



**STATENS ARKIVER**

**RIGSARKIVET**

# **New Fields of Knowledge - Old Ideas**

## **The Introduction of Electronic Registration in Central Government Administration 1960 - 1992**

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### Old Ideas

Before the 1970's registers were primarily used for individual reference, for which purpose paper registers are quite adequate. From the 1920's onwards, there was demand in some sectors for centralised registers, but there were only a few public authorities who dared to establish extensive new paper registers. The registers taken at regional level were used instead.

Only parliament had the right to insist that a public authority must establish an electronic register. As early as 1962 there was a discussion - without result - whether all the suitable registration tasks could be transferred to a computer system despite resistance from the authorities involved. It never happened. The initiative to establish new computer systems was left to individual authorities who each had a vested interest in strengthening their own position.

Electronic registers were most often a continuation of older paper registers. The same authorities registered the same phenomena/ information as previous.





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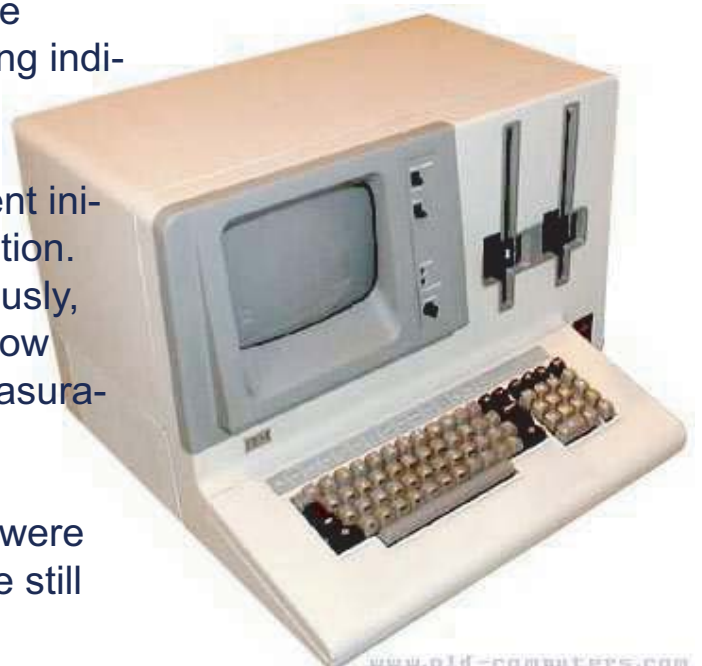
## Registers and Administrative Policy

The first electronic registers were meant to rationalise the collection and availability of information. They also improved the possibilities of collecting statistics.

In the 1970's, centralised social planning became an important subject for central administration. Advanced statistics and prognoses were pre-requisites for such planning. During the 1970's local government took over responsibility for a new range of tasks which led to an increase in cooperation between local authorities. From 1979 onwards law regulated the use of electronic registers. This prevented the misuse of personal information concerning individuals.

Since the 1980's New Public Management initiatives have moulded electronic registration. The processes and results, which previously, had been seen as immeasurable were now better defined and were being made measurable.

At the same time as electronic registers were adapting to their new functions they were still being used for individual references.





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## **New Fields of Knowledge Dynamic Information**

Information written in paper registers is stationary. It is very difficult to calculate or to make statistics or to share the information with other authorities. Electronic information is dynamic. It's possible to make new samples and combinations of information and this in turn can be used to make new calculations.

The new electronic registers are perfect information-channels because data can be gleaned from many localities and brought together.

The pre-arranged and standardised nature of information in electronic registers contrasts with the more individual answers gleaned from a paper register. The fixed answers give less room for variation and perhaps, therefore, less precision. They have however, made it possible to create statistics and to calculate more readily.

New terms of phrase are used in the conversion of "soft data" into "hard data" when there is a subjective appraisal of processes or phenomena. These new phrases are constructed not only with the use of electronic media in mind but also with the administrative use of the information. It must be possible for all archive-users to deconstruct these terms of phrase.





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## Change and Continuity

**Continuity:** The electronic registers contain data concerning the same subjects as their paper-based predecessors and are often compiled by the same authorities.

**Change:** The electronic registers have made co-operation between public institutions concerning the compilation and use of electronic registers a necessity. The new technology has made it possible for authorities to collaborate and share information using several registers at once.

**Change:** Electronic registers enabled authorities to create new fields of knowledge by:

- Information concerning a greater number and also new societal relations.
- A new phraseology to describe the individuals in a register in new ways.
- The ongoing processing of information as the basis for statistics, prognoses and the calculation of results.

With electronic registers it is possible to generate new knowledge of a scope and at speeds previously unknown. The registers however, have been developed against a background of registrational tradition and existing needs.





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## Old Registers - New Goals

### Student registration at Copenhagen University

The story of student registration at Copenhagen University is as old as the university itself.

In 1941 paper registers and a filing system replaced the old protocol books. It gave the university easier access to information concerning the students. However more ambitious plans concerning the registration of the student's behaviour and the development of statistics failed.

