



Educating Immigrants – Educating about Immigrants: Suburban Social Housing as a Knowledge Hub for Danish Welfare-State Integration Politics 1970s–1980s

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Abstract • The social housing project *Ishøj-Planen* and the surrounding suburban municipality Ishøj, south of the Danish capital, became from the 1970s a site for *de facto production of policy* about immigrants at a time when central policy was scarce. This included a double knowledge transmission and production process: municipal authorities and housing associations educated immigrants about welfare-state procedures such as school attendance, the tax system, the labour market, and housing rules. Simultaneously, data *about* immigrants were collected, policies and practices from other states were studied, and knowledge-seeking students and scholars were received and facilitated. Based on this case, and combining history of education and knowledge perspectives with frontline theory, the article explores suburban social housing 1970s–1980s as a *hub* for knowledge production on “immigrants” and how to “educate them” to the welfare state and discusses how this possibly fed into establishing problem definitions and policy.

Keywords • educationalisation of immigrants, public curriculum, suburban social housing, educational welfare state, educational integration knowledge

Introduction: context and research questions

Ishøj Municipality, south of the Danish capital Copenhagen, is famous in Denmark. For being “multicultural”, a “ghetto”, and a “parallel society”, or a workshop for discriminatory policies towards immigrants, depending on political viewpoint, and it has been so – in shifting forms – since the mid–1970s. However – and also exactly because of this – Ishøj has been a hub for knowledge about immigrants and how to educate them into the welfare state. It has been the place to visit for students training to the welfare professions such as teachers and pedagogues and for higher education students of psychology and urban planning. Early migration scholars such as Jan Hjernø and Sweden-based Carl-Ulrik Schierup conducted fieldwork, while prominent journalists covered the case of Ishøj – most notably Nils Ufer, whose feature stories in the progressive newspaper *Dagbladet Information* were later published as the book *Set fra Ishøj (Seen from Ishøj)* in 1988.¹ At the same time, the views and publications of these authors were used in Ishøj among the young modernist suburban politicians and administrators invested in documenting and collecting data about their inhabitants with a

1 Jan Hjernø, Torben Lundbæk and Sven Skovmand (ed.), *Fremmedarbejderpolitik – En bog om fremmedarbejderproblematikken* (Copenhagen: Mellempøkeligt Samvirke, 1973); Carl-Ulrik Schierup, *På kulturens slagmark: Mindretal og størretal taler om Danmark* (Esbjerg: Sydjysk Universitetsforlag, 1993); Nils Ufer, *Set fra Ishøj. Reportager* (Copenhagen: Informations Forlag & Mellempøkeligt Samvirke, 1988).

migration history. Sometimes as part of fighting national political battles, sometimes as part of operating local tasks in order to educate – to train, to help, and to discipline – the suburban municipal population, the ones with a transnational migration history in particular. “Ishøj” as location and symbol became a breeding ground for not only future Danish welfare-state integration policy which was about how to receive and educate immigrants to the welfare state, but also for the public curriculum: what was publicly considered to be established knowledge about “immigrants”.

Like other suburbs across Europe, the modern parts of Ishøj were planned and erected during the boom in the construction plans following WW2 that aimed to facilitate the growing migration from the rural areas to the urban areas.² In Denmark, especially from the 1970s, the suburbs became the home for people moving out from old often contaminated and unhealthy working-class areas in the old inner cities, among them the transnational labour immigrants, the so-called guest workers (*gæstearbejdere*, also at the time called *fremmedarbejdere*, foreign workers). For Ishøj Municipality, this was especially the case with the social housing project *Ishøj-Planen*, the Ishøj Plan, today renamed *Vejleåparken*,³ but often just simply called “Planen” (“the Plan”) in daily-life conversations in Ishøj. This social housing area is as famous as the municipality to an extent where it is hard to distinguish between the municipality and its biggest housing area in national public and political debate.

This article focuses on the suburban part of Danish welfare-state history; the suburb and its social housing as a site for welfare education and knowledge production. Based on the case of Ishøj Municipality and the Ishøj Plan, the article explores how social housing in tandem with the municipal governance have been a site for welfare-state knowledge production on “immigrants” and how to receive and educate them to live in the welfare state. On this basis, it will be discussed how such knowledge production has fed into central policies and political battles and possibly influenced the politics of integration in the welfare state.

The article is structured as follows: firstly, I introduce the historical background of the case, including previous research that the article builds on and takes further. Secondly, the theoretical foundation of the study will be elucidated and the source corpus described. On this basis, the analysis will be folded out in four sections focusing on the de facto policy production and knowledge practices that were established in Ishøj in the period under study in the axis between the city hall and the neighbouring social housing project, the Ishøj Plan. The analysis will concentrate on the municipal “Immigrant counselling office”, and its professionals, a municipal unit moved out to “the Plan” during the 1970s and 1980s which served the double purpose of educating and supervising immigrants, while also collecting data and everyday knowledge, facilitating local politicians and visiting students and scholars. The article concludes with a discussion of how “Ishøj” as a location and a symbol can be said to have influenced

2 Arne Gaardmand, *Dansk byplanlægning 1938–1992* (Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag, 1993).

3 Vejleåparken – the Vejleå park – named after a small stream in the area. At present, it is still a topic of discussion in Ishøj when the name change occurred, and this is mirrored in research-based literature. The topographical overview work TRAP, for instance, dates the name change to 2001–2010, when the housing area went through renovation, see *TRAP Danmark Ishøj Kommune* (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2019), 39. However, the name change already figures on the front cover of the tenants’ magazine for Ishøj-Planen/Vejleåparken *Sekskanten* 11, no. 1 (1984).

welfare-state politics with regard to educating and governing immigrants, both in the form of national policy and in the form of publicly accepted assumptions.

