

Refereed article

## “Without a Mobile Phone, I Suppose I Had to Go There” — Mobile Communication and Translocal Social Constellations in Bangladesh

Harald Sterly\*

### Summary

Recent estimates put the global number of mobile phone subscriptions close to the number of humans currently alive on Earth; at the same time, the global number of both domestic and international migrants is approaching the one billion mark. This article addresses the linkages between these two processes: Although migrants and mobile populations always had ties to their places of origin, the recent boom in access to affordable communication — specifically in the form of mobile phones — has fundamentally changed the way in which millions of migrants “live” translocality. These changes are traced in this article in the translocal social constellations of rural-to-urban migrants in Bangladesh. Translocality is conceptualized through a theoretical framework of strong structuration theory, with the key elements herein being networks, places, and resources. Using the two examples of remittances and the chatroom, it is shown how changing communication practices are now shaping and rearranging the country’s translocal structures. These structural changes encompass social and spatial reconfigurations of translocal networks, shifts in resource endowment, and shifts of norms and expectations regarding social and economic interactions and transactions.

Manuscript received on 2014-07-23, accepted on 2014-12-16

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, family relations, global change, mobile communication, rural–urban migrants, structure–agency, translocality

**Harald Sterly** studied Geography and acts as a coordinator of the Scientific Priority Program entitled “Megacities—Megachallenge.” In his Ph.D. project he analyzes the changes in communication practices and translocal social constellations in Bangladesh.

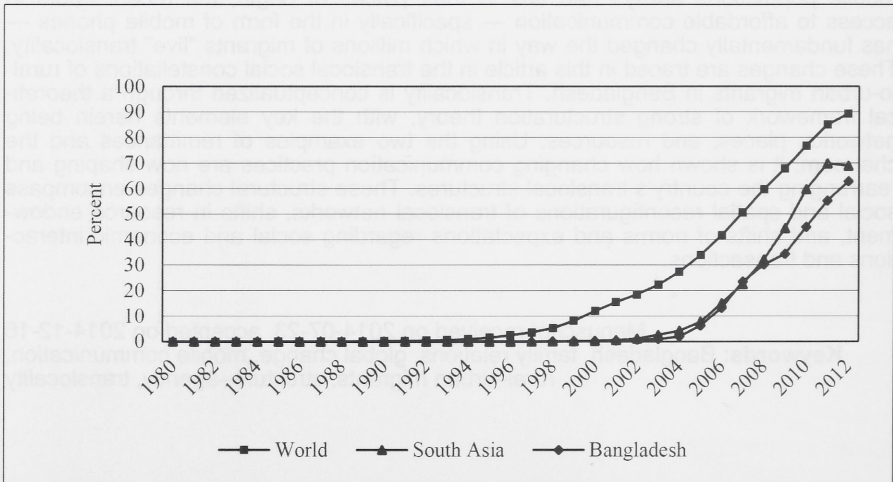
---

\* The author thanks the editors of this issue, Carsten Butsch and Martin Franz, as well as one anonymous reviewer for their valuable and helpful comments on an earlier draft version of this paper.

## Introduction

Since the technology's public launch in 1979, the number of mobile cellular subscriptions has increased to almost seven billion globally at present (ITU 2014). With this rapid diffusion, mobile communication is attributed with being the fastest spreading technology in human history (World Bank 2012). South Asia and Bangladesh are no exception to this trend, as illustrated in Figure 1. In Bangladesh the number of cellular subscriptions had risen to 115 million by April 2014 (BTRC 2014), compared to a total population size of 156.4 million people (BBS 2014).<sup>1</sup> Although unequal access to mobile communication continues to be an important subject of both scientific and political discourse, the gap between the "information have-less" (Cartier et al. 2005: 10) and those owning or having access to a mobile phone now seems to be closing (ITU 2004). A 2008 survey of low-income groups in Bangladesh found only 41 percent of the respondents owned a mobile phone, although 95 percent were currently using one (LIRNEasia 2009).

**Figure 1: Mobile Phone subscriptions per inhabitant**



Source: World Bank (2014), Government of India (2013) — the 2012 decrease in subscription numbers can be attributed to a clearing of the Indian statistics from the total number of inactive subscriptions.

The rapid diffusion of both the mobile phone and of digital information and communication technology (ICT) in general has been the focus of research from a

1 There are inherent difficulties in inferring the number of subscribers from the number of cellular subscriptions (information available in telecommunications statistics): for example, an individual user can own several different SIM cards or multiple users can share a single one between them (Curwen and Whalley 2013). However for the purpose of illustrating the trends presented in Figure 1, the subscription rate (subscription number/population) is used here.

range of disciplines; among others, Cultural Anthropology (among others, Horst and Miller 2006), Development Studies (see, for example, Donner 2008 and Duncombe 2011 for comprehensive reviews), Geography (for a comprehensive review, see Pfaff 2010), Media Studies (for example Moores 2012), and Sociology (such as Castells 1996). From the early 2000s the interdisciplinary research field of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) emerged, covering topics such as economic value chains, m-health (mobile health), m-banking, m-information, or m-governance. Although Bangladesh is covered by the reports on ICT and development, there have to date only been a few studies explicitly dealing with mobile communication in the country. These include Bayes (2001) on the village phone initiative, Bhuyian (2004) on national telecommunications policy, Rashid (2011) on mobile phone utilization by non-owners in rural areas, Hossain and Beresford (2012) on gender issues or Islam, and Grönlund (2011) as well as Dey et al. (2013) on mobile phone use by farmers.

