Wi-Fi, an intermediate technology
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Some years ago, it seemed that optic fibre was the only way to access broadband. In spite of advances, technical difficulties in deployment and high costs of laying cable networks have not made this kind of high speed connection universal, by any means. This has forced the use of intermediate solutions, such as digital compression technology called ADSL, which gives a wider broadband from a single point than with a modem.

However, net surfers have necessities that are more and more ubiquitous that go beyond their specific physical situation. Hence, the growing interest in developing an Internet access based on the cellular phone infrastructure. This idea introduces the concept of mobility: travelling or being on the move doesn’t mean any lose of functionality. Nowadays, having broadband through mobile phone needs the use of UMTS technology that, at this moment, is frozen.

The immediate alternative is called Wi-Fi—a radio frequency technology that, by means of little aerials, enables high speed transmission within a range of 100 metres. What is even more important is the fact that there is no need of exploitation licenses of the spectre. The low cost of Wi-Fi allows for hotspots in places with an appropriate concentration of users, such as hotels, schools, buildings or congress centres. Moreover, different initiatives, promoted by City Halls, research centres, neighbourhood communities, etc., can take advantage of the scope of this technology to share bandwidth signed up through other media.

Still, it is necessary to ask if Wi-Fi will imply new business models. The reality is that Wi-Fi doesn’t offer, technologically speaking, differential capabilities, except for a more available access and a cheaper bandwidth from a global point of view. That is to say, although the price per Megabyte is the same, it is available on more occasions and in more places. Furthermore, it enables users to share leisure bandwidth more easily.

Thus, we are facing a situation like the one some years ago, when ADSL overcame the usefulness of optical fibre as way of getting broadband connection. Wi-Fi appears as a new opportunity to democratize access, this time with broadband, but it is just an intermediate technology on the road towards “total mobility”.