The Uncertain Future of Ham Radio

An interesting article on the IEEE Spectrum website describes some of the current challenges that ham radio faces.

One of the big questions is: what could draw younger people to ham radio? People used to be drawn to ham radio for its ability to provide:

- Communications with others while mobile or away from the home. Now we have cell phones.
- Communications With others around the globe. Now we have the internet.
- A platform to tinker and build equipment using the latest technologies. Now kids learn to program computers.

> Instead, many [younger hams] are interested in the capacity for public service, such as providing communications in the wake of a disaster, or event comms for activities like city marathons.

Since the radio spectrum that ham operators use is a finite resource (in greater demand today), this raises a debate as to whether ham radio should be seen as a hobby or a public utility (see this previous post).[1)]

On the bright side, cheap Chinese radios and SDRs are lowering the bar of entry for new hams in terms of cost, but even that can be a contentious issue.

> As Michel, the former ARRL CEO, puts it: —Every ham has [their] own perspective. What we've learned over the hundred-plus years is that there will always be these battles – AM modulation versus single-sideband modulation, whatever it may be. The technology evolves. And the marketplace will follow where the interests lie.

1)

My personal opinion on this debate is that ham radio should be both a hobby and a public utility, but it should stay "open" in the sense that every transmission intercepted should be easily decodable.