

Slow Spots and Not Spots: Alternative Business Models and Access to Broadband in Rural Areas

John R. Bryson

City-Region Economic Development Institute, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

Meng Song,

Welsh Economy Research Unit, Cardiff Business School, University of Cardiff

Catherine Harris

City-Region Economic Development Institute, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

This paper explores the development of alternative next generation infrastructure business (NGIBM) as a solution to providing access to broadband services in rural areas across the UK

Many rural communities in the UK are in areas known as “slow spots” where broadband speeds are less than 2 megabits per second (Mbps) for frequently used applications¹ or “not spots” where broadband is not currently available.

“Not spots” or “slow spots” produce local distortions that operate at the interface between national and local infrastructure.

Three Literatures:

Financialization

Business Models

Alternative Economies/Alterity

Financialization

“... pure finance is characterised by continuing and comparative quoting of asset values. Among these, real estate investment funds are an investment asset class just like any other. For portfolio managers and financial operators, the only question is, at any given moment and in the context of the listed investment vehicles, which securities should be sold in order to purchase other securities. The city is compartmentalised and grouped into homogeneous and standardised categories (residential, offices, infrastructure, etc.), which are characterised by two numbers: risk and expected yield”^[1].

^[1] Theurillat, T. Vere-Buchel, N, and Chevoisier, O. From Capital landing to urban anchoring: The negotiated city. *Urban Studies* 53: 7, 1511-1512 (2016).

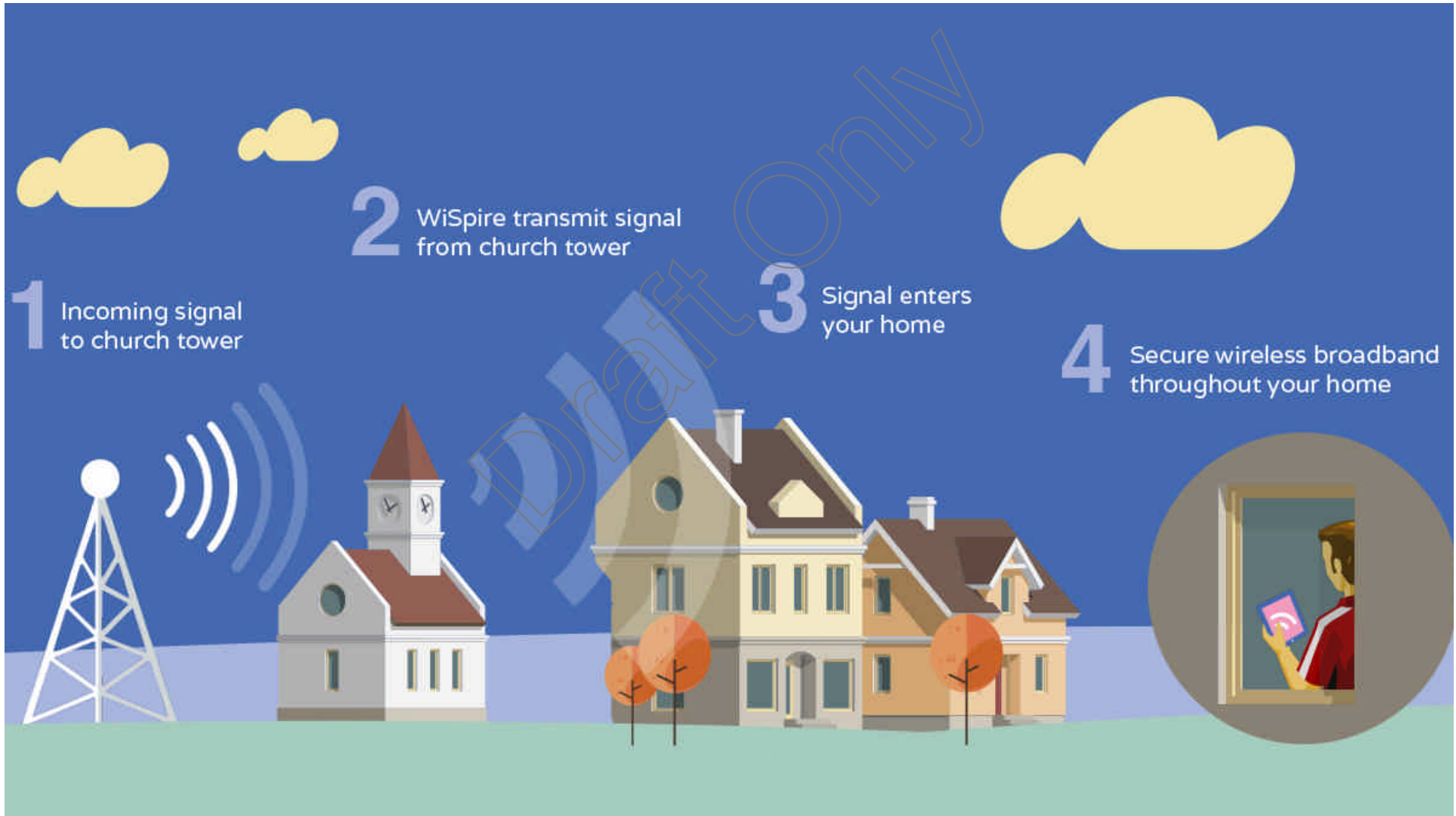
Alterity - Kathie Gibson and Julie Graham:

“ . . . one must represent economic practice as comprising a rich diversity of capitalist and non-capitalist activities and argue that the non-capitalist ones had been relatively ‘invisible’ because the concepts and discourses that could have made them ‘visible’ have been marginalized and suppressed”.

Table 1: The Four Rural Broadband Next Generation Infrastructure Business Models

Types	Number	Definition
Community-initiated	15	These business models are initiated and led by local rural communities, typically a small group of volunteers. Local residents raise the finance and/or campaign to obtain finance from external partners such as individuals, local authorities, private sector investors and charities.
Government-initiated	56	These business models were initiated and financed by the government, typically via a partnership between central government, local government and a communication provider (in most cases BT). Finance might also be provided as part of a grant from the EU or a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
Private sector	Many and unknown	These business models are developed by private sector communication providers, excluding BT, to provide broadband services in rural areas. There are two types: 1) provision of broadband via cable or 2) satellite.
Church of England initiated	2 Dioceses	Creation of a joint venture between church and private sector based on the provision of local wi-fi networks located on church towers.

WiSpire





Conclusions

The primary problem with both local and national infrastructure is ensuring that it is available to all, and that no place or community is excluded from accessing an appropriate level of infrastructure-enabled services.

Providing access to all is difficult and expensive, but some local communities have developed alternative business models to address market failure.

These are “alternative” in that existing conventional approaches are failing to provide access. It is possible to argue that these are, in fact, “additional” NGIBMs as for many “not” and “slow” spot places there is no “alternative”.