Panopticon in the Urinal? the Stockholm homo-sex Commission C. 1950–1965

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the records of the so-called homo-sex commission—a part of the municipal Stockholm police force dedicated to the policing of male same-sex practices—as a case study of the role of policing in shaping historical understandings of homosexuality. Building on a series of documents left by the commission and high-ranking police officers, from memoranda describing the nature of homosexuality to descriptive records of individual suspects and cruising sites, I argue that anti-homosexual policing in Stockholm served three key functions: producing knowledge about homosexual identities and practices, rendering the homosexual population and social spaces visible, and regulating the perceived homosexual use of the urban landscape. While historians have carried out important work on the policing of homosexuality in Anglo-American cities, issues pertaining to other national contexts remain largely unexplored in an international setting. Thus, this article is an effort to bridge geographic gaps in the international historiography of sexuality. It is also an effort to enrich the history of sexuality with a theoretical framework from governmentality studies, examining how sexual categories are produced, made legible and thus becomes possible objects of regulation and management.

Introduction

Cities are key sites of how new subjects should be governed in a liberal society, where policing enforcement specific rationalities within the urban space. The regulation of sexuality, particularly deviant sexualities, is an important element of keeping general order within the city. An urban micro geography of street corners, parks and public conveniences have been identified as key places for policing. Urbanity also has a central place in gay history. Male same-sex practices are shaped by modern urban living, while also being part of the shaping of urban life. Thus, the city is an important location where sexuality is controlled and disciplined, but also a location where dominant norms regarding sexuality are challenged.

The 1950s saw a widespread moral panic in Western Europe and North America regarding homosexuality, and especially the seduction of young heterosexual males. In connection to this, task forces targeting homosexuals were created in Western European cities. While historians have carried out important work on the policing of homosexuality in Anglo-American cities, issues pertaining to other national contexts remain largely unexplored. When it comes to Sweden the police practices of the 1950s are typically only mentioned in passing in articles covering a larger timespan as well as a wider range of themes.
In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault posits that sexuality and the regulation thereof becomes a central form of power, since sexuality exists at the intersection between specific bodies and the population as an abstraction. Homosexuality plays an important part in the formation of a modern discourse on sexuality, with the shift from sodomy as an action to homosexuality as a disposition highlighting the homosexual male being placed as the other in relation to ideas of normal heterosexuality.\(^{10}\)

The historical study of the policing of homosexuality has been heavily influenced by Foucault, with a focus on the exercise of disciplinary forms of power onto individual homosexuals as well as carefully crafted histories of queer urban life.\(^{11}\) In this article, however, I approach the policing of so-called criminal homosexuality in Stockholm in the decades following the Second World War as a form of governmentality, a different part of Foucault’s legacy. That is, a conduct of conducts seeking to regulate the population in a productive manner.\(^{12}\) This is not to say that disciplinary forms of power or cultural histories of same-sex desire are not important, but rather that the exercise of discipline on individual bodies also serves as a way to manage and organize a multiplicity.\(^{13}\) This, argues Foucault, signifies that the “relation between the individual and the collective […] is made to function in a completely different way [than the power of the sovereign] […] in what we call population”.\(^{14}\)

In order to study the policing of homosexuality in Stockholm, I will make use of three analytical categories: knowledge, visibility and regulation. As argued by Mitchell Dean, it is important to acknowledge that these analytical categories are co-present within each other and that each of them presupposes the others without being reducible to them. Knowledge is the epistemological conception of the people to be governed, in this case the subpopulation of homosexual men. Visibility concerns ways of seeing and representing reality; in this case, ways of making previously hidden places visible, and ways of representing the homosexual population statistically. Regulation concerns ways of intervening in reality, both in relation to urban materialities and in relation to (mis)uses of urban space in order to prevent (some aspects of) homosexuality. It is also important to acknowledge that these analytical categories are co-present within each other, that each category presupposes the others without being reducible to them, and that the categories was productive in terms of fostering and discouraging possible identifications.\(^{15}\)

Thus, this article strives to make a contribution to the field of queer history by examining how the homo-sex commission\(^{16}\) within the Stockholm police:

- produced knowledge on homosexuality as a phenomenon.
- made the homosexual male as a category and specific urban places visible.
- regulated urban places and the homosexual men who made use of them.

I will do so by analysing sources in the form of memoranda, minutes, reports and the like produced on an institutional level and with a link to the homo-sex commission. These were produced by the police and signed by high-ranking police officers, and by parts of the municipal bureaucracy, and are located in the Police Authority Archives in Stockholm and the Stockholm Municipal Archives. These main sources are supplemented by a qualitative reading of all archived cases of criminal homosexuality investigated by the homo-sex commission between 1951 and 1953 in order to offer more depth on knowledge production regarding the homosexual male and police practices.\(^{17}\) The use of source material produced by the police and courts is quite common in historical studies on homosexuality.\(^{18}\) These sources are then read against the grain in order to decipher lived experiences from the reports, and is an important way to give voice to a past that would otherwise have been left silent.\(^{19}\) In this article, however, I read the sources “along the grain”, as Ann Laura Stoler puts it.\(^{20}\) Thus, I do not use them as reflections of past experiences by gay men but rather as products of a specific state machinery.
The 1950s and the making of the homo-sex commission

During the nineteenth century, the sodomy statute covered a wide range of deviant sexual practices. After the turn of the century sex between men made up the lion’s share of these cases. The fluid definition of “fornication that is against nature” in the legal framework mirrored a spectrum of queer and sometimes not so queer men who engaged in same-sex practices. These men understood themselves as existing within a broad range of identities, from gender-nonconforming feminized men to masculine “real” men.