State of the art and the background of the case of Ishøj: educational efforts between urban planning and integration politics in the making

Historical scholarship has shown that across the European welfare states, the post-WWII immigrations meant that new policy areas evolved within already established areas of welfare-state politics including education politics.⁴ However, Breidahl, Enemark, and Buchardt have pointed out that in the case of Denmark, such policies largely developed bottom up at the organisational level.⁵ Whereas these scholarly works have dealt with the historical background for how knowledge production and political knowledge battles formed part of labour-market, social, and education policy development concerning immigrants, Øland has pointed out that professionalisation of welfare-state work directed towards immigrants influenced and was itself influenced by welfare-state doxas.⁶ This article builds on and advances further the above-mentioned scholarly work, emphasising the intersections between immigrant and integration policy, urban planning, and educational efforts on the local organisational level, with a focus on how the educational integration knowledge practices deriving from suburban social housing possibly influenced future welfare-state politics based on the case of Ishøj.

The welfare-state historical background of the Ishøj Plan and Ishøj as a modern suburban municipality is grounded in two independent and yet over the years overlapping and interacting welfare-state political projects. Firstly, the post-WWII urban planning, taking off in the late 1940s, and secondly the formation of welfare-state policy dealing with immigration and later on integration of labour migrants and refugees from the onset of the so-called guest worker era, the late 1960s onwards.

The Ishøj Plan was designed and erected from the mid-1960s as part of the big urbanisation plans that characterised the welfare-state formation in Denmark post WWII, foremost the so-called Finger plan or Five-finger Plan that was published

4 Mats Wickström, “The Difference White Ethnics Made. The Multiculturalist Turn of Sweden in Comparison to the Cases of Canada and Denmark,” In *Migration and Welfare States: Policies, Discourses and Institutions*, ed. Heidi Vad Jonsson, Elizabeth Onasch, Saara Pellander and Mats Wickström (Helsinki: Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel, 2013), 25–58; Hans Wallengren, *Socialdemokrater möter invandrare. Arbetarrörelsen, invandrarna och främlingsfientligheten i Landskrona under efterkrigstiden* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014); Christian Ydesen, “Crafting the English Welfare State – Interventions by Birmingham Local Education Authorities, 1948–1963,” *British Education Research Journal* 42, no. 4 (2016), 614–30.

5 Karen N. Breidahl, *Når staten lærer: En historisk og komparativ analyse af statslig policy læring og betydningen heraf for udviklingen i den arbejdsmarkedsrettede del af indvandrerpoltikken i Sverige, Norge og Danmark fra 1970 til 2011* (Aalborg: Aalborg University, 2012); Mette Buchardt, *Kulturforklaring: Uddannelseshistorier om muslimskhed* (Copenhagen: Tiderne Skifter, 2016); Nanna Ramsing Enemark and Mette Buchardt, “Educational Knowledge and Politics of Receiving Migrant Pupils: A Contribution to Danish Welfare State History During the late Twentieth Century,” *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 60, no. 6 (2024), 1027–46.

6 Trine Øland, “The Dynamics of Public Welfare Services for Immigrants and Refugees in the Danish Welfare State,” in *Statecrafting on the Fringes. Studies of Welfare Work Addressing the Other*, ed. Trine Øland et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2019), 165–227; Trine Øland, *Welfare Work with Immigrants and Refugees in a Social Democratic Welfare State* (London & New York: Routledge, 2019).

in 1947. The Finger-Plan was a city regulation principle for the capital area offering a blueprint for how to expand the capital area by changing the agricultural village areas surrounding Copenhagen in five developmental fingers consisting of new cities connected to “the palm” by means of electronic commuter trains and with green leisure areas and a bit of space for remaining agriculture between the fingers. The southern coastline of Køge Bay (*Køge Bugt*) where Ishøj is located, also called Vestegnen, meaning the West Region, made up the thumb.⁷

Cooperative social housing associations connected to the labour movement such as the Workers’ Housing Cooperative, AAB (*Boligforeningen AAB*) became one of the operators of the Ministry for Housing, with regard to building affordable and attractive social housing for the working class and the growing lower middleclass, an area that was considered the least developed in the Danish dominantly Social Democrat-led welfare expansion.⁸ In 1961, the Finger plan was followed up with the so-called Køge Bugt Act (*Køge Bugt Loven*),⁹ and the parish council of Torslunde-Ishøj, at the time headed by the Liberal Party, whose elective base was not least farmers, became a very active partner and player, buying up land from farmers and contracting cooperative social associations such as AAB to construct housing projects.¹⁰

In 1965, the cooperative movement’s construction company Cooperative Construction Industry (*Kooperative Byggeindustri*) started to design and erect the Ishøj Plan, owned and administrated by AAB and of a branch of Danish Housing Company (*Dansk Boligselskab*), called Ishøj Housing Company (*Ishøj Boligselskab*), in close interaction with the parish council. With over 2000 apartments located next to the city mall including a new city hall that was also planned to be erected, the Ishøj Plan was not only a cornerstone in turning a rural parish into a modern municipality, but also a national symbol of welfare-state expansion when the first tenants in 1971 moved in. Torslunde-Ishøj had in the meantime survived the Municipal Reform that in 1970 decreased the number of municipalities, and was now headed by a Social Democrat mayor.

During 1971, renting out the larger apartments, in particular, proved difficult. Economic challenges for housing construction due to an increased interest rate in the loans that were the main source of financing social housing resulted in the rent being so high that many working-class families could not afford it, meanwhile cheap single-family detached houses had become an attractive alternative for the ones that could. Also, the promised commuter train line had not yet reached Ishøj. A solution became renting out to low-income households eligible for housing subsidies and to accommodate so-called guest workers.¹¹

7 *Skitseforslag til egnsplan for Storkøbenhavn* (Copenhagen: Egnsplankontoret, 1947).

8 Jørgen Larsen, *På vejen til bedre boliger. Arbejdernes Andels-Boligforening 1912–1987* (Copenhagen: AAB, 1987).

9 *Lov om planlægning af Køge Bugt-området*, nr. 144 af 17. maj 1961.

10 Erik Mark, “Den økonomiske, tekniske, kulturelle og sociale planlægning i en udviklingskommune. Torslunde-Ishøj kommunes planlægning og udvikling,” *Landinspektøren. Tidsskrift for kortlægning og arealforvaltning* 26, no. 5 (1971), 249–76; Interview with retired head of Ishøj Municipality’s housing and real estate office Flemming Petersen, December 11, 2023.