### **Domestic migration, translocality, and mobile communication**

Around the world domestic migration rates are high, and expected to remain so for the foreseeable future — reflecting the urbanization dynamics currently unfolding in developing countries (UNDP 2009). In recent decades this has led to the inclusion of internal migration in migration studies and to an increased scientific interest in translocality (Bork-Hüffer et al. (2014); Brickell and Datta 2011; Etzold (2014); for a comprehensive review, see Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013a). Although translocal and transnational social practices and mobile communication are linked, studies focusing on the importance of ICT — and especially on mobile communication for translocality — are currently relatively limited; examples are, among others, Brickell (2011), Miller (2009), Tan and Yeoh (2011). This article thus aims at contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between mobile communication and translocal social constellations. I will illustrate the changes occurring in communication practices within translocal family constellations of rural-to-urban migrants in Bangladesh, and interpret the accompanying processes of social change within a conceptual framework of translocality and structuration theory.

### **Theoretical foundation: translocal social constellations, structure, and agency**

With the notion of “translocal social constellations” I refer to the structures and practices linking agents and places over geographical distance. The term encompasses both mobile (migrants) as well as nonmobile (non-migrant) populations, and goes beyond being about economic or social units such as households or livelihoods. In refining the notion of translocality I build upon the conceptualization proposed by Greiner and Sakdapolrak (2013b), who emphasize the three dimensions of place, networks, and locales as constituting translocality. The authors underline the

co-constitution of places and agency as well as networks and agency, referring in the process to Giddens' theory of structuration (1984). Taking up the concepts of networks and place enables the analysis to be conducted from two corresponding angles: the concept of networks (as well as resources) allows structures to be studied on the individual level. A conceptualization of place comprising material and immaterial, as well as local and translocal, aspects permits structural factors that transcend the individual level yet are still under the influence of the agents in question to be identified and analyzed.

## Place

As Brickell and Datta (2011) and Greiner and Sakdapolrak (2013b) highlight, the concept of translocality implies a multidimensional, relational, and dynamic notion of place. Elaborating on the multidimensionality of place, I distinguish between Agnew's (1987) three major dimensions thereof (see Table 1): *Location* is understood as "the geographical area encompassing the settings for social interaction" (1987: 28). Spatial distance is of relevance, especially in terms of the related costs for mobility and travel. *Material*, meanwhile, refers to the sites in which corporeal agents are present and copresent, perform interactions and transactions, and in which material resources are located. Resources are often localized, and their spatial transfer involves costs. *Meaning* denotes the way that agents are making sense of a place, but also the meanings and associations — including a sense of belonging — as well as the rules, norms, and values that are particular to a given place.

These local and translocal structural properties of place form the frames for human agency and practice (such as those particular to a specific place, the exchange of goods and services with other places, travel, and so on) and are themselves outcomes of agency. Translocal agency — understood as agency transcending or spanning multiple different places — is anchored in local structures. Thus in order to capture translocal social constellations, it is necessary to include both local and translocal, as well as structural and agential, aspects.

## Networks

Networks are of special relevance for the notion of translocality because they conceptually link agents (near and far apart), as well as structure and agency: they form the interpersonal structures that connect individual agents, institutions, and organizations, constituting the social space within and between places. However, in more abstract ontological terms, interpersonal networks can also be understood as an intermediary level between (macro) social structure and (micro) individual agency (Stones 2005; Steinbrink 2009). It is important to note that networks are not void of hierarchies and power differences. Stones, for example, emphasizes the "power relations, and the meanings and norms" (2012: 7) — as well as the positioning of agents within them — as important properties of networks. In operationalizing this

concept, to the network topology I thus add the positionalities and rules both of and between the network members as important characteristics of social networks — as these are crucially important in influencing the network members' capacity for agency.

**Table 1: A multidimensional, relational, and dynamic concept of space**

	Structural Properties	
Dimensions	Local properties	Relational/Translocal properties
Location	Geographic location: “here,” absolute coordinates	Relational reference: adjacent, far, near, and so forth
Materiality	Material site for corporeal presence and copresence (such as house, common meeting point, public space); material features and resources (local infrastructure, soil, and so on)	Material sites of flows (roads, paths, bridges, and the like); material sites as nodes and hubs for flows (like bus terminals, bank branches, cellular base stations, and so on)
Meaning	Specific individual relevance (home, own land), specific social relevance (territoriality), symbolic importance (such as birthplace of VIP); rules and norms bound to specific places	Rules and expectations guiding and shaping exchange and transaction (frequency and amount of remittances, of communication, and so forth); meanings attributed to such things as translocal constellations
Agency/Practice	Drawing on local structures; habitualized local practices	Drawing on translocal structures; habitualized translocal practices

Source: Author's own compilation, based on Agnew (1987), Creswell (2004), and Greiner and Sakdapolrak (2013b).