In 1944 homosexuality was decriminalized. However, a new addendum criminalized fornication with another person of the same sex if the other person was under the age of 18. If the younger party was under the age of 15, the maximum sentence of prison or hard labour was doubled to four years. While this legal framework criminalized a narrower set of sexual practices, the relatively stable number of convictions in Sweden between 1945 and 1965 points towards a continued strict policing of deviant sexuality. The higher age of consent for same-sex practices, 18 compared to 15 for heterosexual sex, was an intentional decision with the stated aim of protecting vulnerable youth from sexual deviation and homosexual seduction. The law remained in place until 1978, when the age of consent for homosexual relations was harmonized with that for heterosexual intercourse.

The 1950s can be said to constitute a limbo-like decade in Swedish gay history. On the one hand homosexuality was decriminalized, the term homosexuality—typically as part of a medicalized discourse of sexuality—was widely used to characterize male same sex practices and desires, and the first homosexual organization was formed. These are all strands of the formation of a modern homosexual identity and the police took a predisposed homosexual subject as granted, as I will show below. On the other hand, the decade also saw widespread homophobic moral panics connected to a fear of homosexual seduction of youths—echoing the psychoanalytically informed underpinnings of the higher age of consent. As to how men sought sex with other men, Arne Nilsson has shown how this shifted from an earlier more visible, gender fluid and camp subculture towards silent and anonymous meetings in parks and urinals in Gothenburg, while Göran Söderström has shown how Stockholm had a cruising scene taking place in public urban settings as well as the beginnings of an urban homosexual infrastructure in the form of bars and clubs.

In March 1950, the principal of one of the institutions for juvenile delinquents in Stockholm wrote an opinion piece in the largest daily newspaper in Stockholm. He likened homosexuals to an invasive species who had become emboldened by their newfound legal status as well as laxer attitudes towards homosexuality in society at large. The article ended with demands for forceful action against “those who sexually abuse underage youths”. The opinion piece played into a contemporary climate riddled with fear of homosexuality.

This moral panic was the direct cause for the decision by the governor of Stockholm to call a large number of representatives from the police, the social welfare services, the military and miscellaneous actors from civil society to a meeting on 4 July 1950. This meeting resulted in a consensus regarding the need for action to curtail the damage done by homosexuality. To further these goals, the so-called Hagander Committee, named after the governor, was formed. The Hagander Committee proposed a series of actions to combat male prostitution and to protect vulnerable youths from criminal homosexuality. Regarding the police, the committee proposed that their main focus should be on homosexual men buying sex from youths under the age of 18. However, since so-called rent-boys were said to commit crimes in connection to their homosexual relations police interventions against them were justified. The committee also proposed creating a so-called homo-sex commission within the detective branch and establishing a register of homosexuals.

Knowledge production regarding a homosexual subpopulation

In order to police a subgroup of the general population, the police needed to generate knowledge on the group. Nikolas Rose posits that “rule must be exercised in the light of a knowledge of that which is to be ruled”. This includes general laws of functioning, which in this context can be seen as
abstract forms of knowledge related to who the homosexual male was, what constituted homosexuality and generalized understandings of the desires of homosexuals and how they satisfied these desires.\textsuperscript{31} These forms of knowledge are essential in order to render issues, domains and problems governable and thus possible to regulate through governmental practices.\textsuperscript{32} On the other hand, these practices also connect to other forms of knowledge. That is, while forms of knowledge such as psychoanalysis or criminology enabled certain practices with regards to homosexuals, these forms of knowledge were partially created through the practices of the police.\textsuperscript{33}

An important part of the knowledge production carried out by the committee was an extensive memorandum by director Wangson from the municipal child welfare services. He argued that an understanding of homosexuality as such was necessary to curtail societal damages done by homosexuality. Based on the work of sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, male prostitutes were divided into homosexuals, bisexuals and pseudo-homosexuals (i.e., heterosexuals who participate in homosexual sex acts). Wangson also drew on the Kinsey Report to point out that about a third of the male population had probably had homosexual experience, and to establish the extension of the perceived problem of homosexuality. Since sexuality was regarded as primarily biological in nature, activities aimed at “treating homosexuality” were deemed highly inefficient. Instead, the focus should be on the group of pseudo-homosexual youths, since they ran the risk of having their sexual development distorted by homosexual acts. This also narrowed the focus to a smaller group of youths exhibiting “antisocial tendencies” and linked homosexual acts to social risk factors regarding upbringing, work and leisure—thereby opening up for general interventions in these areas as well as individualized care.\textsuperscript{34}

The detective branch also produced knowledge on homosexuality. A point of departure was that criminal homosexuality was most certainly more widespread than the number of cases. Based on observations and a generalization of interrogations of individual homosexuals as well as a large amount of seized letters between homosexual males, the commission presented a description of the homosexual as an older man who solicited sex from rent-boys and tried to lure primary school-aged boys to engage in homosexual activities through small gifts.\textsuperscript{35} This resulted in the conclusion that all homosexuals posed a potential threat to the youth, as they were disposed to seek sexual contacts with individuals under the age of 18.\textsuperscript{36} Furthermore, the police produced knowledge on rent-boys, who were said to engage in sex solely for monetary gain. This group was the main reason presented as to why increased policing of criminal homosexuality was needed. However, the police described them as brazen and nonchalant in their behaviour, sometimes portraying them as a driver behind the market for homosexual prostitution as well as seducers of new generations of rent-boys with the promise of easy money.\textsuperscript{37}

