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***Knowledge-based Society as Surveillance Society?
Some Remarks on the Development of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) in Hungary***

The paper presents some results of a survey on social and political impacts of CCTV held from 2001 till 2004 in Hungary as a part of the EU FP5 project “Urbaneye”. The participants were institutions from the following countries: Germany (coordinator), Great-Britain, Norway/Denmark, Austria, Hungary, Spain.

The main practical and theoretical issue related to CCTV has been that in democratic societies surveillance of people should be legitimized before and accepted by citizens. So there has been a need for a deal between authorities and citizens with regard to it. Therefore there has been always a swap between increase in security (promised by surveillance by CCTV) and sacrifice of a part of citizens’ privacy. It has been just because CCTV has been both a tool of risk management (a tool of crime prevention and prosecution) and a source of risk (it could be a threat to privacy), too.

In analyzing the situation in these countries we investigated the trends of its development, attitudes towards it (newspapers, inhabitants, and local authorities), its legal framework, debates about it, etc.

The research was carried out in capitals of the partners, so we did it in Budapest.

As I mentioned, CCTV has been a special kind of risk management. Therefore we took into account the regulation of CCTV in Europe, too.

In my research work I came to the conclusion that the main reason of rapid development of CCTV in Hungary had been the following: The local decision-makers were convinced that the increased number of “visible crime” – which was a symptom of the transformational crisis in our country – can be effectively managed by pure technical means. In such cases they took it as a “panacea”.

The attitude of main Hungarian newspapers was mainly friendly. The Hungarian citizens’ attitude was mainly pro-CCTV with some criticism. Their notions about its impact were conflicting and, compared to sensitivity of citizens of other investigated countries, they were less sensible towards privacy problems.

Finally it should be mentioned that the project made policy recommendations, too.

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