

English summary

The use of surveillance cameras for the purpose of crime prevention

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In Sweden, the use of surveillance cameras is subject to a greater level of regulation than in many other countries; as a rule, for example, a permit is required from the county administrative board before such cameras can be used in most areas to which the general public has access. In this report, the National Council for Crime Prevention presents the first Swedish case studies of the use of surveillance cameras for the purposes of crime prevention, as well as a compilation of previous, primarily international, experiences in this area. The focus is directed at the use of surveillance cameras in two types of environment; car parks and street environments – of which the latter is a relatively new area for the use of surveillance cameras in Sweden. The studies have for the most part focused on the effects of surveillance cameras on crime and the consequences of their use for perceptions of security and for personal integrity.

Experiences from other countries show that the use of surveillance cameras may result in both significant reductions in crime and improved feelings of security. This is also the case in the Swedish case studies. Car related crimes were reduced by more than fifty per cent in connection with the introduction of surveillance cameras at one of the (residential) parking lots studied, for example. Further, those using the parking lot reported experiencing greater levels of security in connection with the use of surveillance cameras. As was the case in the studies from abroad, however, there are also examples from the Swedish case studies where the use of surveillance cameras has had a very limited, if any, effect on crime. This was the case in

one of the Swedish case studies that focused on an outdoor environment (Stadsparken in Helsingborg).

One of the central objectives of these studies has therefore been not only to present the effects of the use of surveillance cameras, but also to describe the different conditions characteristic of the various locations covered by the studies. In this way, it is possible to make certain recommendations, on the basis of both the Swedish studies and the information gleaned from previous experience, for those contemplating the use of surveillance cameras, or those already employing them for the purposes of crime prevention.

Effects on crime vary

Surveillance cameras in city centre street environments have shown themselves to have a varied effect on crime. Experiences from abroad show that above all property crimes such as break-ins, bicycle thefts, thefts from cars and criminal damage have been reduced considerably by the use of surveillance cameras. In the two case studies where surveillance cameras were employed in environments of this kind in Sweden, however, namely in Möllevångstorget in Malmö and Stadsparken in Helsingborg, the objective was primarily to improve the public order situation and reduce levels of crime against the person. In Möllevångstorget in Malmö, general levels of crime fell by 40 per cent during the first year in which surveillance cameras were employed. Levels of crime against the person dropped even more substantially (by 50 per cent). Other changes have occurred in the area that may have played a contributory role in this reduction, but probably only to a limited extent. There do not appear to have been any displacement effects, i.e. where crimes have instead been committed at other places in the vicinity. The use of surveillance cameras does not reduce levels of reported problems related to drunkenness or other public order disturbances, however.

In the other case study on the other hand, at Stadsparken in Helsingborg, the use of surveillance cameras does not appear to have led to a reduction in levels of reported crime. Conditions at Stadsparken were different from those at Möllevångstorget, however. At Stadsparken, the cameras only covered the park's pedestrian pathways, whereas the cameras employed at Möllevångstorget covered more or less the entire location. A further difference that may have been of significance is that the crime levels in the two locations at the point when the cameras were introduced were very different. At Möllevångstorget, numbers of offences were substantially greater than they were at Stadsparken, which means that the scope for achieving a reduction was greater at the former location.

In the case of the two parking lots examined, too, both the conditions and the effects on crime differed from the one to the other. In one of these cases, a residential parking garage located in a small community, the number of vehicle-related offences dropped dramatically (by almost 80 per cent) following the introduction of surveillance cameras. In the other case, a public parking garage in a city centre, the use of surveillance cameras appeared to have no effect on crime whatsoever. There were no major differences in the way the cameras were employed in the two cases. The

studies suggest, however, that two other factors may have contributed to the difference in effects. The one factor relates to the level of knowledge of the use of surveillance cameras among those using the parking lot; (this was high among those using the residential garage, but was rather more uncertain among those parking in the public city centre car park). The other factor relates to the environment in which the parking garages were located.