Thus, homosexuality was constructed as an urban problem. Since Stockholm was the largest city in Sweden, it was said to be home to a disproportionately large population of homosexuals, who found easy targets amongst the steady inflow of young men migrating to Stockholm. Furthermore, Stockholm was also portrayed a destination for homosexuals travelling to the capital for casual sex. This was said to amount to an international reputation of Stockholm as “the best city in the world” for homosexuals.\textsuperscript{38}

The police also produced knowledge on individual homosexuals. In thorough investigations, the detectives extracted the minutia of how men met for sex, meticulously recreating who had done what to whom and where, thereby gaining an understanding of homosexual acts as broken down into mutual masturbation, oral and anal sex. Through these inquisitive detailed questions, the police tried to establish how homosexuality was performed through corporeal practices.

Furthermore, the police made attempts to get a glimpse into the inner life of men suspected of criminal homosexuality by investigating their prior sexual history as well as their true desires. Were these men constitutionally homosexual and for how long had they known that they desired members of the same sex? Could some be placed within a grey area of bisexuality? With regards to those with prior sexual experiences with women, how had these relations played out, and had the
suspect been able to perform hetero-sex in a satisfactory manner? To further assist in these lines of inquiry, the police routinely referred suspects to medical and psychiatric evaluations. After 1955, these evaluations were restricted to instances where they had been ordered by a court.\textsuperscript{39}

This knowledge produced the homosexual male as the sexual deviant of the 1950s. Furthermore, the production of knowledge established clear boundaries with regards to the constitution of the homosexual, what he desired and how he acted towards others, which played a key role in informing actions taken by the police. However, this knowledge also established the homo-sex commission as having a privileged position of producing knowledge on homosexuals.\textsuperscript{40} Through interrogations and surveillance, the members of the commission made themselves out to be guides in a hidden and previously unknown urban space, which included a particular vocabulary, separate cultural codes and a covert use of the urban space that took place amongst unknowing members of the public.\textsuperscript{41} The detective chief superintendent also argued for the need for highly specialized and experienced criminal detectives in order to combat male prostitution through surveillance of the urban places frequented by homosexuals.\textsuperscript{42}

**Making the homosexual population visible**

In order to govern, that which is to be governed must first be made legible. A key way to do so is through statistics, which translate populations into data that can be described and measured. On a more general level statistics play an important role in terms of making sexual minorities visible for the state. This accumulation of facts regarding populations not only represents reality but in also constitutes internally homogenous subjects with external boundaries and draws boundaries as to when governmental interventions are possible.\textsuperscript{43} Furthermore, it is also necessary to render visible the space over which government is to be exercised.\textsuperscript{44} The transformation of previously hidden urban space into a legible city was important for subsequent interventions.\textsuperscript{45} One important part of the visualization of homosexuality included cartographic practices, where the police described troublesome parts of the city in order to allocate resources and plan patrols and other forms of surveillance.\textsuperscript{46}

As part of the Hagander Committee, the police compiled statistics of all investigated cases of criminal homosexuality since 1 January 1949.\textsuperscript{47} In June 1950, the governor ordered the police to submit quarterly reports on the number of cases of criminal homosexuality. These consisted of lists detailing the individual case number, the time and place of the suspected crime and the age of the persons involved.\textsuperscript{48} However, in January 1954, the governor changed this to be a yearly report. These reports consisted of a table of the total number of cases, divided into prosecuted cases, closed cases and cases still under investigation. The reports also contained information on the total number of cases involving boys under the age of 15 and youths between the ages of 15 and 18 see (Table 1).\textsuperscript{49} This practice continued throughout the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s but seems to have been discontinued sometime after 1963—as there are no archived reports after 1963. Based on the police archives, it is also hard to discern what, if any, direct practical purpose these statistics served for the office of the governor. I have not been able to find any communication from the governor to the commissioner referring to these statistics.

Based on a memorandum by the detective chief superintendent, the Hagander Committee also argued for the need for a register.\textsuperscript{50} This memorandum stated that it would be unfeasible and highly inappropriate to register all homosexuals, for “reasons which need not be stated here”. On the other hand, the memorandum also argued that the decision to register some homosexuals was highly defensible due to a higher risk of homosexual sex offenders. Thus, the register should be limited to those convicted of criminal homosexuality and homosexuals who had come into contact with the police in relation to other matters, especially those that had been robbed by temporary acquaintances in a public place, since this was said to be indicative of belonging to the kind of homosexuals who solicited sex from minors.\textsuperscript{51} The municipal bureaucracy and local politicians raised considerable concerns regarding the register. While they admitted that a register might simplify the policing of homosexuals,
Table 1. Cases regarding criminal homosexuality.