## Resources

Resources are a central concept in structuration theory. On the one hand the access to and control over resources are important prerequisites for agency, and on the other changes in resource endowment are important outcomes — and as such are also key reasons for acting. Resources play a key role in translocality: most acts of migration are associated with an (expected) improvement of the resource base of individuals, households, and/or families, and the maintenance of translocal links is related to the transfer and conversion of resources.

However, the resource concept posited by important proponents of structuration approaches like Archer (1995) or Giddens (1984) remains on an abstract level. In order to further operationalize it, therefore, I draw on Kleine's “Choice Framework” (2010, 2011), and furthermore adopt the ten resource dimensions that she employs. Kleine builds partly upon the sustainable livelihoods approach, subdividing human capital into educational and health resources — while also adding the dimensions of, cultural, information, geographical and psychological resources. In order to capture a frequently occurring theme in my empirical data, I also include the dimension of time. The extended resource concept allows us to better differentiate structural

changes having an effect on and resulting from agency. For the empirical examples given below, financial, information, psychological, social and time resources are especially relevant: information resources refer to the capacity for information acquisition, and to turn information into meaningful knowledge; psychological resources refer to “self-confidence, tenacity, optimism, creativity, and [psychological] resilience” (Kleine 2011: 123); social resources derive from memberships of groups or networks, and can facilitate access to other resources. Time resources correspond to the “availability” of time as perceived and experienced by the agent in focus, covering also notions of spare time.

### **Agents and agency**

I consider any private individual, (unorganized) collectivity, or organized group (or organization) engaging in agency to be an agent, regardless of whether this agency actually ultimately results in any structural changes or not. I conceive all forms of human action — on a continuum between critically distant and reflected agency on the one side and habitual, routine practice on the other — to be agency. With regard to the topic of translocality and mobile communication, three types of agency are especially relevant: interaction, meaning the communicative and interpersonal engagement of agents; transaction, as the exchange of information, goods, services, finance, and the like between agents within translocal as well as local contexts; and, mobility, as the both long-term (migration) and short-term movements of agents between places — thereby spatially stretching social networks and incorporating translocal relations.

### **Mobile communication practices — empirical data**

The empirical data (70 guided interviews, thereof 55 with men and 15 with women, ten expert interviews, two focus group discussions, and 180 mixed qualitative/quantitative questionnaires) used in the analysis here was collected between March 2011 and April 2013 in both Dhaka and in two villages in Rangpur District, lying approximately 300 kilometers north of Dhaka. The villages were chosen according to socioeconomic parameters, in terms of poverty levels, migration rates, as well as their geographical distance from Dhaka. Survey participants within the villages were selected by way of a stratified sampling strategy, and interview partners were identified from the survey sample as well as through snowball sampling. This article is based on the analysis of the transcribed interviews. For this study the focus was put on rural-to-urban migrants because — despite migration regimes in Bangladesh tending to diversify — rural-to-urban labor migrants represent the largest group of internal migrants in Bangladesh (Bork-Hüffer et al. 2014).

In order to minimize the technological-determinant bias, the data analysis strategy combined in it both inductive and deductive elements. The first step consisted of the establishment of a typology of mobile phone usage practices, which were differenti-

ated essentially by following the logic of Goffman's question characterizing the frame of interactional situations: "What is going on here?" (1974: 8). These types of practice were in a next step interpreted within the analytical framework of translocality and structuration theory. Eleven different categories for them were derived from the interviews and field observations, ones whose titles were obtained partly from the interviews and partly from literature: business, chatroom, dateline, helpline, hotline, infoline, microcoordination, remittances, remote management, umbilical cord, and walkman. Although the boundaries between these categories may overlap in some cases and communicative situations may encompass multiple different categories, they ultimately reflect the basic patterns found in interactional contexts and their meanings. I will now give more details for two key categories: remittances and chatroom.

### Remittances

Regarding remittance transfers, mobile phones are essentially used in two different ways: either for information exchange about the amount, timing, and processing of the transfer, or otherwise the phone is applied directly in mobile financial services (MFS). At the time of the interviews, the majority of those surveyed used their mobile phone to communicate their financial needs and to organize and monitor the transaction process: "Suppose, think, I have gone to Dhaka. At home they have no way of eating. [They] need money. On [the] phone they would say that 'I need money, send me money'" (Shahin, rickshaw puller, Interview, May 15, 2011[11]).

Less than half of those interviewed made use of MFS, which is unsurprising given that the first official provider of this service became operational in Bangladesh only in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Other options for transferring money are sending it through official courier services, through informal courier services or shops, or via travelling friends and trusted persons. Only a few of those interviewed actually owned a bank account. Sending money with MFS is comparably easy: once the sender and recipient are registered, the sender deposits the required amount with an agent, both get a confirmation message, and the receiver can immediately withdraw the amount at an agent's booth at their end. Many mobile phone shops, grocery stores, and the like have now become MFS agents. The most popular service is run by bKash, whose number of agents was expected to reach around 80,000 by the end of 2013 (Financial Express 2013).