11 Interview with Ole Olsen, former municipal director in Ishøj, in the 1960s employed as an office clerk for his predecessor, secretary for the parish council Erik Mark, conducted June 15, 2023; Else Trier, *Ishøj – den grønne port til København. Før og nu* (Ishøj: Ishøj Municipality, 1998).

The same year, the first governmental commission regarding the guest worker situation in Denmark, the Elkær-Hansen commission, pointed to the question of housing as a key area for developing welfare-state politics regarding “the guest workers” who had started to arrive in Denmark due to lack of labour force in the economic boom period in the 1960s.¹² Immigrants had mainly been housed in the old house stock in the bigger cities, but in the early 1970s they were increasingly housed in the newly built social housing areas on the outskirts of the cities.¹³ The Ishøj Plan thus served to solve (part of) the housing problem in the migration policy under development, while the labour migrants served as a solution to the problems that had arisen when urban planning policy was practised.

This status of the guest workers in Ishøj as a solution to a problem was however to change. From the mid-1970s, the guest workers became on the contrary problematised key figures in the media coverage of the Ishøj Plan. “The Plan” had developed from modernist pride and hyped welfare-state expansion into being seen as an economic, social, and immigration-political problem, as also pointed out by for instance Heidi Vad Jønsson, who has studied the case of Ishøj as part of her research on Social Democrat integration politics from 1967–2001.¹⁴

During the 1980s, the national attention to Ishøj as an example of immigration problems peaked. Together with other Social Democrat mayors from the suburban municipalities on the south-western outskirts of central Copenhagen, Ishøj’s Social Democrat mayor Per Madsen challenged the Social Democrat national leadership for being too soft on migration and for leaving the problem to the economically poor suburban municipalities. A key controversy was whether it was legal to establish a quota for how many immigrants were to inhabit a social housing area. In Ishøj, the municipality had since the mid-1970s suggested a limit of 10 per cent, making it possible to reject specific future tenants on this basis. In 1991, a court verdict stated that it was not allowed for the municipality to maintain such a quota policy.¹⁵ However, Jønsson estimates that the battle initiated by the so-called West Region mayors (*Vestegnsborgmestre*) led to a change in Social Democrat integration- and immigration politics.¹⁶ In particular, the quota debate seems to have established consensus that successful integration of immi-

12 *Betænkning nr. 589. Betænkning om udenlandske arbejderes forhold i Danmark. Afgivet af det af arbejdsministeriet den 17. juni 1969 nedsatte udvalg* (Copenhagen: Ministry of Labour, 1971).

13 Jonathan M. Schwartz, *Reluctant Hosts: Denmark’s Reception of Guest Workers*. Kultursociologiske Skrifter no. 21 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1985).

14 Heidi Vad Jønsson, “Immigrant Policy Developing in Copenhagen and Ishøj in the 1970s,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 38, no. 5 (2013), 590–610.

15 The verdict was passed on January 22, 1991, “Udskrift af Østre Landsrets Dombog,” received by Bygge- og Boligstyrelsen, 7. kontor. Box 1894 Boligstyrelsens 4. kontor 1986–1990 Box 4 3116 1, National Archive.

16 Heidi Vad Jønsson, *I velfærdsstatens randområde: dansk integrationspolitik 1967–2007* (Odense: University of Southern Denmark, 2013); Heidi Vad Jønsson, *Fra lige muligheder til ret og pligt. Socialdemokratiets integrationspolitik i den moderne velfærdsstats tidsalder* (Odense: Syddansk Universitet, 2018). Whereas other social housing projects erected in the late 1960s and early 1970s had a similar history for housing immigrants, such as Gellerupplanen in Århus, see, e.g., Mikkel Høghøj, *Gellerupplanen 1970. 100 Danmarkshistorier* (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2025) and Vollsmose in Odense, the prominence of Ishøj in the debate in the 1980s as well as the particular status of Ishøj and Ishøj-Planen/Vejleåparken in national political and public debate should also be seen in light of the role of the West-region mayor group.

grants could be measured in numbers and percentage of the population. This included the idea that more than ten percent immigrants meant that integration was no longer possible, an assumption that spread to for instance school politics, locally as well as nationally. This idea played a key role in a research-based report authored by cultural sociologist Eivind Vesselbo, working on the task for Ishøj Municipality in 1990, a work that received critique from for instance cultural sociologist Christian Horst.¹⁷ This has been described in historical work about the education history of bilingual pupils and how Muslimness became a pedagogical category.¹⁸ The complex local history of knowledge behind this and the role of Ishøj as practice and symbol in this context have however not been described systematically, a task that this article takes on.

Methodology: theoretical approach and sources

Methodologically, the article approaches its object and questions by means of three theoretical perspectives. Firstly, *education* is understood as a dimension of the welfare state, educating citizens to embrace welfare-state values and practise welfare-state rules. Drawing on the work of Depaepe, Smeyers, Tröhler et al., and of Nordic welfare-state history as it has developed in the past decades, political and social problems in the welfare state can be said to have been *educationalised*; sought solved through educating the population.¹⁹ This has not only taken place through the formal education system but also through broader social policy. Drawing on conceptualisations deriving from Ulf P. Lundgren (1981), the welfare state can be said to include a *social and public curriculum* of espoused values and expected behaviours through the tax system, labour market negotiations between employers' organisations and labour unions, state support and regulation of housing and urban planning, and broader public enlightenment efforts such as support for and regulation of leisure time activities and education.²⁰ The question and strategy of educating can hence be understood as a feature that cuts across

17 Eivind Vesselbo, *I går, i dag og i overmorgen. Indvanderrapport Ishøj 1990* (Ishøj: Ishøj Municipality, 1990); Christian Horst, *Kan tal diskriminere? Kommentar til en indvanderrapport fra Ishøj Kommune* (Esbjerg: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 1990).