| Quarter, Year | Cases involving boys under the age of 15 | Cases involving youths between the ages of 15 and 18 | Total Number of cases |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Q3, 1950      | 7                                       | 2                                                | 9                    |
| Q4, 1950      | *                                       | *                                                | *                    |
| Q1, 1951      | *                                       | *                                                | *                    |
| Q2, 1951      | 24                                      | 26                                               | 50                   |
| Q3, 1951      | 12                                      | 7                                                | 19                   |
| Q4, 1951      | 7                                       | 5                                                | 12                   |
| Q1, 1952      | *                                       | *                                                | *                    |
| Q2, 1952      | *                                       | *                                                | *                    |
| Q3, 1952      | *                                       | *                                                | *                    |
| Q4, 1952      | 30                                      | 24                                               | 54                   |
| Q1, 1953      | 29                                      | 45                                               | 74                   |
| Q2, 1953      | 23                                      | 50                                               | 73                   |
| Q3, 1953      | 24                                      | 26                                               | 50                   |
| Q4, 1953      | 14                                      | 19                                               | 33                   |

| Year | Cases involving boys under the age of 15 | Cases involving youths between the ages of 15 and 18 | Total Number of cases |
|------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1954 | 92                                      | 63                                               | 155                  |
| 1955 | 93                                      | 84                                               | 177                  |
| 1956 | 58                                      | 67                                               | 125                  |
| 1957 | 46                                      | 48                                               | 94                   |
| 1958 | *                                       | *                                                | *                    |
| 1959 | 30                                      | 57                                               | 87                   |
| 1960 | 36                                      | 93                                               | 129                  |
| 1961 | *                                       | *                                                | *                    |
| 1962 | 31                                      | 27                                               | 58                   |

*= No reports remain in the archives.

This compilation is based upon information in the following sources:

File appendix 7, 23 January 1951, vol. B:III:b 1951, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift ä angående kriminal homoseksualitet som varit föremål för utredning vid kriminalpolisen under tiden 1/4 – 30/6 1951", 30 June 1951, vol. B:III:b 1951, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift ä angående kriminal homoseksualitet som varit föremål för utredning vid kriminalpolisen under tiden 1/7 – 30/9 1951", 1 October 1951, vol. B:III:b 1951, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift ä angående kriminal homoseksualitet som varit föremål för utredning vid kriminalpolisen under tiden 1/10 – 31/12 1951", 2 January 1952, vol. B:III:b 1951, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift ä angående kriminal homoseksualitet som varit föremål för utredning vid kriminalpolisen under tiden 1/10 – 31/12 1952", 15 January 1953, vol. B:III:b 1952, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift ä angående kriminal homoseksualitet som varit föremål för utredning vid kriminalpolisen under tiden 1/1 – 31/3 1953", 14 April 1953, vol. B:III:b 1953, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift ä angående kriminal homoseksualitet som varit föremål för utredning vid kriminalpolisen under tiden 1/4 – 30/6 1953", 21 July 1953, vol. B:III:b 1953, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift ä angående kriminal homoseksualitet som varit föremål för utredning vid kriminalpolisen under tiden 1/7 – 30/9 1953", 12 October 1953, vol. B:III:b 1953, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift ä angående kriminal homoseksualitet som varit föremål för utredning vid kriminalpolisen under tiden 1/10 – 31/12 1953", 12 January 1954, vol. B:III:b 1953, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift över kriminal hom.sex. under 1954", 2 February 1955, vol. B:III:b 1955, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift fö r år 1955 angående handlagda fall vil kriminalpolisen i Stockholm av kriminal homoseksualitet", Box 202, F2A, 0067B, SSA;

"Uppgift över kriminal homoseksualitet under 1956", 27 January 1957, vol. B:III:b 1957, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift fö r år 1957 angående handlagda fall vil kriminalpolisen i Stockholm av kriminal homoseksualitet", Box 238, F2A, 0067B, SSA;

"Handlagda ärenden rörandes kriminal homoseksualitet under år 1959", 5 February 1960, vol. B:III:b, Krim., PSA;

"Uppgift över handlagda fall av kriminal homoseksualitet under år 1960", 31 January 1961, vol. B:III:b, Krim., PSA;

"Handlagda ärenden rörande kriminal homoseksualitet under 1962", 14 February 1963, vol. B:III:b, Krim., PSA.
they also pointed towards potential registration based on loose grounds and without accountability. As a result, they opposed the creation of such a register. However, Governor Hagander had already ordered the police to propose instructions on how to register suspects of criminal homosexuality.

The police proposed that the register should be placed within the domain of the vice section and that all personnel should be instructed to pass on “necessary information about the suspect’s identity and the circumstances that led to a suspicion” regarding homosexuality in other cases. It was clear that individuals who had been convicted of criminal homosexuality would be registered. However, the proposed instruction also stated that individuals who had been suspects in an investigation that did not lead to prosecution or conviction should be included in the register. This proposition was accepted by the governor, with the addendum that it should be included in the ordinary police instruction. Accordingly, the revised instruction stated that all individuals convicted or otherwise suspected of criminal homosexuality should be registered.

What did this new instruction imply? The convicted part is quite self-explanatory. But what about suspected? In order to understand this, one has to read the internal police memoranda underpinning the instruction. The police argued internally that a register solely consisting of convicted felons would not be effective, since homosexuals in some cases committed actions that “are unpunishable, while the same action in another case is criminal depending on the age of the counterpart”, which the police took as proof of the need to register “all homosexual individuals who are identified or referred to in an investigation”. And while registering individuals who had not committed a crime could “be a delicate matter”, the stated aim of combattting homosexuality made the register defensible, according to the police.

Thus, all suspects in an investigation regarding criminal homosexuality should be registered by default. However, instances when an individual’s homosexual orientation came up in another investigation was also included. Lastly, even youths sold sex to older men were to be registered. Even though this interaction was not necessarily criminal, as some who sold sex were over 18, they were nonetheless to be registered.