Advantages of MFS frequently mentioned are the immediacy and security of transfer (compared, for example, to travelling family members taking cash with them) or

---

2 Before 2011 users of prepaid cellular services could already transfer certain amounts (typically limited to 100 taka per transaction, and 500 taka per day) of airtime balance; another (illegal) option was the transfer of balance using an informal transaction between those mobile phone shops offering prepaid credit recharging, with the receiving shop disbursing the amount in cash to the final recipient (while also deducting a handling fee).

the ease of access (compared, for example, to the procedure for opening a bank account or to the limited service hours of banks): “Which one [transaction mode] do you use most of the time now, which media?” — “bKash is the most convenient” (Forid, factory worker, Interview, March 9, 2013[03]). The distance to the closest handling agents for the two villages of the field study was at the time approximately 3–5 km.

In some cases mobile communication being available leads to the more frequent expression of financial needs by the recipients (further to the sum “normally” sent). Some interviewees mentioned that expectations regarding remittance frequency might have risen as a consequence hereof, although this seems not to lead to an increase in the total amount of money transferred:

**Interviewer:** Earlier, how many times was it [money transactions] earlier?

**Respondent:** Once [per month]

**Interviewer:** And now, approximately?

**Respondent:** Twice or thrice (laughs)

(Forid, factory worker, Interview, March 9, 2013[03]).

## Chatroom

Chatroom denotes a communicative situation that is characterized by experiencing copresence, shared time, and attention, and where “hearing the voice” of and being near to the other person is more important than the exchange of information per se. The label “chatroom” is derived from a practice described by Anwar, a rickshaw puller in Dhaka, who frequently chats with friends in his home village: “Going out I get 20 taka balance ... [on my] mobile [phone] and talk with friends [in the village]. They are sitting down there switching on the loudspeaker, four to five people listen to me and have fun” (Interview, March 22, 2013[03]). For most of those interviewed, frequent, often daily, chatting with relatives is very important, as this regular and intimate contact helps to keep those relationships intact and alive:

**Interviewer:** Okay, they are doing the communication using the phone, does this damage the relationship?

**Respondent:** No no.

**Interviewer:** Because, look, if you visit personally and speak, it creates love and affection.

**Respondent:** No, if you speak through [a] mobile, it also creates love. It does not destroy the attachment.

**Interviewer:** Okay, the attachment is the same if you visit personally or speak through [a] mobile?

**Respondent:** Yes; [when] you speak through the mobile, it stays the same.

(Forid, factory worker, Interview, March 9, 2013[03]).

Daily or very frequent communication with family members not only keeps alive or strengthens those social ties that might be important in times of need, but also contributes to a changed perception of distance: “If I communicate I feel that I am able



to get the news from home every day, don't feel the distance" (Forid, factory worker, Interview, March 9, 2013[03]).

Shared time and attention, and empathy with close relatives, also contribute to psychological wellbeing and to the resilience of both migrants and nonmigrants alike:

**Respondent:** When they call over [the] phone, it seems that they are just near.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**Respondent:** Then we feel happy.

**Interviewer:** Ok, if there [was] no mobile, then how would it be?

**Respondent:** It would be a kind of suffering. We can't know or inform what goes on there or here. If they do not call for two or one day, our heart become restless: how are they or what is their situation?

(Rahim, vegetable trader, Interview, March 8, 2013[03]).

The majority of those interviewed generally use their mobile phones in all locations; however, for calls to close family members or partners some prefer to be in the intimacy of their own urban or rural homes.

## Interpreting the results

Considering the two examples of remittances and chatroom, the empirical data is now analyzed within the theoretical framework of translocality and structuration theory. Interpreting these usage practices I put the main focus on identifying structural and agential elements, their relationships, and the changes in them. As these relationships are different for each of the usage practices, they are thus analyzed separately. Hence, I will now discuss the two categories of remittances and chatroom in more detail and then give an integrative overview of all categories.

## Remittances

Regarding remittance transfers made with MFS (see Table 2), the key processes of structural change concern the topology and spatial configuration of the networks of remittance flows: before the establishment of MFS, money was mainly sent with travelling family members, friends, or with other trusted persons. Thus such transactions were heavily reliant on one's personal social networks, except when informal money sending networks or — rarely — courier services were used instead. With an increasingly dominant system of MFS and a growing number of agents involved in it, a new functional network is now emerging. The material sites of these new nodes are often existing mobile phone vending or grocery shops whose owners have added MFS functionality. The advertisements for the respective MFS brands are the visible symbols of the new translocal features of these places.

At the time of my fieldwork the majority of MFS agents were located in smaller towns and market centers, having substantially altered the spatial layout of the translocal networks through which finances flow and that now span the following: a family member in Dhaka—an MFS agent in Dhaka—an MFS agent in the town—family

members in the village. When compared to the previous system of personal delivery by couriers, this can be interpreted as a process of spatial centralization. It is, however, reasonable to expect that an increase in demand for MFS will lead to a further spatial spreading of its agents, thus possibly turning also, among others, grocery shops in smaller village centers into nodes of this financial network — thereby ultimately leading to spatial decentralization once again.

