

Register-based knowledge production and troublesome administrative/statistical categories

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Outline of the presentation

- The Finnish register-based knowledge production system
- Features (and limitations) of register-based knowledge production
- Power of administrative & statistical categories
- Two examples
 - "Foreign-language speaker"
 - "Foreign background"
- Notion of double identification

Register-based knowledge production regime and a very brief history of it

- Register-based statistical system means that most official statistics are derived from **administrative registers**
- Registers can be **linked using personal identity numbers (PINs)**
- The Nordic countries were pioneers in developing and implementing computerised population registers, PINs and register-based modes of knowledge production
- In Finland, register-based system started to shape in the early 1960s along with the institutionalisation of welfare state
 - E.g., the first version of personal identity number was developed to implement the employee pension act
- Currently registers are used all over public administration, e.g., centralised population register = a basic infrastructure of the state
- Since the early 1970s registers have been used widely in knowledge production– from statistics and governmental reports to research
 - Since 1990 population statistics have been produced solely on register data In Finland

Factors Influencing Register Data

1. Registers serve administrative needs

- Registers contain only the information that is necessary for public administration to perform its duties
- They reflect “an epistemology of a bureaucrat”

2. Type of register

- **Administrative registers**

Maintained and used primarily for service delivery and legal obligations

- **Statistical & research registers**

Maintained and used for analysis, monitoring, and (academic) research

Factors Influencing Register Data

3. Data entry method

- Authorities can enter data real-time
- Retrospective data collection by authorities

4. Missing information

- Despite the myth of no missing data (cf. survey data)
- May contain missing or incomplete data

5. Time span/reference period

- Varies by register type and update frequency
- It is good to remember that also changes e.g., in legislation, (local) administrative practices and information systems can cause changes in register data and furthermore knowledge-based on it

Types of register use in knowledge production

- **Pure register-based statistics and research**, where data may originate either from a single register or be combined from multiple registers
- **As a sampling frame** for surveys (most often the population register)
- **Register data can be combined with other sources**, such as survey data collection, in statistics and research

Features of register-based knowledge production

- Registers are often considered reliable (“real-world data”)
 - the Nordic register data reserves have been called metaphorically new “oil” or “gold” (esp. health data)
 - Registers are based on **administrative categories**
 - Maintained by public administration for operational purposes
 - Serve both at individual-level and population-level governance
 - These administrative categories easily travel to statistics and other forms of register-based knowledge, but statistical categories do not always the same
- It is important to look how statistical offices and other register data users process data (metadata!)
- It is important to remember that registers and register-based knowledge **do not contain:**
 - People's **opinions**
 - **Subjective views**
 - **Experiences**
- Unlike surveys, even structured ones

Power of administrative and statistical categories

- **Administrative categories**—such as citizenship, income level, language or type of residence permit and **statistical categories**—such as gender, language, age, income level, or level of education are...
- ... far from being technical or neutral → they are **tools of governance, resource distribution, control, representation and social ordering**
- Their power lies in **how they shape access to rights, services, and recognition**, and how they reflect and reinforce political and institutional priorities

Power of administrative and statistical categories

- They are also **symbolic constructs** that shape social reality
- Categories always make their objects seemingly commensurate and comparable
- However, because language is always necessarily categorizing, it is not possible to get rid of categories
- Therefore, it is important to be sensitive to what categories do and to look at their **social, political, and ethical implications**

Population register and statistics

- ” In Finland, if you're not listed in the population register, it's as if you don't exist”
 - An administrative register used widely throughout public administration and also in business life (banks, insurance companies, mobile phone operator etc.)
 - Population register is crucial for the statistics compilation as Finland is among the few countries with the register-based statistical system
- Therefore, the entries made into this register have consequences both on
- 1) people's everyday lives and
 - 2) how and if at all they are represented by population statistics and research

Proxies for non-native Finns: Example 1

- The category of "foreign-language speaker" refers to persons who speak foreign language
 - Persons, whose mother tongue is not Finnish, Swedish or Sami are regarded as **foreign-language speakers**
 - For historical administrative reasons **only one language can be entered in the population register** (for foreign-born persons it is entered when their register after moving in Finland, for others it is registered when a child's name is registered)
 - **Either-or –logic of the register conceals cultural diversity and people's ability to operate in multiple languages**
 - Consequently, also population statistics hide bi- or multilingual persons
 - Also, media have adopted the category of foreign-language speaker (e.g. to describe un/employment, urban areas, election candidates)

Proxies for non-native Finns: Example 2

- The category of “a person with foreign background”
 - ...was introduced in Finland in 2012 following the example set by other Nordic countries to capture what is called “the second-generation immigration”
 - **“Persons whose both parents or the only known parent have been born abroad are considered to be persons with foreign background.** Persons who have been born abroad and whose parents' data are not included in the Population Information System are also considered to be persons with foreign background.” (Definition, Statistics Finland)
- A category of “a Finnish origin”
 - **“All persons who have at least one parent who was born in Finland are considered to be persons with Finnish background”** (Definition, Statistics Finland)

The concept of "double identification"

- The concept of "double identification" (Ruppert 2007) refers to the dual process through which census categories are created and legitimized.
- It involves two interconnected forms of identification
- **1) The state identifies** individuals by categorizing them into predefined classifications (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) → This process objectifies individuals, transforming them into statistical entities that collectively form "population."
- The state uses these categories to govern, regulate, and analyze the population
- **2) Individuals identify** themselves with the census categories → This process subjectifies individuals, enabling them to see themselves as part of a larger social entity. It requires individuals to engage with and reflect upon their identities in relation to the categories provided by the census

Difference between census-based and register-based population statistics systems

- Ruppert developed the idea of double identification in the context of Canadian census
- Census means a methods of population count where individuals actually see the census form (the questionnaire) and answer themselves (or choose their answer from given options/category) → in census-based countries like the United States, certain census categories (e.g. race and ethnicity) have been disputed, because people don't identify themselves with the given categories
- **In register-based system, the used categories are not similarly visible to people**
- Does this invisibility of categories change the process of double identification and how? Does it make statistical categories more difficult to be contested and changed?

A code for care and control: The PIN as an operator of interoperability in the Nordic welfare state

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Abstract

Many states make use of personal identity numbers (PINs) to govern territory and jurisdiction, but only a few rely on an all-purpose

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Enacting the border multiple in the post-welfare state: Registration of foreign-born persons in Finland

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Making and Unmaking
Migrants' Family
Relationships in
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