18 Buchardt (2016).

19 Pauli Kettunen, "The Transnational Construction of National Challenges: The Ambiguous Nordic Model of Welfare and Competitiveness," in *Beyond Welfare State Models: Transnational Historical Perspectives on Social Policy*, ed. Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen (Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, US: Edward Elgar, 2011), 16–40; Marc Depaepe and Paul Smeyers, "Educationalization as an Ongoing Modernization Process," *Educational Theory* 58, no. 4 (2008), 379–89; Nils Edling, "The Concept of 'Welfare State' in Danish Public and Political Debates", in *The Changing Meanings of the Welfare State: Histories of a Key Concept in the Nordic Countries*, ed. Nils Edling (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 137–78; Daniel Tröhler, "Educationalization of Social Problems and the Educationalization of the Modern World," in *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, ed. Michael A. Peters (Singapore: Springer, 2016), 698–703; Joakim Landahl, "Educationalising Death: The Emergence of Traffic Education in Swedish Elementary Schools," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 9, no. 2 (2022), 107–23; Ulf P. Lundgren, *At organisere omvärlden, en introduktion til läroplansteori* (Stockholm: LiberFörlag, 1981).

20 Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen, "Introduction: Rethinking Welfare State Models," in *Beyond Welfare State Models: Transnational Historical Perspectives on Social Policy*, ed. Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen (Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, US: Edward Elgar, 2011), 1–15; Mette Buchardt, Pirjo Markkola and Heli Valtonen, "Education and the Making of the Nordic Welfare States," in *Education, State and Citizenship*, ed. Mette Buchardt, Pirjo Markkola and Heli Valtonen, NordWel Studies in Historical Welfare State Research 4 (Helsinki: Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel, 2013), 7–30.

welfare-state politics, education politics, and other forms of social politics, such as the politics of housing and urban planning, an understanding that I conceptualise as *the educational welfare state*.²¹ In continuation, the question of how to handle the newcoming transnational labour migrants and refugees and the extent to which they are to be educated and thus integrated into the welfare state through – in this case social housing – are conceptualised as *educational integration practices*.²²

Secondly, social housing and its governance is understood as a *hub for knowledge production and circulation* generated in relation to educational integration practices. As educational practices at large, such practices are understood as inseparable from knowledge production. Here the study draws on Östling et al.'s conceptualisation of arenas of knowledge, forms of knowledge, knowledge actors, and knowledge circulation.²³ An arena of knowledge is “a place or a platform in its given framework offering the opportunity and setting the limits for certain forms of circulation of knowledge. It serves as a site for interactions between knowledge actors and their audiences”²⁴ In the case of Ishøj, actors and audiences are however often to be understood as overlapping categories, and Ishøj as a location for knowledge reception, production, and circulation is better described as a hub for this, rather than as a scene for communication. Retooling the concept of arena for this study, Ishøj as a location and a symbol is hence understood as a *knowledge hub*; a wheel, connected to axles and other wheels and from which knowledge spokes radiate. Together, these theoretical understandings serve as framing analytical concepts for the research questions asked, and guide the methodological design, and the discussion and conclusions on the findings. Also, they inform and inspire the language of description in the historical analysis.

Where these understandings draw on theoretical development with the history of education and knowledge in intersection, the study also, thirdly, draws on conceptual understanding from frontline theory, emphasising the role of the organisational frontline of the state and its professionals as de facto policy makers. With Evelyn Z. Brodtkin's conceptualisation, actors in the organisational frontline of the state – be it as state or state-related institutions such as municipalities or as more or less independent organisations that solve tasks for the state such as housing associations – “informally

21 Mette Buchardt, “The Nordic Model and the Educational Welfare State in a European Light: Social Problem Solving and Secular-Religious Ambitions when Modernizing Sweden and France,” in *The Nordic Education Model in Context: Historical Developments and Current Renegotiations*, ed. Daniel Tröhler et al. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 107–24.

22 Thomas Faist, *The Transnationalized Social Question: Migration and the Politics of Social Inequalities in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2018).

23 Björn Lundberg, “Exploring Histories of Knowledge and Education: An Introduction,” *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 9, no. 2 (2022), 1–11; Johan Östling et al., “The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge: An Introduction,” in *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge*, ed. Johan Östling et al. (Nordic Academic Press, 2018), 9–33.

24 Johan Östling et al., “Introduction: Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia,” in *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Arenas, Actors and Aspirations*, ed. Johan Östling et al. (Routledge, 2020), 7–8.

construct (and reconstruct) policy in the course of everyday organizational life.”²⁵ This is not least the case in periods when problems are not yet defined and central policy is still in the making.²⁶

The perspective inspired by frontline theory contributes to the study with an analytical awareness of the role of the organisational and local levels of the welfare state in knowledge production, how knowledge not only informed local practices but was also produced in local *educational integration practices* and possibly washed back on central policy and political discussions in society at large.²⁷ Also, the perspective from frontline theory has guided the choice of sources collected for the study, focusing on local organisational and municipal frontline bodies and the choice of actors for oral history interviews. Consequently, the source corpus selected for this study concerns especially the local level of AAB, the main cooperative housing association involved, and the political and administrative management of the municipality. More specifically, the source corpus consists of correspondence between the involved organisations and actors, papers and data collection in relation to writing of municipal reports on reception of immigrants, and the four archival boxes left after “The immigrant counseling office”; daily reports, data collection, reports from study trips to for instance Sweden and Turkey, correspondence with students and scholars and their working papers, all stored at Ishøj City Hall. In addition, the tenants’ magazines from the Ishøj Plan, where most are to be found in Ishøj Local History Archive. Finally, the article draws on oral history interviews with former Ishøj frontline workers and managers including municipal politicians; mayors and vice-mayors, professionals at the immigrant counseling office, city council members, administrative municipal management staff, and those local tenants’ board members from the housing project whom it has been possible to trace and who are still alive. The interviews have been structured around the actors unfolding their “Ishøj history” followed up by questions about their involvement in concrete practices, supported by examples of selected written source material that the actors have commented on. Whereas these interviews have been sources of information on concrete practices and as such supplemented the written source material, it is also important to note that oral history interviews are memory work, reflecting a

25 Evelyn Z. Brodtkin, “Policy Work: Street-Level Organizations under new Managerialism,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 21 (2011), 253; Evelyn Z. Brodtkin, “Reflections on Street-Level Bureaucracy: Past, Present, and Future,” *Public Administration Review* 72, no. 6 (2012), 940–49; Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

26 This point draws on Pierson’s understanding of formative moments and periods for making politics, Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). See also Karen N. Breidahl and Evelyn Z. Brodtkin, “Managing Asylum: Street-Level Organizations and Refugee Crises,” *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 26, no. 1 (2024), 42–63.