The formalization of the transaction process also changes the positionalities of users and service providers within the network: the fees for transactions are transparent and legally enforceable by both sides, as opposed to the informal systems wherein the client is in a much weaker position and fees are often considerably higher. The convenience (accessibility, affordability, security, time saving) of transactions made via MFS leads to more frequent transactions, and — together with more regularly expressed financial need by the recipients — also to changing expectations in the relationships between senders and recipients. Regarding individual resource endowment, mobile communication and MFS reduce the costs incurred and time needed for the transactions as well as improving the access to information for organizing and monitoring the transfer process.

The use of mobile phones in money transactions does not seem to substantially change gender structures regarding access to or decision-making power over remittances. However, women with absent partners were able to communicate their financial needs and to influence the remittance frequency and amount. This indicates a certain degree of change in their negotiation power over resources. In some cases male migrants mentioned their ability to remotely control and manage investments in their rural homes via mobile phone; this could be interpreted as a reduction of women's autonomy and decision-making power.

## **Chatroom**

The most important structural effects related to the chatroom practice (see Table 2) comprise strengthened core networks, a reduction in perceived geographical distance from loved ones, and an improvement in psychological and social resources. One of the characteristics of the chatroom usage practice is the intensive sharing of time and attention in these situations, which — as in face-to-face interactions — strengthens relationships of mutual trust, commitment, and emotional attachment. It also increases expectations about the frequency of communication. Because chatting via mobile phone concerns especially the relations with close network partners (family and close friends), this particular practice results in a strengthening of core networks. This finding is in line with studies about the effects of mobile communication on network structures in India, Kenya and the United States, indicating that

intensified mediated communication strengthens a person's core network ties (Hampton et al. 2011; Palackal et al. 2011; Shrum et al. 2011).<sup>3</sup>

The ownership of a mobile phone influences the spatial setting of communication: Without their own phone, people rely on those of call shops, neighbors, or relatives, in both urban and rural contexts — thus affecting communication in terms of cost, timing, and talk time, while also reducing intimacy. With one's own mobile phone quieter public places, tea stalls, and especially private residences become sites for mediated, translocal interaction. This can in some cases be explained by the higher level of intimacy that the privacy of one's own home provides, but also by practical considerations — such as sharing the phone with other relatives present during the conversations. I also interpret this in terms of avoiding a “doubling of place,” as Moores (2012: 12ff., referring to Scannell 1996) terms the overlay of the communicative frames of the local and the translocal. People also actively and creatively deal with this mixing of physical and mediated copresence, as Anwar's situation shows, with individuals consciously using the mobile phone to create a mixed interaction situation.

Many interviewees reported that mobile communication replaces physical visits, while some stated that communicating over the phone increases their longing for physical proximity to their family. For many of the interviewees regular and close contact with distant loved ones meant an improvement in psychological and social resources, in the form of reduced stress as well as of reliable and intact social relations.

Although the structural changes attributable to different mobile phone usage categories are very heterogeneous and sometimes even contradictory, some general patterns can nevertheless still be discerned herein. The most apparent changes seem to occur in the resource base, whereas networks and places undergo rather more gradual, subtle transformations. Most of those interviewed highlighted the money and time saved in interactions and transactions brought about by mobile phones, through the better coordination of activities and the reduction of the need to travel that they enable. The improved access to information was also frequently mentioned, specifically concerning the condition of absent family members but also regarding practical information — such as about job opportunities, market prices, or timely and easy contact with organizations providing advice and assistance in the fields of agriculture, education, financial loans, healthcare or legal counselling. Intensified communication with close social contacts improves the social resource base that can be mobilized in times of financial, material, and/or psychological need. The maintenance of family relations and the ability to obtain instant access to help and support

---

3 Strengthened core networks does not correspond with increased total network size, which is where the aforementioned studies diverge. Other mobile phone usage practices (especially helpline, hotline, infoline, microcoordination) seem to enlarge distant networks and to strengthen those ties, which is also reflected in Shrum et al. (2011).

is especially relevant for younger women with absent migrant husbands, because of their higher level of vulnerability and greater exposure to discrimination (see also, Kabir et. al 2008). The ability to access immediate support in times of distress is thus now enhancing agents' psychological resilience.

**Table 2: Overview of Relations Between Agential, Spatial and Structural Features**

	Remittances (via MFS)	Chatroom
<b>Agency/Practices</b>		
<b>Interaction</b>	Expressing need, follow up	Sharing of time, attention
<b>Mobility</b>	(less movements of couriers)	(less need for personal visits)
<b>Transaction</b>	Sending of money	
<b>Place</b>		
<b>Location</b>	(De)centralization?	Distance loses importance
<b>Materiality</b>	Grocery stores/mobile phone shops become new sites for network nodes	House/home: site for communication
<b>Meaning</b>	Shifting importance of booths' sites	"Doubling of place"
<b>Networks</b>		
<b>Topology</b>	New nodes (MFS agents)	Strengthens core networks
<b>Positionalities</b>	Formalizing of relations	Improving relationships
<b>Rules</b>	Increases expectations regarding transfers	Increases expectations regarding communication
<b>Resources</b>	Financial, information, time	Psychological, social

Source: Author's own compilation.

