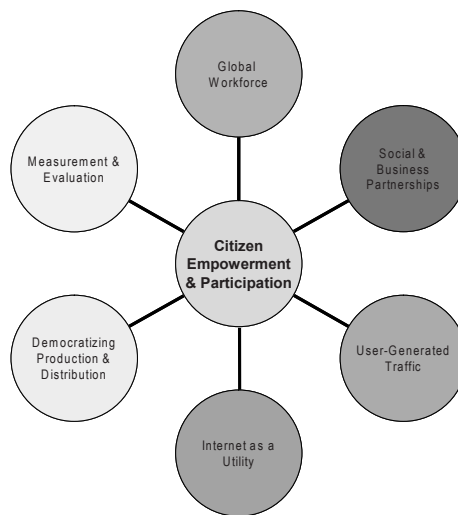


Chapter VIII

Citizen Empowerment and Participation



“Now we have armies of amateurs, happy to work for free. Call it the Age of Peer Production. From Amazon.com to MySpace to craigslist, the most successful Web companies are building business models based on user-generated content. This is perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of the second-generation Web. The tools of production, from blogging to video-sharing, are fully democratized, and the engine for growth is the spare cycles, talent and capacity of regular folks.” (Anderson, 2006a, 132)

Overview: This chapter on citizen empowerment and public participation explores the following ideas and assumptions:

- Internet collaboration and creation make possible global workforces and marketplaces that reach into every nation and community;
- Community members fortunate enough to have broadband access and the skills to use them can form social and business partnerships that assure their needs are met faster and more effectively;
- Democratizing production and distribution, and connecting supply and demand are the forté of the broadband Internet;
- Even though a severe access gap keeps many citizens of the world from fully participating, user-generated traffic will continue to grow exponentially as two-way telecommunication networks become a basic utility at the community level;
- Strategies are needed for benchmarking, measurement and evaluation of citizen empowerment and participation that demonstrate the extent to which communities benefit.

A NEW GLOBAL ORDER

Key Concept: *The first decade of the 21st century will be the pivotal period for the New World Information and Communication Order, when ordinary citizens in communities of all sizes will begin to realise that they have the means to shape their future.*

Judging from what is happening in networked countries and their communities, a new world information and communication order is forming. The visible consequence of this new order is that communities with access to advanced information and communication (ICT) technologies will have a much greater chance of shaping their own destinies by aggressively pursuing what they need.

Under the best of conditions, the emerging Network Society will stimulate economic development, improve organisational performance, and greatly enhance those factors relating to living the good life. It can make this promise because communities will for the first time in history have a framework for working together both locally and globally. It makes possible more active and informed development, as defined by citizens themselves. This unique scenario has local people with a voice in deciding what they want their future to look like, and the means to articulate and work with others over time to turn that vision into a reality.

The empowering development can be linked to a run-away technology called the global Internet. This telecommunication entity was created by government for its own purposes, and later taken over by corporations for their purposes. In the 21st century, the Internet has been appropriated by the public for its own (not yet

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