27 This approach, including the conceptualisation of educational integration practices, draws on the theoretical design and development in the collaborative research project “Educating Newcomers to the Welfare State. Organizational Responses to Migration 1960s–2010s and their Influence on Danish Central Policy” (EduState), consisting of Mette Buchardt (PI), Karen Nielsen Breidahl (Co-PI), Sophy Bergenheim and Siv Holm Hjortlund, funded by Independent Research Fund Denmark <https://www.en.culture.aau.dk/research/research-groups/cfu/educating-newcomers-to-the-welfare-state>, 2022–2027. The source corpus for this article is collected in this project.

present-day interpretation of their previous practice.²⁸ Where information stems from oral history interviews, this is made transparent in the article.

The “immigrant” reports and the desire to produce knowledge 1974–1978

In spring 1974, the renting-out problem was still not completely solved. In addition, the oil crisis had led to growing unemployment, and the guest workers went from being highly needed in industrial production to increasingly being unemployed. In the summer 1974, the municipality leadership, fronted by Social Democrat mayor Per Madsen, established a writing group with the purpose to write a fact-based report about those who for one of the first times in Denmark were called immigrants (*indvandrere*). Former municipal director Ole Olsen argued, when I interviewed him in June 2023, that this choice of new wording was made in order to underline that the newcomers were in many cases here to stay and not “guests” anymore. However, terms such as guest worker and foreign worker were also used. Besides the national political ambitions, the production of the report also started out local knowledge production on “immigrants”, activities in which the municipal “immigrant counseling office” in the Ishøj Plan was to play a crucial role. Also the idea of opening a local branch of the municipality in Ishøj Planen with counseling functions for immigrants seems to be a child of the writing group’s work.

As the head of municipal political and administrative leadership’s secretariate, Olsen was part of this municipal writing group that also included office assistant Edith Christensen, later married Tabassum and to become head of the “immigrant office” that opened in January 1975. Also office clerks from the municipality and the principal from the school in the Ishøj Plan, Strandgårdskolen, took part in the activities that included a study trip to Sweden. The work took place from August 1974 to February 1975. Shortly after, the report *Rapport om Torslunde-Ishøj Kommunes indvandrere* (Report about Torslunde-Ishøj Municipality’s immigrants) was published, later renamed *Indvanderrapport I* (Immigrant Report I).²⁹

Moreover, the purpose of the report was to analyse “school, social, leisure time, housing, labour and tax conditions” for immigrants, to investigate “[...] the economic aspects for the municipality, which within a relatively short period of time has received

28 Sofie Lene Bak (ed.), *Oral History i Danmark* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2016); Julie McLeod, “Memory, Affective Practice and Teacher Narratives: Researching Emotion in Oral Histories of Educational and Personal Change,” in *Methodological Advances in Research on Emotion and Education*, ed. Michaelinos Zembylas and Paul A. Schutz (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 273–84; Jin Hui Li and Mette Buchardt, “‘Feeling Strange’ – Oral Histories of Newly Arrived Migrant Children’s Experiences of Schooling in Denmark from the 1970s,” *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 59, no. 6 (2023), 1054–72.

29 *Rapport om Torslunde-Ishøj Kommunes indvandrere* (Ishøj, Ishøj Municipality, 1975), 4. On the front cover of the second reprint, June 1981 is added: “Indvanderrapport I” (Immigrant Report I). On page 2, the motivation for the report was expressed as the following: “During 1973 and the first half of 1974, the municipality of Torslunde-Ishøj received almost 1,400 immigrants/guest workers, corresponding to about 10% of the total population of Torslunde-Ishøj. (Population as of April 1, 1974: 14,371). Most of the immigrants were, and still are, Pakistanis (about 750) who have settled in the Ishøj Plan. Therefore, in the summer of 1974, the mayor took the initiative to have the entire question of immigrants in the municipality thoroughly examined and appointed a committee consisting of employees from various municipal departments to carry out this task”. This meant that according to the statistics made by the municipality, around 1,400 residents in the municipality were listed as immigrants/guest workers at the time.

many foreign inhabitants, and the purpose was here that an eventual surcharge for the municipality was to be presented to the Minister of the Interior related to an eventual restructuring of the rules for payment of subsidies in order to follow objective criteria”.³⁰

“The payment of subsidies” referred to the subsidies (*bloktilskud*) that the state paid to the municipalities in order to cover not least their welfare tasks. In Ishøj, the political and administrative management wanted to use the percentage of immigrant inhabitants to argue for higher state subsidies, something which should be seen in relation to the subsidies paid to the “rich municipalities” north of Copenhagen.³¹

The same motivation seems to have been behind the decision to publish a new and longer version, the so-called *Indvanderrapport II* (Immigrant Report II) already in 1978.³² As Ole Olsen explains:

[...] we did that because of the social security act³³ [...] where you could see how much money one was spending. So, it was really a lot of money that was spent and one could see how it turned everything upside down. [...] and this was also the reason that we made Immigrant Report II, it was to shed light on it one more time, but it was just as much to make clear the economy. Ishøj really did not get very much from the state. And the purpose with it [the report/MB] was really among other things to do the math and say: ‘Yeah, but you really have to figure out something with the [state/MB] subsidies for the municipality’. So that was what it was used for.³⁴

Though not receiving the desired national attention, the 1975 report had however done some “math” and based on this it suggested to “[s]top renting out apartments in Ishøj-Planen to immigrants”. Ten percent of the apartments were now rented out to immigrants, the report stated, and immigrants made up 20 percent of the residents in the Plan and approximately 10 percent of Ishøj’s population of about 14,000 residents.³⁵ This seems to have been the birth of what was to be called the “10-percent rule”, a principle that until the court verdict 1991 put a stop to it was used to regulate the renting-out policy of Ishøj’s social housing projects.

