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### 1. Introduction

Many authors have highlighted the need to look at the political economy of surveillance and control in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the driving motives and ideas behind our increasingly surveilled societies. Such analyses have tended to privilege consumption, the material interaction between public and private actors and the formal relationships between markets, technologies, policy and politics, leaving out a broader understanding of the motives and expectations that are taking shape alongside the increase of surveillance and control mechanisms. Moreover, authors have tended to explain surveillance *as a technology with social consequences* (see, among others, Lyon 1994).

The aim of this piece is to approach and elaborate on the experience of an up-and-coming, ‘wannabe’ global city, Barcelona, with CCTV in open, public spaces, in light of the literature on this issue, and to explore what local dynamics can tell us about the specifics of the interaction between institutional settings, political processes, financial interests and social concerns.

### 2. CCTV in Barcelona

In 2001, Barcelona installed its first 2-camera CCTV system, along Carrer Escudellers (with one camera on the corner of La Rambla and the other, ironically, on the corner with Plaça George Orwell). That was supposed to be a pilot project, and those who promoted it insisted (then and now) that CCTV was never meant to become a widespread solution to Barcelona’s crime and incivility problems.<sup>1</sup> However, the impact of those devices was never evaluated,<sup>2</sup> and the figures for the whole central area of Barcelona do not show a significant, sustained increase or decrease of illegal or anti-social activity.<sup>3</sup>

Even so, in 2003 the system was expanded to Carrer Princesa with the addition of two more cameras, and to tourist-filled La Rambla in 2009, with 16 more devices (costing a little less than 10,000 euros each). Finally, just recently, video surveillance left the city centre for the first time, and the independent Commission which approves the installation of police-monitored CCTV agreed to authorize more cameras in Poblenou, at the recently-built Parc del Fòrum, and the Northern district of Sant Andreu.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Barcelona’s Councilor for Community Safety (April 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Despite the requests by the CCDVC, which kept asking for information on the use of footage and data on crime in the area. The city’s police, however, only keeps data at the neighbourhood level, and therefore an evaluation of the impact of the cameras *where they are located* is just impossible, even retroactively.

<sup>3</sup> According to the data provided by the police in the annual requests to renew each CCTV system. We can’t take these figures as indicative of the impact of CCTV, however, as they do not specify the limits of the area where the data comes from.



*Figure 1. George Orwell Square (taken by Clive Norris)*

Today, as in 2001, the driving force behind the expansion of CCTV in Barcelona is the governing Socialist Party (PSC), recently joined by the conservatives (Partit Popular, PP) and the conservative nationalists (Convergència i Unió, CiU), who, since 2006, have included video surveillance in their political programs and security discourse. This is despite the fact that even in 2001 they criticized the decision to monitor public space through surveillance, arguing then that the local government was only promoting it to save on police units<sup>4</sup> and questioning the legality and impact on crime of the devices.<sup>5</sup>

But how has CCTV and the idea that there is a need to monitor public space made it to the institutional agenda? What are the imaginaries that wrap up the political process at the local level? In the case of Barcelona, it is hard to come up with a narrative that explains the reasons sustaining surveillance as a policy solution to security concerns by just looking at CCTV. The proliferation of public surveillance in open places is definitely accelerating, but at a rate that would appear insignificant to anyone living in almost any other European capital. Moreover, CCTV has not been enthusiastically adopted by any political party: the conservatives (PP) have embraced it, but have never proposed it as a generalized solution to security problems; and the socialists, while leading most local initiatives to install CCTV, are still openly critical of it when in the opposition in local City Councils.<sup>6</sup> None of the major parties, therefore, has provided surveillance with a legitimizing rhetoric, as would be the case of New Labour in the UK and Sarkozy's UMP in France.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of the local Plenary Session, 24/07/09.

<sup>5</sup> Questions submitted to the Socialist mayor by the conservative nationalists (CiU) on 05/07/10, 23/01/02, 08/03/02 and 25/10/05.

<sup>6</sup> In Valencia, for instance, the local Socialist Party threatened to sue the conservative government for its plan to install cameras in public areas.

A look at the political and media debates of the last 15 years, however, does provide a bigger picture with clues to understanding how and why CCTV has become an increasingly popular policy solution to security problems in urban environments: as part of a broader project to promote ‘civility’ and eliminate ‘anti-social behaviour’.<sup>7</sup> The need to impose ‘proper behaviour’ and sanction deviance is the discourse used to justify and legitimize the need to control what people do in open, public space through the electronic lens –as well as an increased police presence and powers.

Therefore, surveillance, on its own, does not have outspoken policy entrepreneurs either at the local or national level. Likewise, it is hard to find big economic interests actors lobbying public bodies to buy video-surveillance cameras. In Spain, the CCTV industry is highly atomized, and it is usually small, family-run companies (and even individual engineers with strong ties to relevant public figures) that get the contracts to install CCTV at the local level. Therefore, if there is an economic motive behind CCTV, it cannot be found on the profit to be made from the handful of devices being installed every year.<sup>8</sup>

But if it is impossible to find public or private actors that are passionate about CCTV, and nobody is making tons of money with it, why does it seem so difficult to stop or question the proliferation of surveillance technology?

