

CCTV in public space in countries of the EU

Summary

Recently the use of CCTV in public space has been under discussion. In several cities CCTV in public space has already been started and in other cities it is being considered. It is felt, however, that not enough is known about CCTV. That is why, in this study, information has been gathered from other European countries with more experience on the use of CCTV in public space.

Upon contacting Offices in Europe, regarding the issue of CCTV in their countries, it turned out that Great Britain, Ireland, France, Belgium and Finland have CCTV in public space and have information about it.

Extensive literature research and personal contact with Offices around Europe resulted in the following information about the aims, conditions, implementation, and consequences of CCTV in public space.

The various countries are in general agreement about the aims of CCTV. It should prevent and reduce crime and fear of crime, and help the police in detecting and persecuting offences. CCTV is usually implemented as part of a more general crime prevention policy. In Great-Britain CCTV is always used in this manner.

All countries have a legal basis for CCTV. France takes a special place being the first and only country with a special law on CCTV. In the other countries the rules on CCTV are part of the regulations regarding data protection, and are quite similar in content. Differences emerge regarding the amount of time that the tapes may be stored. In France and England tapes may be stored for a month at most and in Belgium for only one day.

Another aspect in which France diverges for setting up a camera system is that a license is compulsory.

The decision to place cameras in public space is usually made locally and the funds are also raised locally. In Great-Britain and Ireland however, there are national programs that have set aside a budget to help start CCTV in public space. The running costs, however, have to be dealt with locally. In Great-Britain and Ireland private companies also contribute considerably towards the cost.

In all countries the general public is usually in favour of CCTV in public space. Although in France and Belgium there have been serious discussions on CCTV in public space and the violation of people's privacy, acceptance of CCTV in public space has followed in these countries too.

The actual monitoring in a CCTV scheme takes place from a control room that is generally located either in a police station or a local government building. In Great-Britain and Finland the monitoring is usually carried out by civil staff and not by policemen. In Great-Britain, CCTV schemes originally started out with policemen watching the screens but have switched to using -cheaper- civilian staff, training them to become control room operators. The quality of this training and communication between the operators and the police are considered crucial elements in the success of CCTV.

In Great-Britain it is considered important that the screens are watched 24 hours a day, as this maximises the effect. Some projects are currently experimenting with a facial recognition system. It is expected that this will be more effective than a regular system and that it will ease the workload of the operators. In the various countries very few evaluations have been conducted. The ones that have been carried out can all be found in Great-Britain, except one in Ireland. Even in Great-Britain there are surprisingly few evaluations of CCTV schemes in public space, considering its widespread nature. Most evaluations are performed locally and, according to the Home Office, not all by proper research criteria. That is why the Home Office plans to start an extensive evaluation next year.

The outcome of the British evaluations informs us of the effects CCTV has on crime and fear of crime. In most places with CCTV crime levels have decreased. In other places crime levels have either remained the same or actually increased. The outcomes range from a drop of 21% to a rise of 9%. CCTV has been proven most effective against property crimes. Concerning acts of violence against people, effects of CCTV are somewhat different because this behaviour is usually impulsive and the people involved are often under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Because of this, offenders tend to pay less attention to the presence of cameras. With these crimes, instead of preventing them, CCTV may help to stop a violent act from escalating through quick interference by the police. Regarding fear of crime, research shows that people usually feel safer knowing they are in a CCTV area. Hardly any research has been done, however, on the effect of CCTV on police management. Cameras in public space may also have side-effects. A negative side-effect of CCTV is displacement. From the evaluations, it appears that there usually is some displacement, but it is not considered a major problem since it only concerns a small percentage of crime. Other things that could influence effects of CCTV are the infrastructure of a town or city, its size, the visibility of the cameras, and publicity on positive effects of CCTV. A few remarks can be made regarding the evaluations. According to research, the effects of CCTV can fade after the first year, because the public as well as possible offenders tend to get used to the cameras. For that reason, evaluation periods should not be too short. Furthermore, the length of evaluation periods should be matched, so that results can be compared. Finally, comparisons should be made with neighbouring areas as well as comparable areas, so that trends in crime levels can be taken into account. The unique effect of CCTV in all of

this will remain hard to establish, because CCTV is always part of a more general crime prevention policy and will hardly ever stand on its own. Finally, research is recommended on the consequences of CCTV on police management and the attitude towards CCTV among policemen.

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