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***Toward Telecommunicative Democracy:  
Telecommunications Convergence as a Tool of Social Justice***

*What do philosophers want with telecommunications convergence?*

Convergence can be understood not only technically in the sense of the convergence of different telecommunication devices, but also philosophically, as the convergence of people into a new kind of mobile society. I ask, whether this mobile society can turn societies into democratic communities. Should we not say that telecommunication convergence leads to telecommunicative and telecommunity convergence, which is a further possibility of the realization of social justice? It can be so, and I formulate my first thesis, for which I will argue:

(1) Telecommunications industry can actively support to establish and strengthen democracy and to make sure the world for it.

As in the ancient Greek polis the politicians and thinkers, as in the modern times the great political philosophers and the constitutional fathers of the first modern democracy, and as in the twentieth century such philosophers as John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, John Rawls and Richard Rorty, further, as such institutions, as the modern democratic constitutions in so many countries in the late twentieth century – in the twenty-first century, it is possible, that *mobile communication companies and services will be one of the main guarants and enlargers of democracy*. Mobile communication devices can become the vehicles of democracy and social justice. I do not want to say that mobile communication manager should work on the theory of justice or democracy. Their business is, that they bring the mobile devices to so many people as possible, and they should do that in large scale. Mobile companies are making their benefits, but no one should forget, this benefit depends on the possibility of free communication, and this is possible only in democracy. It is the business interest of mobile companies as it is the interest of us all, to secure democracy and to make possible the democratic developments in non-democratic countries. My second thesis is:

(2) There is no mobile communication on the long run without democracy and there is no democracy in the future without mobile communication.

The thesis does not mean of course, that everywhere, where mobile phone is used, there is democracy. But it does mean, that mobile phone were developed and made possible in democratic countries and that non-democratic countries which allow inside of their territory mobile communication, they allow to enter a piece of democracy there. This piece can then work as a yeast, moving the public toward democracy.

Manuel Castells writes, „we have observed a growing tendency for people, in different contexts, to use wireless communication to voice their discontent with the powers that be”, and describes three cases from the early years of the century, which are „the ousting of President Estrada in the Philippines in 2001, the electoral defeat of the Spanish Partido

Popular in 2004, and the voting into power of Korean President Moo-Hyun in 2002.”<sup>1</sup> There are fears in the democratic world, that gangs, political groups or clans could take over great power over different segments of the society or economy with the help of fast mobile communication. And this remains always a danger. As for every development in technology, it can be used for good or for bad. But the examples are certainly encouraging. And if philosophers are right to say, people have a sens for social justice, mobile communication can help to have more and perhaps overall changes towards more just societies. The chance against gangs or political groups comes with the possibility of connecting of a huge number of fast communicating people, who can have through that enormous communicating power much more influence on political developments than gangs, which are and remain a little minority in society and societal communities.

Philosophers and empirical researchers of the society had since long time the conviction, that most of the people would like to have justice in society and are not interested in criminal activities. Criminal activities can never secure and stabilize communities and societies, they lead to animosities and tensions, they do not give security for raising children and they give over an insecure world for future generations. Besides these, economist emphasize, that people like justice, human beings have a sense for just and upright social relations.<sup>2</sup> We arrive to my third thesis:

(3) Mobile communication of enormous number of people can help societies to move toward more just societies, just on the basis of the sense of justice.

If we ask the question, „What do we want from a convergence of telecommunication?“, probably many of us agrees with the answer, more social justice, a safer world for democracy, and that means, a safer, less cruel world for human life, where there is more real justice in the world.

As most philosophers agree, the condition of social justice is a reasonable public sphere, where people can articulate their views, interests and can make agreements which is good for all. Justice is social goodness for all, produced in public reasoning, and public reasoning can be much more effective with mobile communication.

### *Public reasoning*

It is well known, that by John Rawls, as Amartya Sen remarks, „the interpretation of justice is linked with public reasoning”.<sup>3</sup> The famous passage of Rawls about elaborating social justice is, „a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to certain conception of justice. Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does any one know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties

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<sup>1</sup> Castells, Manuel – Mireia Fernández-Ardevol – Jack Linchuan Qiu – Araba Sey, *Mobile Communication and Society: A Global Perspective*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2007. 185. The detailed description of what happened, see 185-214.