Many communicative practices strengthen core networks through intensified contact with close family members and friends, but in other cases the ability to maintain more distant personal relationships and flexibly arrange face-to-face meetings leads also to an expansion of one's distant network — for example with former work colleagues or neighbors. While the materiality of places is subject only to gradual change, the meaning and attached norms do undergo considerable revision in some cases. Due to a high population density and the limited availability of privacy, communicative situations often overlap and places are "doubled," true in both local as well as translocal interactions. Carrying a mobile phone also seems to gradually raise women's awareness about the benefits of being mobile and of venturing outside of the home, while also increasing the feeling of personal safety when doing so.

Most of the interviewed women had access to a mobile phone or, when there were several handsets in the household, owned one themselves. All but one interviewed woman emphasized the advantages that access to mobile communication had had for them, as regards, for example, access to reproductive health services, personal feelings of security, or the ability to communicate with close family members living

elsewhere. However other dimensions of gender inequality (such as access to and control over resources and remittances, household responsibilities, position within the family, property rights, and so on) were not found here to be strongly influenced by mobile communication, further confirming the findings of Tenhunen (2014).

## Conclusion

For the categories of remittances and chatroom, a range of change processes can be traced. In addition to the sheer spread of mobile phones and to their observable usage patterns, a theoretically informed perspective reveals some of the processes underlying these usage patterns: mobile communication has the potential to transform the resource base of poor people, for example their access to often crucial agriculture, business, education, health and other types of information; the ability to obtain support in situations of psychological stress; the option for increased political participation; and, the benefits from the money and time saved as a result of the better coordination and organization of one's daily activities. In most cases this outweighs the sometimes substantial costs associated with mobile handsets and their usage.

The examples also illustrate the intricacy and multidimensionality of translocal connections and the relational aspects of place. They show the different spatial grounding of functionally distinct translocal arrangements: financial flows are increasingly processed through specialized locations, ones until recently found only in larger town centers, whereas chatting and general information exchange take place between private locations or between the places where communication partners are respectively situated. The integration of places into translocal contexts is increasing, and social networks and social spaces are now being spatially reconfigured. This could be, in the case of MFS, interpreted as Bangladesh's villages now entering a "space of flows" (Castells 1996: 376ff.). The increasing inclusion of ICT into everyday practices of interaction and transaction is leading to an integration of physical and mediated copresence, as well as to shifts in the relationship between private and public space. These effects are being observed, researched, and debated heavily in postindustrial societies, but they have to be acknowledged as taking place in developing contexts as well.

These structural changes increase the scope for agency in various ways. Among other things they: improve agents' ability to efficiently organize their daily activities; enhance flexibility in how one reacts and takes decisions under conditions of uncertainty; increase the capacity to diversify and intensify one's social networks; and, facilitate the migration process by prearranging employment, housing and travel and by helping build up a contact network upon arrival. From a geographical perspective it seems important to note the interdependence of processes on a variety of scales: while global and national structures and processes have been important in enabling the spread of mobile communication (for example foreign investment,

global production systems, policy reforms, technological developments, and the like), the local socioeconomic and sociocultural context has substantially influenced their adoption, domestication, and usage. The changes that are associated with mobile communication extend over scales as well, ranging from local changes in resources, translocal networks and flows, transformed perceptions of time and space for large parts of a society, to the establishment of new economic sectors on the both national and global levels. In closing, then, to put it in the words of Taylor et al. (1995: 9):

In this case geographers deal with a local-global dialectic, where local events constitute global structures which then impinge on local events in an iterative continuum.

