Archives as Builders of Civic Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

Archives and archivists can participate in rekindling civic engagement from many venues. The implementation of a modern civil registration service is at the heart of providing better archival public services. The modernisation of civil registration system in Turkey culminated in 2000 with the introduction of the Central Civil Registration System or MERNIS, as is known by its abbreviations in Turkish, set up after long and arduous work. This paper describes the process of establishing, extending, and improving MERNIS services through national and international cooperation and collaboration. The focus of this paper provides examples of using archives by the public agencies accessing MERNIS are as follows: Economic and financial; planning and investment; security; military service; health services; education; social security; electoral registers; justice. As a result, it was found out that access to central civil registration system and archival databases to citizens eager to find and use vital services within their communities.

Key words: civil registration service, Turkey, archival databases

Gli archivi come costruttori di accordi civili

SINTESI

Gli archivi possono partecipare ad alimentare l'impegno civile in molti modi. La realizzazione di un moderno servizio di registro civile è il cuore del fornire servizi archivistici pubblici. La modernizzazione del Sistema di registro civile in Turchia è culminata nel 2000 con l'introduzione del Sistema di registro civile centrale, o MERNIS, come conosciuto nell'acronimo turco, messo in piedi dopo un lungo e duro lavoro. Il presente articolo descrive il processo di formazione, ampliamento e miglioramento dei servizi di MERNIS attraverso una cooperazione ed una collaborazione nazionale ed internazionale. L'articolo fornisce esempi dell'utilizzo degli archivi da parte di agenzie pubbliche conei settori economico e finanziario, nella pianificazione ed investimento, sicurezza, servizio militare, servizi sanitari, istruzione, sicurezza sociale, registri elettorali e giustizia. Come risultato, si è scoperto che l'acccesso al servizio centrale di registro civile ed ai database archivistici da parte dei cittadini ha riscosso l'entusiasmo di questi nella ricerca ed utilizzo di servizi vitali all'interno delle comunità.

Parole chiave: servizio di registro civile, Turchia, database archivistici

Arhivi kot gradniki civilnih partnerstev

IZVLEČEK

Arhivi in arhivisti lahko na mnogo načinov sodelujejo pri ponovnem oživljanju državljanskega udejstvovanja. Izvajanje sodobne storitve registra prebivalstva je v središču zagotavljanja boljše arhivske javne službe. Modernizacija sistema registra prebivalstva je v Turčiji dosegla vrhunec leta 2000 z uvedbo Centralnega registra prebivalstva (MERNIS), ki je bil rezultat dolgega in napornega dela. Prispevek opisuje proces vzpostavljanja, razširitve in izboljšanja MERNIS storitev s pomočjo nacionalnega in mednarodnega sodelovanja. V prispevku so navedeni posamezni primeri uporabe arhivskega gradiva s strani javnih organov, ki dostopajo do MERNISA in sicer ekonomskih in finančnih, načrtovanje in naložbe; varnostnih; vojaških služb; zdravstvenih in izobraževalnih služb; socialno varnost; volilne evidence; sodstvo. Rezultat je ugotovitev, da je dostop do centralnega registra prebivalstva in arhivskih podatkovnih zbirk vzpodbuda za državljane, da bi našli in uporabljali osnovne storitve v svojih skupnostih.

Ključne besede: register prebivalstva, Turčija, arhivske podatkovne zbirke

Toplumsal Kayıtların Tutulmasında Arşivler

ÖZET

Arşivlerin ve arşivcilerin birçok ortamlarda toplumsal sorumlulukları artmaktadır. Modern nüfus kayıt sistemlerinin uygulanması arşivlerde başarılı kamu hizmetleri verilmesini sağlamaktadır. Merkezi Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi veya Türkçe kısaltmasıyla MERNİS 2000 yılında uzun ve zorlu çalışmalar sonucunda kurulmuştur. Bu makale, ulusal olduğu kadar uluslararası işbirliği ve dayanışma yoluyla MERNİS hizmetlerinin kurulması, geliştirilmesi ve geleceği hakkında bilgiler vermektedir. Bu çalışmanın odak noktası MERNİS yardımıyla erişilen ve kamu kurumlarında arşivlenen ekonomi ve maliye; planlama ve yatırım; güvenlik; askerlik hizmetleri; sağlık hizmetleri; eğitim; sosyal güvenlik; seçim kayıtları; adalet hizmetleri ve benzeri alanlarda arşivlerin etkin kullanımına yönelik verilen hizmetleri ortaya çıkarmaktır. Sonuç olarak, merkezi nüfus kayıt sistemine ve arşiv veri tabanlarına erişim yardımıyla vatandaşların kendilerine ait hayati hizmetleri bulma ve kullanma konularında nasıl bilinçlendikleri gösterilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Merkezi nüfus kayıt sistemi, Türkiye, Arşiv veri tabanları

1 Introduction

Civil registration plays a vital role in modern society. It underpins the civil status of each person giving them protection as well as protecting society as a whole. Government authorities will be responsible for recording of all life events - births, stillbirths, adoptions, marriages and deaths. Many life events are registered, and certificates are produced. The service was a manual and labour intensive paper based system. But, the implementation of a modern civil registration service is at the heart of providing better public services. However, the use and application of information and communication technology can improve the manual registration system.