One important part of the ongoing policing of criminal homosexuality was the production of memoranda with qualitative descriptions of specific areas and places said to be meeting places for homosexuals. This included examples of thick descriptions of particular urinals, their interior design and how homosexual men used these to meet and engage in sexual activities. These were then made part of the ongoing work to stem the tide of youths who “either based on their own desires or monetary gain appear at the location to meet homosexual men”. There are also examples of how particular places were singled out as “especially cherished haunts” of homosexuals, particularly the park Humlegården and the Central Station.

This work was formalized and structured by the creation of the homo-sex commission. As part of the preparatory work of creating the commission, all police districts were instructed to submit a qualitative description of particularly troublesome locations in the city. All districts reported known meeting places for homosexuals, as well as places in need of better artificial lighting. A number of public urinals, primarily located in or adjacent to parks, were reported, as were the northern and southern shores of the lake Mälaren (see Map 1). Here, the police strongly recommended that municipal park management replace older urinals with modern, single-stall models and increase the number of streetlights in the identified locations. The municipal youth welfare agency also compiled a list of cafes said to be known homosexual meeting places. Furthermore, the agency performed some more qualitative assessments of the urban space and identified the southern shore of Mälaren as a hub of homosexual prostitution.

The homo-sex commission gained knowledge regarding the most frequented places by systematizing places mentioned in interrogations and investigations. Based on this material, the commission compiled a list of locations such as parks, urinals and public bathhouses. This list was supplemented by descriptions of locations said to be haunts of particular subgroups of male prostitutes and their clients, as well as a decoding of subcultural designations of particular places.
Thus, the memorandum could decipher that “the Headquarter” was a public urinal on Kungsgatan, that “the Wailing Wall” was a urinal on Eriksbergsgatan and that the southern lakefront of Mälaren was known as “the Gold Coast”.65

This resulted in further cementing certain locations as known haunts for homosexuals. Within this area, the detectives focussed on public restrooms, noted how many “youths” and “homosexuals” had gathered in front of specific urinals, and the frequency of traffic to and from these urinals. However, the reports do not mention policemen entering the urinals.66

The perhaps most immanent effect of police statistics, register and mapping was how both homosexuals and their use of certain locations in the city were made legible to the police. This enabled regulation and served as a basis for informed decisions regarding which regulatory
techniques to employ. However, quantification also has a powerful effect in terms of standardizing its object. By means of statistics and the register, the police constructed a unified subject—the homosexual—out of a plethora of individuals, circumstances and sexual acts.

**Regulating the homosexual population**

Based on the production of knowledge described, the police deployed regulatory techniques aimed at homosexuals. These were ways of intervening in order to produce desired conducts and hinder undesired ways of living, acting and using places. Within the context of policing homosexuality, this regulation can be understood as a prosaic geography of localized disciplinary practices. Disciplinary practices differ from the legal system, which is focused on determining guilt and meting out punishment, by a focus on a continuous evaluation and potential punishment with normalizing effects on the subject to create pliable bodies that have internalized normative modes of behaviour. However, it is important to reiterate that I understand the regulatory techniques as primarily having been aimed at the sub-population of homosexuals rather than individual subjects.

As a way to combat homosexuality, the police asked the municipal Traffic Office to remodel public urinals in a way that made public sex harder by turning towards single-person stalls, better lighting and designs offering better possibilities for oversight by an attendant. During the 1950s, the Traffic Office was engaged in an ongoing programme of modernization, where primarily older street urinals were replaced by modern single-stall models. Due to fiscal concerns, the office strongly opposed a sweeping replacement of all urinals, and open-air urinals with partial walls were dismissed as unfeasible for the Nordic climate. The office adopted a favourable position regarding the imposition of a fee on all public municipal restrooms and regular supervision by an attendant or patrolling police. The mere knowledge of the possibility of being seen was said to deter at least some unwanted use of the restrooms. Lastly, the office also promised to prune foliage in the parks and to ensure better lighting at all locations pointed out by the police in order to ensure better visibility with regards to potential criminal homosexuality.

The Hagander Committee also argued for the need for regular surveillance of “such locations that are commonly known to be meeting places in the homosexual market” as a way to obstruct contacts between homosexual men and youth selling sex. In order to reach this objective, the committee proposed a number of regular patrols to get a firm grip on the urban nightscape. However, the municipal finance board argued that regular patrols were inefficient and that targeted surveillance of individuals who could be suspected of criminal homosexuality was preferable.

While it was stated that one of the primary tasks of the commission was to surveil urban cruising grounds, this surveillance differed from both contemporary international practices and previous police practices in Stockholm. By order of Governor Nothin in 1944, anti-homosexual surveillance was to be carried out in the open and “in such a manner that a crime is not committed.” Furthermore, the three detectives in the homo-sex commission primarily worked with investigations pertaining to criminal homosexuality, which meant that they didn’t engage in routine surveillance. Instead, routine surveillance was carried out by the public order police, within a broader policing of deviants and undesirables. In this context, the public order police were instructed to police individuals lingering in known cruising grounds. This instruction was primarily aimed at so-called criminal homosexuals, but men looking for sexual contacts with other men in general were also policed.