## References

- Agnew, John A. (1987): *Place and Politics. The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*. Boston: Allen & Unwin
- Archer, Margaret (1995): *Realist Social Theory. The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Bayes, Abdul (2001): "Infrastructure and Rural Development. Insights from a Grameen Bank Village Phone Initiative in Bangladesh", in: *Agricultural Economics*, 25, 2–3: 261–272, doi: 10.1111/j.1574-0862.2001.tb00206.x
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) (2014): "Total Population Statistics", <http://www.bbs.gov.bd/Home.aspx> (accessed: 2014-05-27)
- Bork-Hüffer, Tabea; Etzold, Benjamin; Gransow, Bettina; Tomba, Luigi; Sterly, Harald; Suda, Kimiko; Kraas, Frauke; Flock, Ryanne (2014): "Agency and the Making of Transient Urban Spaces. Examples of Migrants in the City in the Pearl River Delta, China and Dhaka, Bangladesh", in: *Population, Space and Place*, doi: 10.1002/psp.1890
- Brickell, Katherine (2011): "Translocal Geographies of 'Home' in Siem Reap, Cambodia", in: Brickell, Katherine; Datta, Ayona (eds.): *Translocal Geographies. Spaces, Places, Connections*. Surrey: Ashgate, 23–38
- Brickell, Katherine; Datta, Ayona (2011): "Introduction. Translocal Geographies", in: Brickell, Katherine; Datta, Ayona (eds.): *Translocal Geographies. Spaces, Places, Connections*. Surrey: Ashgate, 3–22
- Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) (2014): "Statistics for Mobile Phone Subscribers in Bangladesh", <http://www.btrc.gov.bd/content/mobile-phone-subscribers-bangladesh-april-2014> (accessed: 2014-05-27)
- Cartier, Carolyn; Castells, Manuel; Qiu, Jack Linchuan (2005): "The Information Have-Less. Inequality, Mobility, and Translocal Networks in Chinese Cities", in: *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 40, 2: 9–34, doi: 10.1007/BF02686292
- Castells, Manuel (1996): *The Rise of the Network Society. The Information Age. Economy, Society, and Culture Volume I*. Chichester: Blackwell Publishers
- Creswell, Tim (2004): *Place. A short introduction*. Malden: Blackwell
- Curwen, Peter; Whalley, Jason (2013): "Mapping Worldwide Mobile Networks. Some Problems and Indicative Solutions", in: *Telecommunications Policy*, 37, 11: 1150–1165, doi: 10.1016/j.telpol.2012.05.004
- Dey, Bidit L.; Binsardi, Ben; Prendergast, Renee; Saren, Mike (2013): "A Qualitative Enquiry into the Appropriation of Mobile Telephony at the Bottom of the Pyramid", in: *International Marketing Review*, 30, 4: 297–322, doi: 10.1108/IMR-03-2012-0058
- Donner, Jonathan (2008): "Research Approaches to Mobile Use in the Developing World. A Review of the Literature", in: *The Information Society*, 24, 3: 140–159, doi: 10.1080/01972240802019970
- Duncombe, Richard (2011): "Researching Impact of Mobile Phones for Development. Concepts, Methods and Lessons for Practice", in: *Information Technology for Development*, 17, 4: 268–288, doi: 10.1080/02681102.2011.561279
- Etzold, Benjamin (2014): "Migration, Informal Labour and (Trans)Local Productions of Urban Space. The Case of Dhaka's Street Food Vendors", in: *Population, Space and Place*, doi: 10.1002/psp.1890

- Financial Express (2013): "bKash Eyes to be the Largest m-Banking Service Provider Co in the World", in: *Financial Express*, December 4, <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2013/12/04/7142> (accessed: 2014-05-27)
- Giddens, Anthony (1984): *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Goffman, Erving (1974): *Frame analysis*. New York: Harper & Row
- Government of India (2013): "Annual Report 2012–13. Department of Telecommunications, Delhi", [http://dot.gov.in/sites/default/files/Telecom%20Annual%20Report-2012-13%20%28English%29%20\\_For%20web%20%281%29.pdf](http://dot.gov.in/sites/default/files/Telecom%20Annual%20Report-2012-13%20%28English%29%20_For%20web%20%281%29.pdf) (accessed: 2014-05-20)
- Greiner, Clemens; Sakdapolrak, Patrick (2013a): "Translocality. Concepts, Applications and Emerging Research Perspectives", in: *Geography Compass*, 7, 5: 373–384, doi: 10.1111/gec3.12048
- (2013b): "Rural–urban Migration, Agrarian Change, and the Environment in Kenya. A Critical Review of the Literature", in: *Population and Environment*, 34, 4: 524–553, doi: 10.1007/s11111-012-0178-0
- Hampton, Keith N.; Sessions, Lauren F.; Her, Eun J. (2011): "Core Networks, Social Isolation, and New Media", in: *Information, Communication & Society*, 14, 1: 130–155, doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2010.513417
- Horst, Heather; Miller, Daniel (2006): *The Cell Phone. An Anthropology of Communication*. Oxford: Berg
- Hossain, Sarah; Beresford, Melanie (2012): "Paving the Pathway for Women's Empowerment? A Review of Information and Communication Technology Development in Bangladesh", in: *Contemporary South Asia*, 20, 4: 455–469, doi: 10.1080/09584935.2012.737309
- Islam, M. S.; Grönlund, Åke (2011): "Bangladesh Calling. Farmers' Technology Use Practices as a Driver for Development", in: *Information Technology for Development*, 17, 2: 95–111, doi: 10.1080/02681102.2010.526093
- ITU (2004): "ICT Facts and Figures 2014", <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2014-e.pdf> (accessed: 2014-05-28)
- (2014): "Key 2005–2014 ICT Data for the World, by Geographic Regions and by Level of development", [www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2014/ITU\\_Key\\_2005-2014 ICT\\_data.xls](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2014/ITU_Key_2005-2014 ICT_data.xls) (accessed: 2014-05-27)
- Kabir, Md. Azmal; Lipi, Nazmun Nahar; Afrin, Sadia; Seeley, Janet (2008): "Social Protection By and For Temporary Work Migrants and their Households in Northwest Bangladesh", Migration DRC research report, University of Sussex, [www.migrationdrc.org/publications/research\\_reports.html](http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/research_reports.html) (accessed: 2014-10-23)
- Kleine, Dorothea (2010): "ICT4WHAT? Using the Choice Framework to Operationalise the Capability Approach to Development", in: *Journal of International Development*, 22, 5: 674–692, doi: 10.1002/jid.1719
- (2011): "The Capability Approach and the 'Medium of Choice'. Steps Towards Conceptualising Information and Communication Technologies for Development", in: *Ethics and Information Technology*, 13, 2: 119–130, doi: 10.1007/s10676-010-9251-5
- Ledgard, J. M. (2011): "Digital Africa", in: *Intelligent Life Magazine*, 2011, Spring, <http://moreintelligentlife.com/content/ideas/jm-ledgard/digital-africa?page=full> (accessed: 2014-06-01)
- Ling, Richard S. (2004): *The Mobile Connection. The Cell Phone's Impact on Society*. Amsterdam: Morgan Kaufmann
- LIRNEAsia (2009): "Teleuse at the Bottom of the Pyramid Data Booklet. Findings from a Six-country Study in Emerging Asia", Data Booklet, <http://lirneasia.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/Teleuse-at-BOP-Data-Booklet-LIRNEAsia.pdf> (accessed: 2011-11-04)
- Miller, Daniel (2009): "What is a Mobile Phone Relationship?", in: Alampay, Erwin (ed.): *Living the Information Society in Asia*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 24–35
- Moores, Shaun (2012): *Media, place and mobility*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan
- Palackal, A.; Nyaga Mbatia, P.; Dzorgbo, D.-B.; Duque, R. B.; Ynalvez, M. A.; Shrum, W. M. (2011): "Are Mobile Phones Changing Social Networks? A Longitudinal Study of Core Networks in Kerala", in: *New Media & Society*, 13, 3: 391–410, doi: 10.1177/1461444810393900
- Pfaff, Julia (2010): "Mobile Phone Geographies", in: *Geography Compass*, 4, 10: 1433–1447
- Rashid, Ahmed T. (2011): "A Qualitative Exploration of Mobile Phone Use by Non-owners in Urban Bangladesh", in: *Contemporary South Asia*, 19, 4: 395–408, doi: 10.1080/09584935.2011.577206
- Robins, Kevin (1995): "The New Spaces of Global Media", in: Johnston, R. J.; Taylor, Peter J.; Watts, Michael J. (eds): *Geographies of Global Change. Remapping the World in the Late Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Blackwell, 248–262