When archives provide civic and government information to the community, they build social capital and encourage civic involvement. Archives can forge civic partnerships with other organizations and individuals that extend their reach and help them achieve their mission. Thanks to new technologies, people can make a request under the Data Protection Act to any organisation processing personal data. Access to archival databases to citizens eager to find and use vital services within their communities. Archives and archivists can participate in rekindling civic engagement from many venues.

The modernisation of civil registration system in Turkey culminated in 2000 with the introduction of the Central Civil Registration System or MERNIS, as is known by its abbreviations in Turkish, set up after long and arduous work. MERNIS contribute to social transformation from three different aspects: civil registration offices, the citizen, and public agencies. This paper describes the process of establishing, extending, and improving MERNIS services through international and national cooperation and collaboration. The focus of this paper provides examples of using archives by the public agencies accessing MERNIS are as follows: Economic and financial; planning and investment; security; military service; health services; education; social security; electoral registers; justice. Recognizing that a robust democracy and the public welfare depend on an engaged and informed citizenry, archives are now willing and eager to strengthen both the study and practice of civic engagement in a diverse democracy and independent world.

2 Civil registration system

Civic registration system initiatives underway offer perfect opportunities for archives to fulfil their traditional roles of accessing right, provisioning documents that support human life capacities (e.g., driving license, passport, voter lists, and personnel cards), promoting civic literacy and ensuring an informed citizenry. It is very important to know the number of people in a country in planning policy in social sector and other programmes. Several characteristics of civil registration have been detailed in this study, and these are imperative for it to be considered well-functioning.

Civil registration must be (*UNICEF, 2013*):

- Compulsory;
- Within a national authority or, if not, there is a mechanism to ensure national coordination;
- Free - without charge, whether for regular or late registration. It is recommended that the copy of the registration, otherwise known as the birth certificate, should also be free of charge;
- Available primarily purposes such as birth, marriage and death certificates;
- Continuous, permanent and available - the civil registration records must be kept forever. This also requires that the records need to be retrievable, easily accessible anywhere in the country;
- Universal in coverage - all people who are born in the country must be able to be registered without prejudice;
- Confidential - access to the information in the registry must be strictly controlled, and highly sensitive;
- Timely, complete and accurate - the information has implications for other obligations and rights for the individual.

It is possible to view the national indexes to civil registration in countries online or on microfiche. The General Register Office website maintains a list of those record offices, archives and libraries that have copies of the civil registrations.

3 The role of archives in promoting partnerships and using civil registration system

Public institutions can make a difference when they help citizens understand different issues and find effective ways to act on public problems. Archives are among the most trusted public institutions. In recent years, the civil registration system has been used as an important research tool. The framework has 12 components as scope namely:

1. National legal framework for civil registration;
2. Registration practices, coverage, and completeness;
3. Forms and data quality;
4. Determination of the quality of archive materials and archive documents;
5. Quality improvement of the service provision;
6. The detection and evaluation of archive materials;
7. Data storage, tabulation, access and dissemination;
8. The detection and evaluation of archive materials;
9. After the evaluation process, protect, and take measures necessary for the preservation;
10. The use of modern equipment;
11. Ready to keep control the activities of the archive;
12. To be given other tasks to do.

Civil registration system registers usually has only one access point, the registration number, and this makes them easy to use, as there is usually accessing by subject. In these cases, civil registers are used in conjunction with archives to provide additional purposes.

4 Overview of civil registration and archival system of Turkey

Civil registration services carried out in Turkey has long historical background starting from Ottoman Empire. Since the foundation of Ottoman Empire, in order to collect taxes and recruit solders, various records had been kept periodically. Modern population services in Ottoman Empire started after 1831 census and with the foundation of Census Department (Ceride-i Nufus Nezareti) under the Ministry of Interior and Census State units (Defter Nezareti) in other states. After the first general census in 1831, population records had been updated by 1844, 1852, 1856, 1866, 1881/82 and 1905 regional or general censuses. The civil registration system which has been formed according to the various needs had gone through several stages. Ottoman civil registration system is divided into

three distinct periods as „Classic Census Registrations Period“; „Special Purpose Civil Registration Period“ and „General Purpose Civil Registration Period“. The change in civil registration system has shown parallelism with the development of civil registration organization. At the beginning the Census Department which performed civil registration services turned into Directorate of Public Population in 1884. In 1889, this unit became General Directorate of Public Civil Registration. In 1914, it was reorganized and renamed as General Directorate of Civil Registration. The records that created with 1905 General Population writing and renewed population registration law (Sicil-i Nüfus Nizamnamesi) in 1914 became the basis of population services in Turkish Republic era (*Çimen, 2012*).

