

Do you believe
photography of public
places is an
inherently suspicious
act that ...



Is Photography in Public Space Inherently Suspicious? In recent years, the proliferation of advanced photographic and computing technologies such as those embedded in cellular phones and wearable gadgets have resulted in malicious photographs that put people at risk. There is an increasing number of people being victimized by photographs taken and tampered and circulated around, ruining reputations. There are also serious cases where criminals and terrorists take photos in order to gain insights into people's activities as well as public security operations and details of facilities and infrastructure (DHS 2012). These raised concerns regarding photography in public places. However, these should not be enough to make the capture of photographs in public places an inherently suspicious act. This is supported by several legitimate arguments.

First and foremost, there is the basic photographer's right. Dannemann (2009) emphasized this when he pointed out that in most free society, the right to take pictures within the public sphere is inviolate and is guaranteed by fundamental laws (p. 99). If a photographer cannot take photo in a public space, how could he create the desired composition and exposure of people, things and places if he is barred from doing so on account of being viewed as suspicious? The space is not owned by anyone and shooting pictures is part of a citizen's freedom to do as he desires, without interference and certainly without prejudice from other people and the authorities.

It is also helpful to determine why photography arouses suspicion. According to Mark Meyer (2013) this can be largely attributed to the impact of the what he called as movie plot threats: that we like to anticipate and predict attacks and threats and since we do not have anything to base such predictions

from, we are driven by materials read in thriller books or seen in the movies
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where the bad guy does his photo surveillance. So viewing photography as suspicious is a manifestation of a society that is getting paranoid. People should just as well bury their heads in the sand or live under a rock if they are afraid of being seen in public. And it is not good to live in such an environment where people instinctively view others and their actions in a negative way. Besides what could photographers possibly do with an image of an individual in public? Not all people are perverts, criminals or terrorists and the public recognizes this. Each of us must have used a camera in public at some point in our lives so we understand the logic behind photography in public spaces.

If there are instances that require vigilance and suspicion, there are ways to deal with them. With the increased focus on terrorism and criminality, governments have raised the level of information dissemination so the public knows how to identify suspicious people and acts. The National SAR Initiative is an excellent example of this policy (DHS).

All in all, public space and what transpires therein reflects the values of a society. If we inherently view someone admiring the view of the space and taking a photograph of it as suspicious, then it reflects a disturbing character. It is certainly not natural, at least, in the cases of free societies where freedom and individual rights are paramount. Therefore, prejudice to public photography must never form part of public policy.

Works Cited

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