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CCTV Surveillance of Stureplan and Medborgarplatsen

Interim Report 2

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Summary

The possibility to conduct CCTV surveillance in public places in Sweden is regulated by law (Swedish Camera Monitoring Act 2013:460). Monitoring areas to which the public has access requires a license from the county administrative board in the current county. When applying for a permission the interest for monitoring is weighed against the interest for integrity. That is, the need to conduct CCTV surveillance in order to prevent, detect or investigate crime set against individual interests not to be watched.

Medborgarplatsen and Stureplan are two areas of Stockholm's inner city where there are plenty of restaurants, pubs and night clubs. These areas have since long struggled with high rates of crimes committed in public places. These crimes include assault, violence or threat to public servant, unlawful threats, muggings, sexual offences and aggravated violence. Crime is largely concentrated to weekend nights.

Over the years, the Police have made numerous attempts to bring down crime rates in these areas. For example, every weekend night since 2006 the Police deploy mobile police offices in the areas. During weekend nights, the police presence is also reinforced with the "City Weekend Command", which means an extra appointment of around 30 police officers. Collaboration with pubs and door staff in the areas has also been conducted for some years. Despite these and many other initiatives the crime rate has remained high. This is the reason to the Police's application for night-time CCTV surveillance at Stureplan and Medborgarplatsen in 2006. After a process of appeals from both the Police and the Chancellor of Justice (JK), the Police were granted a three-year license to monitor the sites in June 2012. The first CCTV cameras became operational in July same year. The license covers 7 cameras at Stureplan, which can be enabled between the hours of 11 pm and 6 am, and 9 cameras at Medborgarplatsen, which can be enabled between the hours of 9 pm and 5 am.

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) [henceforth the National Council] are evaluating the CCTV trials in three reports; one for each year the cameras have been in use. This is the second report, and it describes:

- how people at these places perceive them (compared to how they perceived them a year ago)
- how crime trends at the sites have changed over the recent years
- how the Police have been working with the cameras
- how useful the recordings from the cameras has been in investigations.

The impression of Medborgarplatsen and Stureplan is unchanged

Overall nothing has changed in terms of how people visiting Stureplan and Medborgarplatsen perceive the areas. Nothing has changed regarding how extensive the problems are perceived, people are just as concerned about being exposed to violence and the insecurity remains at the same level. The only difference since the first measuring is that the opposition to CCTV surveillance has decreased. There are now only few who oppose CCTV surveillance in the areas.

In order for CCTV to prevent people from committing crime in an area, a prerequisite is that these people are aware of the cameras. In the first report, it became clear that few people knew that Stureplan and Medborgarplatsen were subject to CCTV surveillance. This awareness has certainly increased, but there are still many who are unaware of the cameras.

Can the decline of reported crimes be linked to the cameras?

During the period of CCTV surveillance, the number of reported offences against a person has declined at both Stureplan and Medborgarplatsen.¹ The decrease occurred primarily during hours that the cameras were on and particularly when they were manned. The decline at Stureplan has only occurred during these hours, other times the reported crime on the contrary has increased.

In the areas used for comparison, there has also been a downward crime trend during the period. When taking into account the development in the comparison areas, it is only during CCTV operating time with manning at Medborgarplatsen where the decline is evident.

It is doubtful whether the decrease can be seen as a result of the cameras. One factor working against the cameras' importance is that the decrease does not coincide with their introduction. For some offences the decline began before the CCTV surveillance, while for others it did not begin until the cameras had been running for quite a while. The fact that there has also been a decrease

¹ The decrease at Stureplan is not statistically significant.

of reported crime in the comparison areas during the period reinforces the assessment of the National Council.

The Police perceive the cameras as useful tools

The cameras at Stureplan and Medborgarplatsen are monitored and operated from the Police's Command center (LKC). On weekdays the cameras are manned by regular staff at LKC, but on Friday and Saturday nights the work is handled by a camera operator. After each work shift, the camera operator writes a follow-up of what worked well or poorly during the session and what use they had of the cameras.