Image 1: Population Registries

Proclamation of the Republic of Turkish in 1923, however, brought significant changes to the way civil registries are maintained. In 1928, following the acceptance of the Latin alphabet, Arabic letters and numbers were abandoned in the maintenance of the registries. In 1934, last names were granted to each family and individual, abolishing the practice of appellations. It was not until 1972, however, when the introduction of Law No 1543 and its successor Law No 1587 paved the way for the modernisation of the civil registration system in Turkey. The amendments made to the abrogated Law No 1587 envisaged that „*The Ministry of Interior shall be empowered to ensure the transfer of family registries to registries kept in electronic form and to facilitate carrying out civil registration acts using these registries, to provide measures ensuring the security and privacy of the registries kept in electronic form, to repel the civil registries kept in paper form, to determine the civil registration offices empowered with issuing, registration and safekeeping of reference documents, to decide on the use of electronic signature in all kinds of civil registration acts carried out in electronic form, and to meet the requests for information from the records kept centrally in electronic form by the public institutions and the work flow in the headquarters and*

the districts in the scope of the principles and procedures to be determined within the completeness of civil registration services." The Law also dictated that the civil registries, comprised of family registries, special registries and microfilms maintained in paper or electronic form are official documents maintained in paper or electronic form on a district and family basis which include information used to determine the rights and obligations of persons, their identity, family relations, nationality and civil status. Civil registries are official documents which have to be kept indefinitely.

Currently, the main legislation covering all aspects of civil registration is the Civil Registration Services Law No 5490, dated 29.04.2006. The modernisation of civil registration system in Turkey culminated in 2000 with the introduction of the Central Civil Registration System or MERNIS, as is known by its abbreviations in Turkish, set up after long and arduous work. MERNIS is a centrally administered system where any changes in civil status are registered electronically in real time over a secure network by the 966 civil registration offices spread throughout the country. The information kept in the central database is shared with the public and private agencies for administrative purposes. The aim of the system is to ensure the up-to-datedness and secure sharing of personal information and therefore increase the speed and efficiency of the public services provided to the citizens. MERNIS has become the backbone of the e-Government infrastructure in Turkey (*Eroğlu, 2006*). Currently, the MERNIS database houses more than 130 million personal data files and (as of January 2009) more than 2000 public bodies are using the up-to-date data from the MERNIS database. The services provided by MERNIS are as follows:

- Modernisation of civil registration services by transferring the civil registries into electronic form;
- Assignment of an unique Turkish Republic Identity Number;
- Provision of on-line exchange of personal information using the identity numbers as identifiers;
- Provision of better demographic statistics using information technologies;
- Enabling easy, fast and secure delivery of public services to the users by sharing identity information with public sector institutions and agencies, thus reducing bureaucracy.

5 Joint use: civil registration and archival systems

Joint use is referred to as shared space and co-location. Civil registration and archival systems built to serve two (or more) population bases. There are literally dozens of reasons to partner or collaborate. This partnership is becoming more common and examples include:

- Legislative controls;
- Stronger collaboration with other relevant government agencies and their archives;
- Carried out automatically in electronic form and data inconsistencies are prevented. In addition, all operations are monitored instantly from the headquarters and districts are being warned in cases of incorrect operations;
- With the introduction of the Identity Information Sharing System, agencies would be able to carry out their operations without requesting further documents from the citizen;
- Agencies would be able to quickly and efficiently conclude transactions related to the citizen;
- Economize;
- Tax collections and controls would be carried out more easily and informal economy would be brought under control;
- Banks and notaries would be able to validate the accuracy of persons' records by accessing the civil registration database. In this way, fraudulent and counterfeiting incidents would be prevented;
- Planning and investment: Investing agencies would be able to use data in MERNİS classified according to information such as age groups and number of population and therefore make accurate future planning and investments based on real data.
- Assistance in monitoring entries and exits from the country, monitoring and arresting convicted persons, outlaws and drivers who committed traffic offences endangering the life and property of others;
- Security forces would be able to validate identity information of wanted persons by accessing