The establishment of an electronic register in 1964 was not the university's own initiative rather that of the Ministry of Education who wanted more reliable statistics relating to students.

1938



1970



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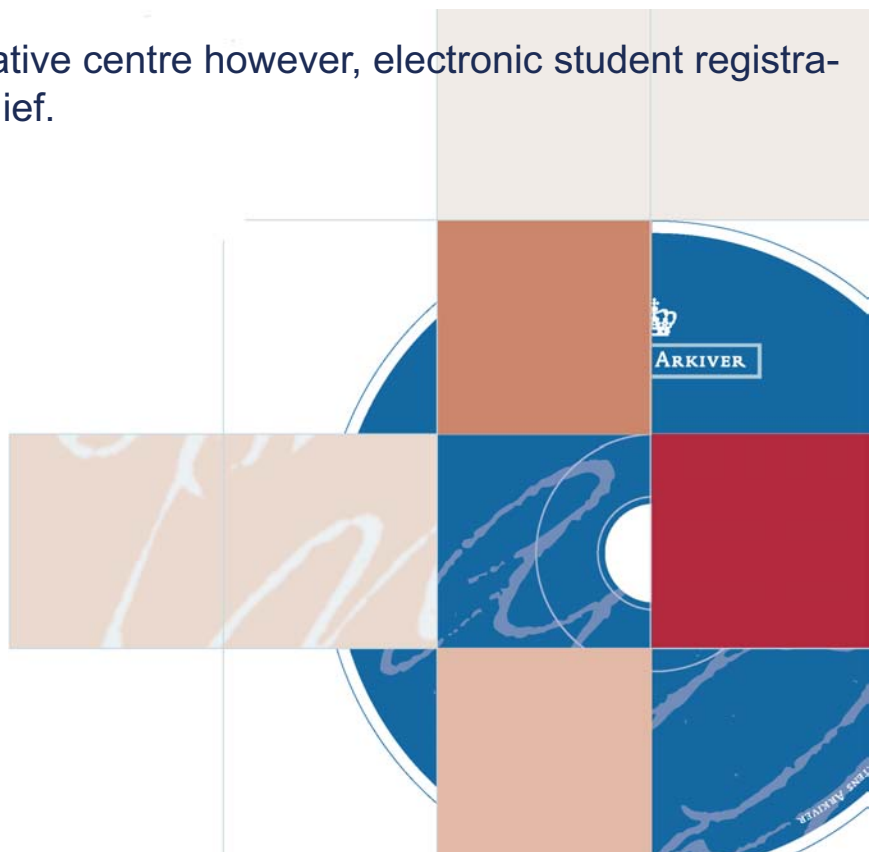
In the 1970's a new system with new administrative goals was planned. By registering which examinations students took and when they took them the Ministry was able to build up a result-orientated basis for the distribution of funds to the university.

The new system was criticised by the Students Union and by the university faculties who refused to contemplate a centralisation of control over further education.

To measure the performance of students, the complex learning process was divided up into intervals and results that could be entered into the register. "Soft" data became "hard" data.

There was conflict between the ministry, who wanted a measurable student-career and the university's lecturers and students who maintained that academic freedom is one of the university's most important characteristics.

At the university's administrative centre however, electronic student registration meant administrative relief.





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## **Aliens Register**

### **Registration of unnaturalised foreign residents**

The archives of foreign resident administration with resident-files from 1926 and after are amongst the most extensive archives in the Danish State Administration. As a large number of the files are active for a generation, the older parts of the archives remain in use in foreign resident administration.

The archive is huge (well over 1.000.000 files) however the individual cases are registered using a simple numbering system. It would have seemed natural to have established an electronic register for foreign residents in the 60's or 70's but it was first in 1993 that such a system was introduced.

Until 1993 Aliens Register had an adequate manual registration system. Due to its size, it had become rather cumbersome to work with. However, it had fulfilled the needs of foreign resident administration and the Ministry of Justice saw no reasons for changing it.

With the establishment of the Employment Ministry's register over guest workers in 1971, it was suggested that this register could function in a wider capacity as a register of foreign residents but the Ministry of Justice showed no interest in the idea.

It was only in 1983, when the Danish Parliament passed a new law concerning foreign residents and undertook a reorganisation of the residential-administration, that the Ministry of Justice became interested in the establishment of a foreign resident registry. The ministry's interest was not least sparked by the fact that it was becoming impossible to maintain the vast archive of residency-files, their keys and the administrative paperwork in the same building.



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Due to economic issues, an electronic registration system - for the registration of asylum-seekers - was established to run concurrently with the manual register. In 1990 work was resumed on the development of the final foreign resident register which was completed on schedule in 1993.

The core information contained in the new register is little different from those found in its predecessor which it replaced in 1993. However, the Aliens Register was a completely different system with a much wider purpose with direct access to all authorities concerned with foreign residents.

Therefore the Aliens Register became a data bank which could deliver information for regular and ad-hoc purposes including new and more advanced statistics.

Nowadays there is a plan to create a portal to Aliens Register as a service to local government agencies so that the register can fulfil a service for local government agencies.