Thus, uniformed policemen regularly stopped men suspected of seeking sex with other men in the urban space. However, this seems to have been a somewhat haphazard and contingent practice dependent on the judgment of the individual policeman. The instruction to the public order police regarding who should be reported did not specify that suspected homosexuals were of particular interest. Furthermore, the instruction stated that minors under the age of 15 who could be suspected of prostitution should be registered. These men were identified and registered in short reports, which consisted of personal data, as well as a short description of what had led to the policing and a designation of “homosexual.”
According to the instruction, the homo-sex commission kept a central register of men who had been convicted or suspected of criminal homosexuality. It was primarily compiled by the investigative work performed by the commission and was described as the “homophile filing cabinet”. The vice section also had a separate register where tips regarding suspected “homophiles” were kept. This separate register was primarily filled with information arriving via the central surveillance register where all daily reports produced in the districts were gathered. If a report was marked with “homosexual”, the clerks at the central register made a copy and passed it on to the separate register of homosexuals. The separate register was also filled with tips from the public and as a by-product of other investigations. In addition to the register, many suspects of criminal homosexuality were photographed with the stated intention to use these pictures in investigations. The reasoning was that while many sexual encounters were anonymous, suspects could be identified by photographs. In total, 629 pictures were taken between 1943 and 1964. During the first years of the 1960s, the number of cases declined. Especially the number of cases leading to a suspect being placed in custody by a court was said to be in decline due to “a more lenient view of homo-sex crimes”. The register, however, continued to exist well into the 1960s. In 1964, an overhaul of the files and registers that should be kept at the detective branch included the register of “certain homosexual men”, supplemented by a register of “male prostitutes.”

The most immediate effect of the homo-sex commission was the material interventions. The municipal Traffic Office made changes in public restrooms and municipal parks with the aim to individualize the use of restrooms and make both restrooms and parks easier to surveil. However, surveillance doesn’t seem to have played a key role in criminal investigations. After having read all archived cases from 1951 to 1953, I can conclude that surveillance is not stated as the instigating cause for any investigation from these years. On the other hand, photographs were commonly used to identify suspects from 1953 onwards. This is not to argue that the surveillance wasn’t a productive practice, but that the surveillance and registration primarily functioned as acts of regulation, both of the individual and of the urban space. Visible surveillance signal that the police see what is going on and are vigilant of potential disruptive sexual behaviours. Especially when policing is justified by explicit statements on the need to regulate homosexuals in certain urban places. Furthermore, the register was probably well-known by homosexual men since it was explicitly referenced by the press. So even if surveillance only led to registration, this in and of itself was a regulatory technique that sought to disrupt cruising. However, this was not accomplished through punitive measures aimed at the individual, but rather through a rule at a distance introducing friction and uncertainties into the use of urban places.

Conclusions

Knowledge is necessary to govern the city, and specific places within the city became a central nexus in terms of gathering knowledge on a homosexual subpopulation as well as an important vector for regulatory interventions carried out in order to make use of some locations less appealing. While some of the techniques analysed were clearly disciplinary and targeted individuals, they also fit into a larger scale of governmentality where the aim was to regulate the group of “homosexuals” rather than discipline individual homosexuals. Indeed, the recurring interactions between police and men who were interpellated as homosexuals functioned as a managerial way of implementing criminal law that also produced the subject that was policed. Following Steven Maynard, I would also argue that the interrogation room became a local nexus of power-knowledge where men suspected of criminal homosexuality met a police discourse on homosexuality grounded in a modern sexological understanding of (homo)sexuality as constitutive and called upon to confess their own position on a Kinsey-scale.

Regarding a Nordic context, Peter Edelberg has convincingly shown how anti-homosexual policing, surveillance and legal repercussions functioned as a disciplining of a homosexual subculture in Copenhagen during the 1950s and 1960s. Edelberg argues that it stands to reason that the disciplinary effects were more widespread than the immediate effects of individual encounters, not in the least since
the policing was made widely known through newspapers. Lastly Edelberg proposes that the modern homosexual subjectivity, as a well-defined sexual minority, presupposes a conception of homosexuality as a constitutive, and generalizable, disposition. This makes the homosexual minority possible as an object of knowledge that could be counted, investigated and analysed.92

My results are in line with what Edelberg has shown regarding Copenhagen. The production of knowledge regarding both individuals and the homosexual population as a whole, as well as interventions at targeted places in the inner city made a constitutive, and generalizable, homosexual subject possible. Based upon this partly new criminological understanding, the homo-sex commission in Stockholm was conceived as a way to steer homosexuals away from certain public places and from rent-boys as objects of desire. By analysing the governance by the homo-sex commission, this article illustrates how urban rule operate through different power-knowledge relations and techniques dependent on specific intersections between governmental institutions, the targeted group and the urban landscape.93 However, it is important to note that this case constituted a way of governing that did not primarily seek to crush the capacity for action of individual homosexuals through punitive measures, or even a disciplining of individuals, but rather represented a series of interventions and regulations seeking to encourage certain ways of (not) acting as homosexual men. To govern is to “cut experience in certain ways, to distribute attractions and repulsions, passions and fears across it, to bring new facets and forces, new intensities and relations into being”, as Rose puts it.94 So while the history of the homo-sex commission beyond doubt is a history of policing, surveillance and oppression, it is also part of a history of the formation of a modern homosexual subject. The police certainly distributed repulsion and strove towards creating friction to such an extent that cruising for rent boys would disappear, but I would argue that this was a productive use of power that also had an effect that channelled male same-sex desire towards practices and subjects left unregulated by the police.95