<sup>2</sup> Compare D. Coyle, *The Soulful Science. What Economists really do and why it matters*, Princeton University Press, 2007; N. Häring, O. Storbeck, *Ökonomie 2.0 – 99 überraschende Erkenntnisse*, Stuttgart, Schäffer-Poeschel Verlag, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> A. Sen, „What do we want from a theory of Justice?” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume CII, Number 5, May 2006, 213-238, 215.

do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. *The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance.*"<sup>4</sup>

Is this not an introduction or invitation to the choose of the principles of justice in a mobile society or in a society of mobile communication, where no one *really* knows his place in the society? In the mobile society most of the people do not have stable place, everything is in moving and changing, the people, the goods, the resources, the ideas, the feelings. Class positions and social statuses can be maintained in longer term only in immobile societies: in the modern mobile society no one knows, what will happen with him in the future. One can know from experience, that class positions and social statuses are continuously changing. When people and parties do not know any more, what is good for them in longer run, or what justice in society will mean for them in a future unknown situation, and what will be they interest some years later, then they need a new kind of agreement, a new way of elaborating social relationships in justice. In this situation the veil of ignorance does not remain a sheer construction or a bloodless theoretical entity, but it will be an active part in legislation and in many agreements between people. In the mobile society, people's interest is to apply the veil of ignorance, since in this society everyone is „behind the veil of ignorance” about many things, and more and more people realizes that. Mobility is a new kind of ignorance, but also, a possibility of a new kind of knowledge and of a new kind of society.<sup>5</sup>

It is prima facie obvious that mobile communication creates different kind of publics which sometimes do not match to national-state borders. On the other hand, as we know it from Castells, most of mobile communication happens between people living in the same area (family, friend, workplace), so the creation of new communities and public rests between limits. He emphasizes that although mobile communication has transnational effects, it is used mostly by closely connected people, and even in some societies (f. e. Korea) it can lead to strenghten traditional family and community relationships. Castells writes, „the demand for mobile communication has long existed, as family members always want to stay in touch and adjust their activities to ensure the functioning of the family unit. Thus, while the new technologies bring new means of coordination and of social support, they are appropriated in a way that strengthens existing family relationships instead of causing any revolutionary change.”<sup>6</sup> With mobile communication it will be not simpler to define, what kind of public we mean as subject of justice and democracy, and what questions should be treated to determine and realize justice.

The classic place of the public reasoning was the agora in ancient Greece, and later the „agoras”, the market places of the New England settlements in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, or the „agoras” of the Swiss cantons from the Middle Ages on. History has shown, and I think, and Rawls' theoretical optimism feeds himself from here, that where people living in the Western tradition can have free communities whithout supressing or forcing power from outside or inside, there is a chance, that main political actors put aside their own personal, local and instantaneous interests and can establish a political democracy of their community, which is based on justice. All ancient and modern democracies were founded on public deliberations, on freedom, on common discovering of justice.

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<sup>4</sup> Rawls, op. cit. 12. My emphasis (J.B.).

<sup>5</sup> See Kristóf Nyíri, ed., *Mobile Communication: Essays on Cognition and Community*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2003 and Kristóf Nyíri, ed., *A Sense of Place: The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Castells, op. cit. 88.

If mobile communication can lead communities to public reasoning, and people can express in freedom the „public sense of justice” (Rawls), then we can have real chances to secure the world for democracy and to establish well-ordered societies on local and global level. Rawls say, „a society is well-ordered when it is not only designed to advance the good of its members but when it is also effectively regulated by a public conception of justice.”<sup>7</sup> It is not important to build societal structures on the „moral goodness” of the individuals (this would lead to absurdities, to dictatorial systems, to loss of freedom, which is the life-blood, the prime mover, the *conditio sine qua non* of democracy), and it is not primarily important to support the well being of the people in the society, what counts, is, that the *public conception of justice regulates effectively* the institutions of a society. Mobile communication can help to develop justice and to establish and control institutions which ensure the effectiveness of justice.