- Shafiqul Alam Bhuiyan, A. J. M. (2004): "Universal Access in Developing Countries. A Particular Focus on Bangladesh", in: *The Information Society*, 20, 4: 269–278, doi: 10.1080/01972240490480983
- Shrum, Wesley; Mbatia, Paul N.; Palackal, Antony; Dzorgbo, Dan-Bright S.; Duque, Ricardo B.; Ynalvez, Marcus A. (2011): "Mobile Phones and Core Network Growth in Kenya. Strengthening Weak Ties", in: *Social Science Research*, 40, 2: 614–625, doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2010.09.015
- Steinbrink, Malte (2009): "Urbanisation, Poverty and Translocality. Insights from South Africa", in: *African Population Studies*, 23, Supplement: 219–252
- Stones, Rob (2005): *Structuration Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- (2012): "Causality, Contextual Frames and International Migration. Combining Strong Structuration Theory, Critical Realism and Textual Analysis", IMI Working Papers Series 62, <http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/pdfs/wp/wp-62-2012-causality-contextual-frames-and-international-migration-combining-strong-structuration-theory-critical-realism-and-textual-analysis> (accessed: 2014-06-01)
- Tan, Brian A. L.; Yeoh, Brenda S. A. (2011): "Translocal Family Relations Amongst the Lahu in Northern Thailand", in: Brickell, Katherine; Datta, Ayona (eds.): *Translocal Geographies. Spaces, Places, Connections*. Surrey: Ashgate, 39–54
- Taylor, Peter J.; Watts, Michael J.; Johnston, R. J. (1995): "Global Change at the End of the Century", in: Johnston, R. J.; Taylor, Peter J.; Watts, Michael J. (eds): *Geographies of Global Change. Remapping the World in the Late Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1–10
- Tenhunen, Sirpa (2014): "Mobile Telephony, Mediation, and Gender in Rural India", in: *Contemporary South Asia*, 22, 2: 157–170, doi: 10.1080/09584935.2014.899981
- UNDP (2009): "Human Development Report 2009. Overcoming Barriers. Human Mobility and Development", [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/269/hdr\\_2009\\_en\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/269/hdr_2009_en_complete.pdf) (accessed: 2014-05-20)
- Worldbank (2012): "Information and Communications for Development 2012. Maximizing Mobile", <http://www.worldbank.org/ict/IC4D2012> (accessed: 2014-05-30)
- (2014a): "The Little Data Book on Information and Communication Technology 2014", [http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/ldb/LDB\\_ICT\\_2014.pdf](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/ldb/LDB_ICT_2014.pdf) (accessed: 2014-06-03)
- (2014b): "World DataBank. World Development Indicators", <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators> (accessed: 2014-05-27)