Also the establishment of the immigrant counseling office was as mentioned partly a child of the process of writing the 1975 report. The office opened on an experimental basis on January 2, 1975, while the report was still in production, and the final report recommended that the office was established on permanent basis.³⁶ Ole Olsen and Edith Tabassum also took part in the writing group around Immigrant Report II, and the office that she was now the official head of became a central part of drafting it and delivering the data. Immigrant Report II was delivered to Social Democrat Prime Minister Anker Jørgensen on his visit in the Ishøj section of the Social Democratic Party in the

30 *Rapport om Torslunde-Ishøj Kommunes indvandrere* (Ishøj: Torslunde-Ishøj Municipality, 1975), 3.

31 Interview with former mayor Per Madsen, May 3, 2024.

32 *Indvanderrapport II* (Ishøj: Ishøj Municipality, 1978).

33 The social security act (*Bistandsloven*), 1975.

34 Interview with Ole Olsen, June 15, 2023.

35 *Rapport om Torslunde-Ishøj Kommunes indvandrere* (1975), 51.

36 *Rapport om Torslunde-Ishøj Kommunes indvandrere* (1975), 44–9.

autumn 1978. Knowledge produced at the immigrant office was hence directly at play in national political negotiations.

1975: Establishing “The immigrant office”. Moving out the municipality to “the Plan”

The “immigrant counseling office” that opened in January 1975 functioned up until 1991. In *The Hexagon (Sekskanten)*,³⁷ the tenants’ magazine of the Ishøj Plan, it was announced under the name of “The immigrant counseling office”, but in most other sources “the immigrant office” is used.³⁸

While being among the first municipalities to use such a tool in Denmark, the practice was inspired by Sweden, where the writing group had visited on a study trip. Study trips became part of the activities after establishing the immigrant office. In 1977, another study trip to Sweden took place hosted by the Swedish Indvandrerverket in Norrköping, and an immigrant office was visited.³⁹ Another trip went to Istanbul and Izmir, Turkey, in 1981, arranged by Danish Municipalities (*Danske Kommuner*), the national organisation for municipalities, with Tabassum, the municipal school director, and a teacher as the Ishøj participants. The content was for instance visits at factories where the question of labour union organising was discussed, visits at schools, social security offices, and research institutions.⁴⁰ Whereas it can be hard to detect how the study trips were transformed into new knowledge and practices, there is no doubt that such knowledge collection practices were prioritised.

The office was organised as a branch of the municipality. The counseling of immigrants about social security, taxing, and employment services was delegated to the office, meaning that such functions were moved closer to the users. The office opened in one of the empty apartments in the Ishøj Plan in the section run by AAB. The apartment was located on the ground floor of Strandgården 29, next to the primary and lower secondary school of the Ishøj Plan Strandgårdskolen, and a short distance from AAB’s tenants’ house, where the tenants’ board of AAB’s part of the Ishøj Plan was located as well as the local AAB administration, governed by the tenants’ board. Also, this enclave in “the Plan” contained the local shopping centre with for instance a grocery store and a pub. The office was hence part of AAB’s local community centre, and in the beginning the office even shared the apartment with AAB’s local board.

Besides the abovementioned functions, the office produced data and delivered information to the municipality. These data were on the one hand to be used to influence national politics, for instance data to the “immigrant reports” and other national interventions. Inside the municipality, the office, on the other hand, collected information for local administrative use, for instance regarding school attendance of the children of immigrants, something that was also monitored and followed up on in concrete outreach work by the officers. At the same time, the office produced and delivered information to the immigrant inhabitants in the municipality about rights and duties

37 Named after an architectural feature in the Ishøj Plan.

38 *Sekskanten*, no. 1, January 1975, 4–5.

39 “Besøg på et indvandrerkontor i Norrköping,” November 1977, “Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222, box 1, Ishøj City Hall.

40 “Rejsen til Tyrkiet, d. 15/3-81 – 22/3-81,” ”Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222, box 1, Ishøj City Hall.

in welfare-state Denmark. This also included translations of municipal information to the majority languages spoken by the immigrants and an extensive interpreter service. Besides between two to three full-time employees, the office had an extensive part-time staff of interpreters competent in especially Urdu, Punjabi, Turkish, and Kurdish.⁴¹

The office and its officers were hence to serve as translators in multiple senses of the word: as interpreters with regard to languages but also as mediators and transmitters between the immigrants and the municipality and other organisational units of welfare-state Denmark, such as labour unions and the police. The office can in other words be said to have served a double role of educating newcomers into the bureaucratic practices and espoused values of the welfare state, while at the same time facilitating the exercise of bureaucratic control.

In the frontline in the Plan: daily practices in the office – local frontline de facto policy

When the office opened in 1975, working professionally with immigrants was not established as an area of professional welfare work.⁴² The office was hence staffed with professionals-in-the-making with and without a migrant history themselves, all of them bringing in knowledge and skills which were to be transformed into a new professional body of knowledge directed towards and based on work with immigrants.

Edith Tabassum came from a position as a secretary (*kommunal assistant/overassistent*) in the office for housing benefits (*boligsikring*), a welfare allowance for tenants with a low income. Here she gained experience in meeting and helping immigrants with for instance their taxes.⁴³ She functioned as the leader of the office until it was closed in 1991, and most correspondence from the office is signed by her. Also, her husband, Ashraf Tabassum, an active community organiser in Ishøj-Planen, originally from Pakistan, was hired to the office, first as an interpreter, but shortly after as a municipal officer (*funktionær*). He had a BA degree from the Emirates.⁴⁴ In addition, Ahmet Bayram was hired to the office, while from 1982 to 1987 also serving as a city council member for the Social Democratic Party as the first migrant and among the first city council members from Ishøj-Planen.⁴⁵ Bayram had arrived in Denmark in 1973. Originally from the Konya province in Turkey, he studied economy in Ankara and came to Denmark to continue his studies but had to start over at Copenhagen Business School. His brother had already arrived in Denmark as a guest worker in 1970, and lived in the Ishøj Plan, where Bayram joined him in 1975. Shortly after moving to Ishøj, Bayram was hired as an interpreter in Turkish by the office, and was for a time

41 Salary lists, "Flygtninge-Indvandrere," F. 42222, boxes 1–4, Ishøj City Hall.

42 Cp. Øland (2019a, 2019b).

43 "Edith Linnerup Tabassum," a description of Tabassum written by herself, 1978, "Flygtninge, indvandrere," F. 42222, box 4, Ishøj City Hall.