The follow-ups mainly include comments on three areas: technology, collaboration, and events detected or reported thanks to the cameras. Many of the technical problems reported in the follow-ups in the first report have also been raised for discussion ahead of this report. In some regards, it is apparent that many of the operators now are more experienced to work with cameras and they no longer lack information to the same extent. This is despite the fact that the function as camera operator has been staffed by many different people

When the camera operators describe situations when the cameras have been used, it is mainly about events that has been detected and could be averted by the operator. Another common use is that the operators have seen a person who is behaving as if under the influence of alcohol or drugs who need to be taken care of according to the Act 1976:511 on the disposal of drunk people, etc. (LOB). The camera operators and officers on patrol duty that the National Council has been in contact with, agree that the cameras are a valuable tool that they would like to retain.

Limited use of video in investigations and prosecutions

In addition to preventing and averting crime, a purpose with the cameras is to facilitate investigation work. Over the 9 month period² that the National Council has studied, video evidence was sought in some 80 cases. The National Council has reviewed the majority of them. In total, 23 cases seem to indicate that the requested video has revealed something that was relevant to the investigation. In the other cases, the recordings did not show anything of interest as the cameras either were angled in another direction, were inoperative or had an unclear image.

12 of the 23 cases were prosecuted. In three of the judgements, the video had a particularly significant impact for the conviction.

² From January to September 2013.

Assessment of the National Council

The National Council can conclude that both the general public and the Police have a positive attitude to CCTV surveillance on Medborgarplatsen and Stureplan. In terms of public attitudes, many people in Stureplan and Medborgarplatsen say that they believe that the cameras will lead to increased security, despite the fact that the proportion of people reporting that they feel safe has not risen. From the perspective of the Police, the positive attitudes are partly about the cameras being able to facilitate their work in the field, i.e. that the cameras help them to detect and prevent crime, and that recording from the cameras may facilitate investigation work.

The evaluation from the National Council provides no support to the impact of CCTV surveillance on neither crime nor public safety at the two sites. These results are consistent with findings in systematic reviews and studies from other countries.

CCTV surveillance that is conducted in real-time has certainly a different potential compared to when images are solely studied retrospectively, which has been the preconditions for the other camera projects conducted in public places in Sweden that have been evaluated. There are examples from the Police's follow-ups which shows that crime has been prevented, but overall the documentation are too poor to fully illustrate the extent to which the cameras have helped to prevent crime in specific cases. Regardless if these situations have been more common than described, the fact that the reported crimes has not decreased more at the CCTV sites than in other comparable sites in Stockholm remains.

Regarding the third purpose, the possibility to use recordings from cameras in investigations of crimes, the results is more promising according to the National Council. There has not been an extensive use of CCTV recordings in investigations during the period studied. Over the 9 months studied by the National Council, video was requested for some 80 cases. This can be proportioned against the fact that more than 600 crimes (of the relevant categories of crime) were reported during the hours that the cameras were enabled at Stureplan and Medborgarplatsen over the same period. However, there are examples of cases where CCTV recording constituted important evidence and also examples where it was significant for a conviction. These cases should be highlighted.

According to the National Council, there may be potential for increasing the use of CCTV recordings from the sites in the investigation of crimes. The value of the cameras would thereby increase. However, this requires an improved knowledge of the cameras among police investigators and prosecutors, as well as maintaining images of high quality and a correct alignment of the cameras to a greater extent than today.

Opportunities for improvement

The National Council has identified a number of areas where the work could be improved and proposes the following measures:

- *More information about the cameras to visitors.* The possibility for a deterrent effect of the cameras requires that the potential offenders are aware of the surveillance. However, most people who are at the sites are not aware of the cameras existence. There is therefore reason for the Police to disseminate more information of higher quality about the CCTV surveillance in the areas.
- *More information about the cameras to investigators and to police officers on patrol duty at the sites.* Successful work with the cameras, i.e. the possibility of using the CCTV to prevent and avert crime, requires that the police officers who work at the sites have a good knowledge of them. From the perspective of the investigators, knowledge is a prerequisite for using CCTV material in criminal investigations to a greater extent than has previously been done.
- *Specialisation of the function as camera operator.* If the position as a camera operator was specialised, it would be easier to work out strategies to successfully use the cameras. This would probably also encourage cooperation with both the Police on patrol duty and with the city weekend operator.
- *Improve the conditions for using recordings in investigations.* The technical problems seem to have decreased since the first report but in order to increase the likelihood that images can be used retrospectively, the Police need to continue working on developing the technical conditions. Still, it is relatively common that the cameras are incorrectly aligned or that the images are dark, black and white or unclear. Many of the problems are probably due to operator error.



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