

## **MOBILE COMMUNICATION: HISTORICAL HINTS**

### **2.1 Thirty years of mobile communication**

Who does not remember, perhaps even with a touch of nostalgia, the first call made through that device, cumbersome and expensive, but with a somewhat magic flavour? And also, how to forget those first publicity gimmicks, that today arouse a smile? They seem very far times, but we are talking of just 10-15 years ago... Recent history, that made us witnesses and protagonists of a Copernican change.

To be precise, 2006 celebrated the thirty-third birthday of cellular telephony, if we consider as “zero hour” the day in which, in a street of Manhattan, Martin Cooper – a Motorola employee – phoned the R&D Manager of Bell Laboratories (AT&T), Cooper’s business competitor. The model he used was the prototype Dyna-Tac, 1.130 grams in weight, with no display or other functions besides calling, and represented a technological turning point, though it was necessary to wait for other ten years to see the global marketing of the first, proper cellular phone, a model called DynaTac 800X, and again produced by Motorola. At the time – it was 1983 – in order to enter the world of mobile telephony it was necessary to pay around 4.000 \$, and carry a heavy “brick” of eight hundred grams.

Certainly year 1973 marks a fundamental date for mobile telephony, but just for the “insiders”. In fact, the majority of people began to see and use mobile phones only during mid-Nineties. At that time, this new means of communication started spreading like wildfire in all the social strata – at first among business managers, who employed it as a work tool, and afterwards in the younger generations, that felt finally free to communicate without family control. Bearing in mind the social, economic, and technological background of the Information Society – as presented in the first chapter – we will now move to a discussion of the most relevant phases of the history of the mobile phone. We will not simply focus on the milestones of its technological evolution, but also on those – perhaps not as well-known – of its commercial diffusion and socio-cultural impact. We will concentrate on the Italian case mainly; however, whereas possible, the discussion will lead to present comparisons and analyses involving other reference countries in the mobile communication field, such as the US and, for the European continent, the Scandinavian nations.