44 Edith Tabassum's notes, 1978, "Flygtninge, indvandrere," F. 42222, box 4, Ishøj City Hall. Both Edith and Ashraf (called Ashi) Tabassum were deceased before this research project was designed from 2020 onwards.

45 The municipal election in 1982 was the first where "foreigners" who had been residing in Denmark for minimum 3 years could vote and run for election, according to Lovbekendtgørelse nr. 196 af 22. april 1981, that changed Lov nr. 101 af 29. marts 1924 om kommunale valg.

the only one who could write Turkish, not only speak it. Soon after he was, as Ashraf Tabasum, employed as a “funktionær”⁴⁶

Whereas the first abovementioned announcement of the opening of the office in the tenants’ magazine was in English and Urdu, the office with Bayram got the capacity to also translate written text from Danish into Turkish. Bayram recalls that besides him another Turkish-speaking interpreter was hired and that besides that the office had three other interpreters and was capable of interpreting for Arabs, Pakistanis, and Yugoslavians, besides for Turks and Kurds.⁴⁷

The hirings were often done in unorthodox ways but leading to new kinds of professionalisation and helped build up professional knowledge. This is illustrated by the arrival- and professionalisation history of Ahmet Degirmenci, leading social worker in Ishøj Municipality, social education teacher, family therapist, and former city council member for the Social Democratic Party. I interviewed him at Ishøj City Hall in November 2023, where it was revealed that Degirmenci started his career as a part-time hired interpreter, while still being a teenager.⁴⁸ Degirmenci’s professional history also offers insights into the practices of the office.

Degirmenci came to Denmark with his mother and sisters on August 29, 1976 in order to join his father who came to Denmark as a guest worker in 1970 and had moved into the Ishøj Plan. The family moved into a five-room apartment in Strandgården⁴⁹ 29, one of the big apartments that had been difficult to rent out. The apartment was on the third floor in the same rise as the immigrant office that had opened shortly before on the ground floor. Degirmenci explains that Ahmet Bayram from the office helped the family with economical support for getting the big and expensive five-room apartment furnished. Also, Bayram helped Degirmenci, at the time 14 years old, to get language instruction when the principal at the nearby Strandgårdskolen found him too old to start in a reception class for what was at the time called foreign-language pupils. Instead Degirmenci, initiated by Bayram, studied Danish at a language school for adults and finished 9th grade and achieved a lower secondary diploma at a so-called centre for adult learning (*VUC*) in Ishøj. Working at a factory as unskilled labour at 16 years old, he was subsequently hired by Edith Tabassum and Bayram as an interpreter, which again after a year led to Degirmenci starting to teach at municipal day- and evening schools, for instance illiterate women, before going back to school and ending up graduating from education studies college with a social education teacher diploma (*socialpædagog*).

The frontline practices of securing social support and helping with school access in other words intersected with recruiting and developing skills and knowledge for the office, in the abovementioned case; being part of initiating a career of a municipal politician and administrator. As frontline organisation, the office was in other words

46 “Tolkene,” 2 pages machine-typed notes by Edith Tabassum, “Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222, box 4, Ishøj City Hall; Interview with Ahmet Bayram, January 15, 2024.

47 Interview with Ahmet Bayram, January 15, 2024.

48 Interview with Ahmet Degirmenci, November 14, 2023.

49 Strandgården, literally meaning “the beach farm” named after the farm that had previously owned the land of Ishøj-Planen.

also creating a future municipal frontline and thus contributing to forming specialised professional knowledge.

The written files after the office, stored in four archival boxes in Ishøj Municipal Archive, further adds to the picture of complexity of the practices and de facto policy making of the office and its officers. The official task description from 1981⁵⁰ and 1985⁵¹ focuses on organising written and oral interpretation and keeping the immigrants “informed”, and thus with a to some extent top-down approach informing the immigrant inhabitants. In addition, doing statistics for the school department, possibly watching the 10-per cent rule that was also from 1978 considered as tool in the Ishøj schools,⁵² and following up with home visits in case of school absence were part of the contract with the municipality.

However, the daily reports show another more bottom-up oriented approach to the tasks and the clients. For instance, the staff seem to have connected their clients to the labour unions and assisted the communication between labour unions and the clients. Thus, municipal officers seem to have sometimes functioned as labour union recruiters in addition to assisting their clients in getting a better support from the unions, which were not always supportive of non-Danish national members, as historian Nina Trige Andersen has pointed out.⁵³

Also, the daily reports show that the officers to a large extent focused on the social conditions of the clients; the problems that immigrants experienced, rather than immigrants as a problem. In a report dated September 19, 1988, Edith Tabassum wrote that the biggest problems for the immigrants in Ishøj were that they couldn't find jobs and apartments: “Young Arab family – are expecting a child in October, live in a one-room youth apartment. Are applying for an apartment, but have lived too short a time in Ishøj. Therefore, help for applying in other municipalities”.

While the municipality tried to limit immigrant access to apartments up until the court verdict in 1991, the municipality's immigrant office sought to find apartments for them in other ways, though outside Ishøj. As de facto policy makers, the frontline staff in the office seem to have worked with a double strategy: creating knowledge for the national battles about a more restrictive approach to immigrants meanwhile working close to community activism oriented towards immigrants, supporting their rights and access to welfare-state benefits.

“Seen from Ishøj”: “Ishøj” and the office as a gateway to knowledge about “the immigrants”

While the office can be said to have served a complex role when facilitating that the newcomers learn bureaucratic practices and espoused values of the welfare state, mean-

50 December 6, 1981, “Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222, box 1, Ishøj City Hall.

51 October 7, 1985, “Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222, box 1, Ishøj City Hall.

52 In a municipal report on foreign-language pupils, the arguments were supported by what is called “the much-talked-about 10-per cent rule”. Udvalget for Fremmedsprogede Elevers Undervisning v. Claus Mohr Drewes (sekretær), *Fremmedsprogede elevers undervisning. Arbejdsrapport nr. 1 Oktober 1978. Analyse – Problemformulering* (Ishøj: Ishøj Municipality, 1978), 8. The §7 Archive, Ishøj City Hall, Box: “Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222-1.