### *Mobile telephonia*

What happens with public reasoning and democracy in the age of mobile telephones? We are at the treshold of the possibility and perhaps of the realization of a much larger, more participative and more global democracy. There are just three quoted examples from the beginning of this century, where people with fast, mobile and networkly connected communication changed the outcome of political elections. It can be taken for certain, that millions of mobile communicating people did not phoned and voted against their own common interest. They could agree upon, which political leader is good for them, and in this case, good is certainly equivalent „hopefully brings more justice in the society”. These were perhaps not examples of creating procedurally just institutions or new procedural constitutions. But if it happened, then it can again happen, that in some countries, in Asia, in Africa or Latin America, at the occasion of a political turning point a new elected political leader, can overcome the obstacle of his personal interests and begins a process of building new institutions and a new constitution in the above described historical-normative sense. If he is in a situation to do that and the enemies of his project do not overturn his administration before the work is done, because he builds on the sense of justice of the people, he can have chances to realize justice and procedural democracy. That process needs the public, the new agora, which *is* the mobile communication. Millions of people can react in the mobile network and influence the political events. This way people can participate in shaping new constitution and new institutions. Since this kind of miracles happened in agora-conditions earlier, it cannot be excluded, that in the new mobile-agora there won’t develop – as unforeseen and *inattendu*, as the first modern democracy – the first Democracy of mobile communicating people, the first *Mobile Telephonia*.

### *The Global aspect*

It should be emphasized, that *Mobile Telephonia* will be not a global, but a local community, a state. As the most mobile phone uses are between family members, also, the most political phone uses happen in the own local community or country. If this kind of evolution sometimes and somewhere happens, then Rawls alleged skepticism would not be justified any more. Amartya Sen writes, „even though Rawls was a visionary leader of thought on the importance of public reasoning, he had considerable skepticism about the use of public reasoning at the global level.”<sup>8</sup> This skepticism can have two interrelated reasons, the difference in cultures and political power-relations on the one hand, and the difference of

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<sup>7</sup> Rawls, op. cit. 4-5. In the following passages quotations from Rawls will be from here.

<sup>8</sup> Sen, op. cit. 229.

languages. The difficulty with the difference in cultures becomes today more dramatical, in the age of not only possible mobile telephonias, but in the age of the felt danger of global terror. Anthropologists and literary critics say that not only in European cultures, but in most cultures (the best seen in folk tales), there is a strong sense of social justice. If it is true, then in an optimistic scenario it is only a question of time, and of right education (which can be done, or even which can happen on large scale also via mobile communication) that people move toward more just condition and perhaps toward establishing procedural democracy. On the other hand, the difference of language seems to be overcome with one general language, which is spoken by everyone and everywhere, the English. (This is probably true even, if Manhattan high society little children begin to learn in early age mandarin.) As Dewey said, founding, developing and maintaining democracy takes time, and it is of course a question of future history, whether global terror or global warming leaves us so many evolutionary time. Habermas spoke in European context about the necessity of a common language base for building a European public sphere, where public reasoning is possible for common justice and for European common democracy.<sup>9</sup>

Global justice cannot be reached of course without mental or cultural developments of people in countries, living until today in non-democratic political structures. Otherwise the process would be not democratic, coming from demos, which becomes more and more citizen of his own country. But member of folks become citizens, when they establish themselves their procedural justice and their democratic institutions. An educational, institutional and cultural support from other societies can come but only with the agreement of the people in the given country. Otherwise they won't feel that it is their creation and it is their democracy – and then it won't be a real democracy even with establishing imported democratic structures. Today in Western democracies „the concept of a possible alternative ... society is excluded” by the people.<sup>10</sup> But it is the result of long historical, cultural, philosophical and political developments. And this situation is reached just by gradual, processual and even procedural discovery and establishing of societal justice and democracy. We cannot suppose that other communities can do in one day with principles establishing their democracies. But if they establish, it will be procedural and from inside, as described in possible developments of *mobile telephonia*.

As Dewey remarked, democratic societies are as stable, as human beings themselves. Mobile telephones can help a lot in making more stable and just societies – and more satisfied human beings.

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<sup>9</sup> J. Habermas, *Die postnationale Konstellation*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1998, 155.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Cox, quoted by Habermas, op. cit. 91.

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