Few effects on perceptions of security and integrity

Both the case studies presented in this report and previous studies indicate that people's perceptions of security tend to increase with the introduction of surveillance cameras, although only to a limited extent. Levels of security appear to increase most in places where people often find themselves alone, such as parking lots, for example. This, in combination with higher levels of concern over crime in general, may be the reason that levels of perceived security increased somewhat in connection with the introduction of surveillance cameras in Stadsparken, even though levels of crime were not reduced. At Möllevångstorget, where crime levels fell in connection with the use of surveillance cameras, levels of perceived security also increased somewhat more than they did at Stadsparken. Those using the residential parking garage, where crime levels fell, also experienced an improved sense of security. It is not unusual, however, for people to believe that the use of surveillance cameras will lead to a greater increase in levels of security than is actually the case.

One negative consequence of the use of surveillance cameras may be that they are perceived as an infringement upon individuals' personal integrity. To date, however, the majority of the Swedish public do not in general appear to have anything against the use of surveillance cameras for the purposes of crime prevention. There are major differences, however, between various types of location; the use of surveillance cameras appears to be most accepted in locations where a person may in general be observed by more or less anyone at all, as is the case in shops and taxis, for example, as well as in street environments.

The National Council's assessment

The Swedish case studies, and previous experiences, show that the use of surveillance cameras can lead to reductions in crime. Similarly, levels of perceived security may increase somewhat in connection with the use of surveillance cameras, but only to a limited extent. It is also important, however, to take into consideration factors other than the number of crimes that may have been prevented and increased levels of security when assessing whether the use of surveillance cameras is the most suitable measure, either in general or in a specific instance. These factors include of course the question of integrity, which should be accorded a substantial degree of importance, and that of cost-effectiveness. Alternative methods to reduce

levels of crime and increase levels of security should always be considered and examined. The use of surveillance cameras in public places is, and should continue to function as, a complement to other crime preventive measures.

The number of permits issued for the use of surveillance cameras has increased over recent years. This trend is likely to continue, not least since adjustments to the relevant legislation in Sweden are being planned within the near future which may expand the opportunities for the use of surveillance cameras in certain contexts. Whilst this report fills a number of gaps in the available knowledge in this area, Swedish experiences of the effects of surveillance cameras remain limited at the present time. Nor do the four case studies conducted by the National Council for Crime Prevention provide a picture of the whole of the field within which surveillance cameras may be employed. It has not been possible in all of the cases to interrupt and employ recorded events in order to clear up crimes, for example. In addition, other aspects of the use of surveillance cameras should be examined in more detail, not least those relating to the costs involved. It is therefore important to increase levels of knowledge in this area by continuing to carefully document and follow up the use of surveillance cameras in the future.

On the basis of the experiences described in this report, certain recommendations can be made as to the continued use of surveillance cameras for the purposes of crime prevention. One such recommendation is that the use of surveillance cameras should be preceded by a thorough analysis of the nature of the problem in question and of the possibilities specifically for surveillance cameras to contribute to a reduction in the extent of the problem. Strategic thinking is of major importance in relation to decisions not only as to whether surveillance cameras should be employed, but also in relation to decisions as to how, when and where this method should be employed.

One of the findings that the National Council would like to emphasise is that on the basis of these studies, the use of surveillance cameras has the greatest chance of making a substantial contribution to reduced crime levels in areas where such levels are high (or may be expected to be high) to begin with. There is quite simply more scope to reduce crime where crime levels are high. This is also the case in relation to the question of perceived security. Employing surveillance cameras to further increase levels of security, or to further reduce levels of crime, where these levels are already relatively high or low respectively, is likely to produce only limited effects, if any.

Another recommendation that can be made on the basis of these studies would involve selecting locations where crime is relatively concentrated and where it is possible to cover the whole of the relevant area. Thus the cameras' coverage should be, or should be perceived to be, good. In complex environments, such as parking garages which are difficult to cover in this way, a larger number of cameras are required, and their use out of doors often requires clearing vegetation. It is often the case that other, complementary measures should also be put in place in connection with the use of surveillance cameras.