

1.7 IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY & REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

From what has been said earlier about the primary engines that are driving the emergence of local open access networks around the world, it is taking place at the current time very much despite, rather than as a direct result of, government policy and regulatory activity. This is not entirely surprising, given the fact that current policies, in both the developed nations and developing nations alike, have largely been fashioned in close collaboration and consultation with the current major operators and players in the telecommunications industry. Quite naturally, these seek to pursue a smooth and migratory or evolutionary route to the future – rather than permitting disruptive technologies the freedom to delineate 'disruptive business models'. The emergence of open public local access networks is precisely such a disruptive business model. If there is a lesson of the moment, it is that public policy makers should not attempt to rush into formulating precise policy around this new movement for open access networks – either to promote them or to inhibit them. Until and unless there is uncontestable, objective and quantifiable evidence that they are a net social and economic contributor in every situation – then it would be foolish to try and establish a firm and precisely formed public policy stance.

Clearly, the further development of open access networks is undesirable when viewed by various operators and incumbent players in the telecoms industry and although these parties have clear and well articulated voices in government and regulatory circles, it is important that they are not blindly heeded before independent evidence is available. What, however, is uncontested at this moment in time is the fact that there appears to be an undeniable flicker of flame which is growing across communities and which is being recognized by political leaders, that in the open access model, in its broadest sense, there maybe an alternative and quicker route to the future information age than that presented by the conventional telecoms sector.

Until such time as these expectations and visions can be verified by sound retrospective analysis to be real or dispelled as mere fanciful chimera, nothing should be done to inhibit or extinguish the ground swell of community driven appetite for open access networks in one form or another. As Chairman Mao said during the Cultural Revolution, "Let one thousand flowers bloom". If open public local access networks do in fact begin to take root and grow to the point of flowering, it will then be, and not before, the time to begin to frame government and regulatory policy to see how best to nurture and accelerate their growth. Meanwhile and until and unless such incontrovertible data is available, nothing should be done to inhibit the possibility of them taking root and flourishing.

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