Notes

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4. Houlbrook, Queer London.
5. Phil Hubbard, Cities and Sexualities (London: Routledge, 2011), 11–29.
6. Wannes Dupont, “The Two-Faced Fifties: Homosexuality and Penal Policy in the International Forensic Community, 1945–1965”, Journal of the History of Sexuality 28, no. 3 (2019); David K. Johnson, The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
7. Gert Hekma, “Queer Amsterdam 1945–2010”, in Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe Since 1945, eds. Matt Cook and Jennifer V. Evans (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Frank Mort, “Mapping Sexual London: The Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution 1954–57”, New Formations: Sexual Geographies 37, no. 1 (1999); Peter Edelberg, “The Long Sexual Revolution: The Police and the New Gay Man”, in Sexual Revolutions, eds. Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
8. Dupont, “Two-Faced Fifties”, 361.
9. See, for example, Jens Rydström, “Sweden 1864–1978: Beasts and beauties”, in Criminally Queer: Homosexuality and Criminal law in Scandinavia, 1842–1999, eds. Jens Rydström and Kati Mustola (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007). There are important exceptions that have written about anti-homosexual policing in Stockholm during the 1950s, albeit in swedish. Cf. Göran Söderström, “”Homofiljakten’ i Stockholm på 1950-talet”, in Sympatiens Hemlighetsfulla Makt: Stockholms Homosexuella 1860–1960, ed.
Göran Söderström (Stockholm: Stockholmia, 1999); Stig-Åke Petersson, Bara Bögförtrycket Blomstrade: Samhällets Åtgärder mot den s.k. Kriminella Homosexualiteten i Stockholm under 1950-talet (Stockholm: Rosa Rummet, 1983).

10. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: Volume 1 an Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990).

11. See, for instance, Houlbrook, Queer London; Rydström, Sinners and Citizens.

12. Michel Foucault, Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 87–123.

13. Foucault, Security, Territory, Population, 12.

14. Foucault, Security, Territory, Population, 66.

15. These analytical categories originate from the field of governmentality studies. Stephen Legg, “Foucault’s Population Geographies: Classifications, Biopolitics and Governmental Spaces”, Population, Space and Place 11, no. 3 (May/June 2005); Stephen Legg, Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi’s Urban Governmentalities (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Mitchell Dean, Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society (London: SAGE Publishing, 2010); Nikolas Rose, Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

16. The commission was a three-man team consisting of one senior criminal detective and two criminal detectives and was part of the vice section of the plainclothes detective branch of the Stockholm city police force.

17. In total, 4,028 individuals were interrogated as suspected of criminal homosexuality in Stockholm between 1943 and 1964 (Attachment 1, case number 1034/1964 (hereafter 1034/1964), Box 1437 (hereafter 1437), Akter i avgjorda mål (hereafter F1), Justitieombudsmannen 1810–1990 (hereafter 01), Riksdagens ombudsmän och revisor 1809 (hereafter 623), The Swedish National Archives (hereafter RA).

18. Houlbrook, Queer London, 5–8; Jennifer V. Evans, “Banhof Boys: Policing Male prostitution in post-nazi Berlin”, Journal of the History of Sexuality 12, no. 4 (2003); Jens Rydström, Sinners and Citizens: Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880–1950 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 18–22.

19. Houlbrook, Queer London, 5–6.

20. Ann Laura Stoler, Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic anxieties and Colonial Common Sense (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

21. Rydström, “Sweden 1864–1978”, 183–187.

22. Arne Nilsson, “Creating Their Own Private and Public: The Male Homosexual Life Space in a Nordic city During High Modernity”, Journal of Homosexuality 35, no. 3–4 (1998). Cf. Laud Humphreys, Teatoom Trade [electronic resource], 105; Houlbrook, Queer London, 167–194.

23. Rydström, “Sweden 1864–1978”, 183–187, 200–207.

24. Arne Nilsson, Såna och Riktiga Karlar: Om Manlig Homosexualitet i Göteborg Decennierna kring Andra Världskriget (Göteborg: Anamnia, 1998), 206–227; Rydström, “Sweden 1864–1978”, 200–207; Jens Rydström and David Tjeder, Kvinnor, Män och Alla Andra: En Svensk Genushistoria (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2021), 216–219; Göran Söderström, “Homosexuella i Vardagslivet”, in Sympatiens Hemlighetfulla Makt: Stockholms Homosexuala 1860–1960, ed. Göran Söderström (Stockholm: Stockholmia, 1999).

25. Birger Sjöden, “Den homosexuella prostitutionen”, Dagens nyheter (hereafter DN), 8 March 1950, 6.

26. Johan Hagander served as Governor 1949–1963.

27. Excerpts from the protocol, 4 July 1950, Box 1456, Handlingar till huvuddiariet (hereafter E2), Kommunstyrelsen Stadskansliet 1920–2000 (hereafter 0566B), Stockholm City Archive (hereafter SSA); Excerpt from the protocol, 22 June 1950, Box 106, Handlingar till polismästarens diariet (hereafter F2A), Stockholms polisinspektors expedient (hereafter 0067B), SSA; Letter to the police commissioner, 22 June 1950, Box 107, F2A, 0067B, SSA; Memorandum by Hj. Mehr, 22 November 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.

28. Memorandum by Hj. Mehr, 22 November 1950, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.

29. Memorandum by Hj. Mehr, 22 November 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.

30. Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘advanced’ liberal democracies”, in Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism,Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government, eds. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 44.

31. Rose, “Governing ‘advanced’ liberal democracies”, 44–45.

32. Dean, Governmentality, 32–33, 42–43; Stefan Vogler, Sorting Sexualities: Expertise and the Politics of Legal Classification (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021) 10–12, 196–199.