records in MERNIS database;
- Military Service: Assistance in drafting conscription lists by ASAL (Department of Military Conscription), since the lists of persons reaching the conscription age could be obtained from MERNIS on time. In addition, since data on male population classified by age groups can be obtained from MERNIS, military personnel needs for the next years can be determined and planned accordingly;
- Health Services: Since patient files would be opened based on the identity number, health records of a person would be possible to maintain as a whole;
- Health policies such as the hospital and health centre needs by region would be planned based on real data from MERNIS;
- Civil registration is a basic requirement for evidenced based policy and planning decisions. All tiers of government would provide all the needed infrastructures and logistics that could help improve civil registration in their jurisdictions.
- Introduction of demographic archive surveillance sites can be generalised for the entire population research;
- Education: Since all kinds of nationwide or regional education statistics would be available instantly, planning and policies related to education would be better determined;
- Provide access to information, records, resources, services, experts;
- Create an information literate community;
- Social security: Since social security agencies will be also accessing the MERNIS database, copies of civil and family status previously requested form the civil registration offices will be provided in electronic form, thereby abolishing the intra-agency correspondence and increasing the speed and efficiency in the provision of services to the citizens. In addition, memberships with multiple social security agencies by the same person or attempts to register with fake identities would be prevented to a great extend;
- Electoral registers: Assistance in the establishment of electoral registers, since the details of persons reaching the age of voting would be instantly available;
- Justice: Identifications during court trials could be made by accessing MERNIS database from the court's computer terminal. In addition, copies of civil and family status requested during inheritance trials would be accessed in the same way, ensuring that the trials are concluded faster;
- Knowledge and experience sharing needs urgent review. The civil registration system connected with archives needs would help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the system in the light of current technological and socio-economic developments. These would be useful for built and developed community.

Image 2: MERNIS

6 Responsible agencies

Archives can benefit from new relationships that provide expertise, financial support, experience, and good public relations. Responsible agencies are:

- General Directorate of Civil Registration and Nationality;
- Turkish Statistical Institute;
- General Directorate of Local Administrations;
- Municipalities - Provincial Special Administrations;
- Organised industrial zones;
- Muhtar offices (village and administrative quarter units);
- Public utilities (such as electric and water supply agencies);
- Representations abroad;
- Managers (apartments, residential complexes and public housing).

7 Conclusion

Developments can be more widely and equitably distributed if policy makers and development planners had guide to establish/improve a civil registration system. Therefore, efforts must be spared in revamping and data security the civil registration in Turkey. As a result, this research has presented a case study about the process of cooperating with a Central Civil Registration System on government archival databases for citizens. In this scope, the system - MERNIS aims to reduce costs and provide faster and more efficient public services, and therefore reduce bureaucratic problems faced by the users of the services. Joint uses of "MERNIS" and archival systems have the power to efficient use of resources, biographical data monitoring from a single centre, prevention of economic losses due to address, efficient and effective provision of public services, ensuring more integrated e-Government infrastructure, and more efficient operation of public audit mechanisms. Archivists, record managers and conservators should be encouraged to make a contribution to the global consideration of professional concerns. Archive services should be aware of such possibilities and actively seek out opportunities for cross-domain co-operation where this can be of benefit.

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SUMMARY

Civil registration plays a vital role in modern society. It underpins the civil status of each person giving them protection as well as protecting society as a whole. Government authorities will be responsible for recording of all life events - births, stillbirths, adoptions, marriages and deaths. Many life events are registered, and certificates are produced. The service was a manual and labour intensive paper based system. But, the implementation of a modern civil registration service is at the heart of providing better public services. However, the use and application of information and communication technology can improve the manual registration system. When archives provide civic and government information to the community, they build social capital and encourage civic involvement. Archives can forge civic partnerships with other organizations and individuals that extend their reach and help them achieve their mission. Thanks to new technologies, people can make a request under the Data Protection Act to any organisation processing personal data. Archives and archivists can participate in rekindling civic engagement from many venues. The modernisation of civil registration system in Turkey culminated in 2000 with the introduction of the Central Civil Registration System or MERNIS, as is known by its abbreviations in Turkish, set up after long and arduous work. MERNIS contribute to social transformation from three different aspects: civil registration offices, the citizen, and public agencies. This paper presents a case study about the process of cooperating with a Central Civil Registration System on government archival databases for citizens. The focus of this paper provides examples of using archives by the public agencies accessing MERNIS are as follows: Economic and financial; planning and investment; security; military service; health services; education; social security; electoral registers; justice. Recognizing that a robust democracy and the public welfare depend on an engaged and informed citizenry, archives are now willing and eager to strengthen both the study and practice of civic engagement in a diverse democracy and independent world. Archivists, record managers and conservators should be encouraged to make a contribution to the global consideration of professional concerns.