### 3. Local political pressures, global economic imperatives

While CCTV might make little sense as an immediate political strategy or economic solution, seeing it in the framework of the civility drive mentioned before allows us to explore less apparent explanations and rationales. In the context of a generalized crisis of legitimacy of political parties, a longstanding embrace of punitive populism<sup>9</sup> and an increased pressure from far-right parties at the local level,<sup>10</sup> CCTV is used to convey the idea that government is ‘doing something’ about crime and incivility (Garland 2001). It is, therefore, an electoral tool, even if, in the case of Barcelona, a close look at the adoption of security and CCTV as an electoral strategy provides a complex picture that casts doubts on its usefulness: the last two Socialist mayors embraced surveillance and law and order at moments of acute political crisis, both internal and external, and only after trying other strategies, like big events (Fòrum de les Cultures in 2003, Winter Olympic Games in 2009) in the hope of recreating the success of the 1992 Olympics and attempts to promote an image of closeness to the population, participation, and sensitivity to citizens’ needs. Interestingly enough, Socialist Mayor Joan Clos promoted Barcelona’s Civility Ordinance and expanded the city’s CCTV system in 2003, but by the time the Ordinance was passed and the cameras installed, he was politically irrelevant and did not run for office in 2007. In a disturbingly similar turn of events, the ‘security turn’ announced by the current Socialist mayor, Jordi Hereu, is likely to be his last major decision before losing the support of his own party (not to mention the electorate).

This local political pressure to ‘do something’ in a context of a widening gap between citizens and elected officials, however, is only one side of the coin. The discourse around civility and surveillance, which effectively make up the broader security discourse at the local level, is not only a way to sell political alternatives to the electorate, but also a marketing tool used by the city both to fulfil the demands of the corporate sector and to compete at the global level (Cochrane 2007).

The political economy of surveillance, then, resides less with the immediate profits to be made from establishing surveillance devices as consumer products than with a broader economic project linked to

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<sup>7</sup> These range from peeing and swindling to begging, prostitution, skating, leafleting, playing ball and painting graffiti, among other activities which the police can impose fines for since 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Note that we are talking about public CCTV in open spaces. Private CCTV and CCTV in public transport would be a different matter.

<sup>9</sup> The Spanish Penal Code has been reformed 25 times in the last 15 years.

<sup>10</sup> The far-right (allegedly racist and xenophobic) Plataforma per Catalunya is currently represented in 7 Catalan towns, and has led the recent debate on the banning of the burqa.

turning urban spaces in spaces of investment and profit. The fact that Barcelona (Spain) has so far only installed CCTV systems in the city centre, in areas used intensively by tourists, reveals a picture that takes the economic rationale of surveillance beyond the corporation-meets-public-official discourse, which highlights private profit and the role of lobbies and lobbyists as a key reason behind the ascendance of surveillance technologies in public spaces, and addresses instead a more complex setting, where the electoral expectations of local politicians meet the economic interest of the private shop owner meet the political aspirations of local media moguls meet the pressure to sell safe cities in the context of a global drive to see security technology and surveillance as the solution to all urban evils (and fast track to winning elections).

This context could explain the lack of concern about the actual effectiveness of CCTV, and the emphasis on its symbolic (detering) impact. The real driving motives behind CCTV would seem to be related to particular political aspirations and a public-private interest in adding the 'safe' tag to the wrapping of the city as a global product, not fighting crime. After all, it is the visibility of anti-social behaviour, and not its impact on objective community safety, that has contributed to making it such a priority in local political agendas (Wacquant 2009). In the same way, the visibility of the cameras as a policy choice seems to be the main factor behind their success.

#### 4. Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, the tendency to understand surveillance as a *technology with social consequences* was mentioned. This tentative dive in the concrete aspects of the political economy of surveillance as a policy process and alternative in the Spanish context would suggest the usefulness of exploring an approach that takes surveillance as a *political and social process with technological consequences*, embedded in a global drive to provide 'safe' urban environments for business, high-end tourism and an investment-attracting 'creative class'. This is the imaginary that is wrapping up the urge to eliminate deviance and unpredictability from the city center.

In this sense, I would argue for the need to understand surveillance in the broader context of urban policy and urban regimes, exploring the role it is playing in local political environments, as a last resort for drowning politicians and political parties; and at the global level, as part of the must-have check list for any city striving to make it to the map of up-and-coming global economic hubs (Logan and Molotch 1988).

The resulting picture will probably be one of power, uncritical policy-transfer, fear and contradiction. Not pretty, but maybe useful in terms of identifying weak links in the policy chain.

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