33. Cf. Anna Lvovsky, Vice Patrol: Cops, Courts, and the Struggle over Urban Gay Life Before Stonewall (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2021); Lvovsky, “Cruising in Plain View”.

34. Memorandum by director Otto Wangson, 6 September 1950, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.

35. Letter to the police commissioner, 5 August 1950, vol. B:IIIb 1950, Detective branch (hereafter Krim.), Archive of the Stockholm Police Authority (hereafter PSA); Memorandum to detective chief inspector Larsson, 17 July 1951, vol. B:IIIb 1951, Krim., PSA.

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37. Memorandum to detective chief inspector Larsson, 17 July 1951, vol. B:III:b 1951, Krim., PSA.
38. Memorandum to the police commissioner, 16 March 1953, vol. B:III:b 1953, Krim., PSA.
39. Memorandum to the detective chief superintendent, 4 November 1964, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
40. Cf. Lovevsky, "Cruising in Plain View".
41. Memorandum to detective chief inspector Larsson, 17 July 1951, vol. B:III:b 1951, Krim., PSA.
42. Letter to the police commissioner, 30 June 1961, vol. B:III:b 1961, Krim., PSA.
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44. Rose, Powers of Freedom, 34–37.
45. Joyce, Rule of Freedom, 35–56; James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (New Haven: Yale University Press), 53–63.
46. Leslie Moran and Derek McGhee, "Perverting London: The cartographic practices of law", Law & Critique 9 (1998); Mort, "Mapping Sexual London".
47. Excerpt from the protocol, 22 June 1950, Box 106, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
48. See Table One.
49. Excerpt from the protocol, 27 January 1954, Box 156, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
50. Excerpt from the protocol, 5 December 1950, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA; Memorandum, 22 November 1950, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.
51. Memorandum to the police commissioner, 5 August 1950, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
52. Memorandum by HJ Mehr, 22 November 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA; Memorandum, 15 June 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.
53. Letter to the police commissioner, 4 April 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA; Letter to the police commissioner, 20 July 1950, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
54. Memorandum with a proposition of regulation regarding the register of certain homosexuals within the detective branch, 21 March 1951, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA; Letter to the police commissioner, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
55. Excerpt from the protocol, 29 September 1951, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
56. Excerpt from the protocol, 14 November 1951, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
57. Memorandum to the detective chief superintendent, 29 July 1950, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA; Proposed order, 4 September 1950, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
58. Memorandum to the, 29 July 1950, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA; Proposed order, 4 September 1950, Box 108, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
59. Report, 5 July 1950, Box 107, F2A, 0067B, SSA; File appendix 13, 15 February 1949, vol. B:III:b 1949, Krim., PSA.
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62. Memorandum from assessor Hawor, 5 September 1950, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA; Memorandum, 15 November 1950, Box 107, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
63. List of cafes where notable conditions have been observed, 21 June 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.
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73. Memorandum, 15 November 1950, Box 107, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
74. Memorandum, 22 November 1950, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA; Memorandum, 15 June 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA; Letter from the police board, 26 June 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA; Excerpt from protocol of the municipal finance board, 18 September 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA; Memorandum by Hj. Mehr, 22 November 1951, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.
75. Torsten Nothin served as Governor 1933–1949.
76. Letter to the police commissioner, 20 March 1944, Box 56, F2A, 0067B, SSA.
77. Letter to the police commissioner, 8 December 1964, vol. B:III:b 1964, Krim., PSA; Memorandum by detective chief inspector Larsson, 30 August 1950, Box 1456, E2, 0566B, SSA.
78. Attachment 1, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA; Letter to the police commissioner from the superintendent of the public order police, 25 November 1964, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
79. Cf. Söderström, “Homosexuella i Vardagslivet”, 504–506; Jerome H. Skolnick, Justice Without Trial: Law Enforcement in Democratic Society (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), 215–219.
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81. Attachment 1, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA; Letter to the police commissioner from the superintendent of the public order police, 25 November 1964, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
82. Complaint, 6 September 1964, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA; Attachment 1, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
83. Complaint, 6 September 1964, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA; Letter to the police commissioner from the superintendent of the public order police, 25 November 1964, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
84. Complaint, 6 September 1964, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA; Attachment 1, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA; Attachment 4, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
85. Attachment 7, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
86. List of the files and registers that should be kept at the investigative branch 19 January 1965, 1965, vol. B:III:b 1965, Krim., PSA; Decision, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
87. Complaint, 6 September 1964, 1034/1964, 1437, F1, 01, 623, RA.
88. “Kamp mot pojktotukten”, DN, 6 December 1950, 1, 32; “Polisregister för misstänkt homosexuell”, DN, 15 May 1951, 1, 35.
89. Cf. Wayne A. Logan, Knowledge as Power: Criminal Registration and Community Notification Laws in America (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 136–141.
90. Cf. Issa Kohler-Hausmann, Misdemeanorland: Criminal Courts and Social Control in an Age of Broken Window Policing (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 256–268.
91. Cf. Steven Maynard, “Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery, Toronto, 1890–1930, Journal of the History of Sexuality 5, no. 2 (Oct. 1994), 239–242.
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93. Cf. Legg, Spaces of Colonialism, 2–19.
94. Rose, Powers of Freedom, 31.
95. Cf. Edelberg, Storbyen Trækker, 232–239; Lvovsky, “Cruising in Plain View”, 994.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding
This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council [grant no. 2018-01161].

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