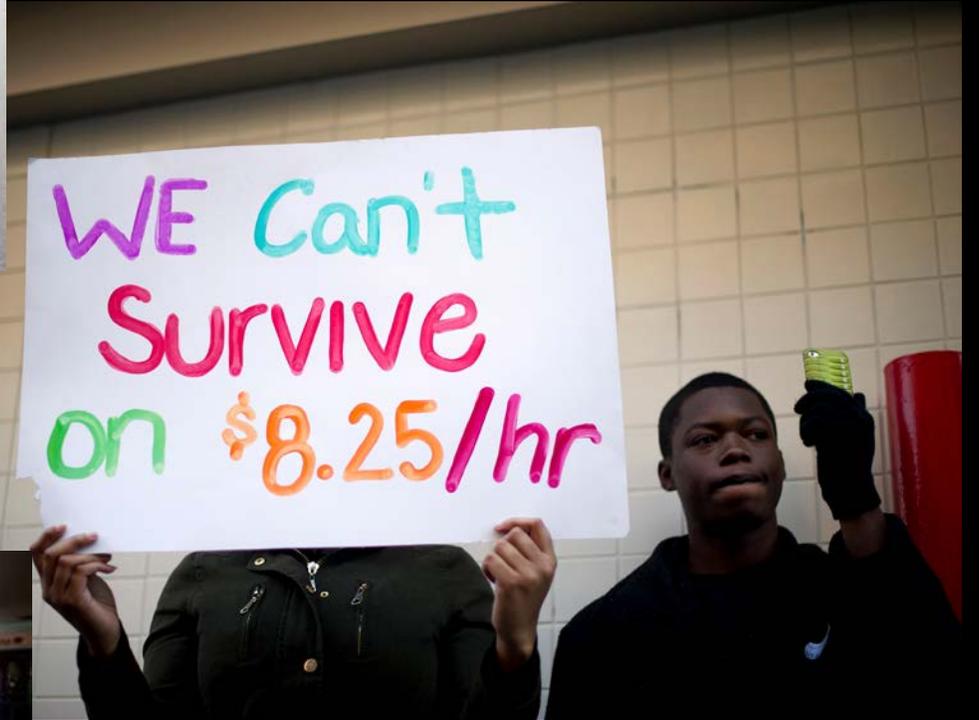
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# people & places that do well in the digital economy...



and those that don't.



the meta-debate...

Will the digital economy more deeply entrench **social** and **spatial** digital divides? Or are more inclusive pathways possible?

# inclusive innovation: an emerging strategy?

## SOCIAL

- balancing innovation and inclusion is possible (Brookings, 2015; Savitch & Kantor 2002; Bradford & Bramwell, 2014)
- workforce development & career pathways
- supports & capital for women, minority, & immigrant entrepreneurs
- makerspaces
- digital literacy & skills
- digital infrastructure & broadband access

## SPATIAL



# inclusive innovation in ordinary cities?

- not on anybody's radar
  - public policy
  - talent & digital economy entrepreneurs
  - academic research
- institutionally thin
  - fragmented, siloed, weak policy integration
  - under-leveraged assets, insufficient infrastructure
  - complacent, weak identity
- outside digital corridors
  - Greensboro, NC outside Raleigh-Durham Research Triangle
  - London, ON outside the Ontario Digital Corridor

**UPSHOT?** they have to grow digital opportunity from within (talent, start-ups, networks)

# whether, where & how?

Ordinary cities are experimenting with inclusive innovation for economic transformation (Bradford 2014; Bramwell 2014) but we want to know more about the realistic prospects for...

digital transformation of the local economy

and

social inclusion in these strategies

in

'ordinary' mid-sized cities undergoing restructuring

in

different policy contexts: Canada and the US

# research area 2: the local context for global networks

1. What *institutional* factors most effectively shape a local context attractive to **entrepreneurial start-ups** in *traded digital economy sectors*?
2. To what extent and in what ways do local education and training systems seek to *include under-represented and under-connected groups* while meeting current and future demands for digital skills in regional labour markets?
3. How do regional innovation systems and regional economic development activities support *transformation* to research and innovation, technology transfer & commercialization, specialized education and training or skills development opportunities?
4. What are the implications of these findings for federal and provincial policies supporting regional innovation and economic development and what new policy initiatives could be implemented to support *inclusive entrepreneurial growth* in *knowledge-intensive/digital industries* in Ontario?

# 3 research questions

1. *Creating* digital opportunity? (transformation)
2. *Expanding* digital opportunity? (inclusion)
3. *Governing* digital opportunity? (intermediary institutions)

# *1. creating digital opportunity?*

## digital transformation in the 'ordinary' city

**Q:** How are mid-sized cities responding to digital economy demands? Are they implementing long term transformative strategies or relying on more conventional approaches?

**H1:** Mix of strategies but will see investments in entrepreneurial supports (economic gardening; makerspaces; incubators & accelerators; mentoring) and skills development for indigenous digital transformation.

## *2. expanding digital opportunity?*

inclusive digital innovation in the 'ordinary' city

**Q:** Do digital transformation strategies seek to include groups typically under-connected to the digital mainstream (women, displaced middle skill workers, racial and ethnic minorities)?

**H:** Unable to rely solely on firm and talent attraction, will reach out to under-connected groups.

### *3. governing digital opportunity?*

the politics of economic transformation in the 'ordinary' city

**Q1:** What institutional factors shape urban development strategies for inclusive digital innovation? How do patterns of local politics enable or constrain strategic efforts?

**H1:** Economic development is a crowded field. Inclusive digital innovation will depend on coordinated development agendas.

**Q2:** What is the role of public policy in facilitating inclusive digital transformation at the local scale?

**H2:** We aim to find out...

# methodology: 2 archetypal ordinary cities



# after that...

**2. questionnaire to 'ordinary' cities in Canada and the U.S.**

(local government, ec dev people, state/provincial reps, non-profit intermediaries)

**3. case studies of progressive 'ordinary' places**

(Chattanooga? Grand Rapids? Waterloo?)