53 Nina Trige Andersen, *Labor Pioneers. Economy, Labor, and Migration in Filipino–Danish Relations 1950–2015* (Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2019).

while exercising bureaucratic control, also with regard to knowledge production, the role of the office was complex: on the one hand, the office delivered data for political national interventions, often interventions critical to immigration, while on the other hand the office served as a gateway for cultural studies- and social psychology-oriented migration research in-the-making, where the scholars also critiqued policies and pending political discussions for being (too) critical towards immigrants.

In October 1983, the social anthropologist Jan Hjarnø, at the time affiliated with South Jutlandish University Centre (*Sydjysk Universitetscenter*) – a municipally run research centre existing from 1971–98 – published a report on *Social organisation hos tre indvandrergupper i Ishøj Kommune* (Social organising among three immigrant groups in Ishøj Municipality). The original plan was that Sydjysk Universitetscenter was to develop into a regionally and municipally focused sixth university of Denmark, something that never happened. But the kind of research Hjarnø took on in Ishøj in close collaboration with the municipal leadership and the municipal immigrant office seems to have fitted well with the profile of the university centre: locally based research performed in close collaboration with municipal authorities and institutions. The 100-page long report was based on a pilot study taking place during 20 days in September 1983 with Turkish, Pakistani, and Moroccan immigrants and residents in Ishøj-Planen. In the preface, Hjarnø thanked the immigrant office whose interpreters had assisted him. The purpose of the report was to achieve a grant from the Danish research council, and then also contribute to making an extended version of Ishøj Municipality's Immigrant Report II. In a letter accompanying the report Hjarnø sent to Ole Olsen, at the time head of mayor Per Madsen's office and his close collaborator, Hjarnø emphasised and specified that the purpose of such a new immigration report was to “illuminate the immigration problem on municipal level from A to Z”.⁵⁴ Hjarnø did not end up contributing to an “Immigrant report III”. As Immigrant Report II was in its nature a knowledge- and data-based policy paper, it was however clear that this was also the intention with the planned new version, where Hjarnø's research could add “observation of their behaviour and through conversation reach an understanding of their cultural patterns”, as Hjarnø had formulated knowledge contribution in the pilot study.⁵⁵

A close relationship between the municipal officers and the Swedish based migration scholar Carl Ulrich Schierup developed during the 1980s. Schierup's monograph *På kulturens slagmark: mindretal og størretal taler om Danmark* [On the battlefield of culture. Minorities and majorities speak about Denmark] from 1993 was critical of the political approach to immigration that Per Madsen pursued in the mayor collaboration during the 1980s, the quota policy, etc. During the 1980s, Schierup had been a frequent guest in the immigrant office. That Edith Tabbassum considered him an important collaborator in developing de facto policy is shown by their correspondence and papers, such as her week report from June 1, 1985, addressed to Ole Olsen:

54 Jan Hjarnø, “Social organisation hos tre indvandrergupper i Ishøj Kommune” (Sydjysk Universitetscenter, October 25, 1983), 1. “Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222, box 1; Letter from Jan Hjarnø to Ole Olsen, November 7, 1983, “Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222, box 1, Ishøj City Hall.

55 Hjarnø (1983); “Flygtninge-Indvandrere,” F. 42222, box 1, Ishøj City Hall.

Carl Ulrik Schierup was here in week 9. We discussed general alternatives to the unemployment of Turks. On March 1st, 1985, Jan Hjærnø came, and both stayed with me for a weekend, during which we visited Ishøj and Hundie and exchanged experiences about the life patterns of Turks here and in Turkey. We talked about why Turks so often become long-term unemployed and why they lose their jobs more quickly compared to Yugoslavs and Pakistanis. We concluded that Turks generally return late from vacation in Turkey, and this is the primary reason for their unemployment. No employer in the private labour market would tolerate this. We discussed Danish language education. We talked about case studies in Ishøj – about how it could be done if permission from the municipality were granted. Carl Ulrik Schierup attended a meeting at the Employment Agency with, among others, Heinrich Christiansen.⁵⁶

Despite the close relation between the immigrant office, Tabassum, Ishøj Municipality, and scholars such as Hjærnø and Schierup, Ole Olsen in the Danish Daily *Politiken* expressed a more distant attitude to “experts” in an article portraying Tabassum under the title “Immigrants are her whole life”:

She has enormous knowledge. Not an academic, intellectualised, liberated immigrant opinion, but a pragmatic, practical attitude. According to her immediate superior, office manager Ole Olsen, she is the Dane who knows the most about immigrants. “I have laughed a lot at all the people who present themselves as immigrant experts, but in comparison to Edith, they have no practical, historical knowledge of the matters, and they also cost society a lot of money because many of their projects are unsuccessful.”⁵⁷

On the one hand, the municipal leadership was hence distant to scholars when it came to public appearance at the national level, where the Social Democratic Party at the time fought about the directions of its immigrant politics, with mayor Per Madsen in one of the leading roles. On the other hand, the municipality seems to have worked closely with scholars, where the form of knowledge was an applied cultural sociology that explained what was seen as the problems with immigrants with their cultural patterns and behaviour. Explaining, defending, problematising, and attacking immigrants with what was seen as their culture as explanation became in Denmark the key frame for discussing and creating immigration and integration politics from especially the 1990s onwards. This took for instance the form of cultural sociological policy-related work in the field of education, where the experiences in Ishøj were also a recurring reference point.⁵⁸

In the late 1980s, journalist Nils Ufer’s newspapers articles and later book *Seen from Ishøj*, mainly based on interviews and reportages from the Ishøj Plan, contributed a counter perspective to immigrant-critical campaigns in the tabloid press, but also contributed to making Ishøj visible as an exciting and troubled place.⁵⁹ Trouble and

56 Typed report, signed Edith Tabassum, June 1, 1985, “Flygtninge, indvandrere,” 42222, box 4, Ishøj City Hall. In the quote, ET’s spelling of “Hundige” and “Hjærnø” is kept.

57 “Indvandrere er hendes liv,” *Politiken*, August 23, 1987.

58 Buchardt (2016).

59 Ufer (1988).

excitement became part of the public curriculum about immigrants, and immigrants became symbolised by the town of Ishøj and the Ishøj Plan.

This included the many groups of pupils and students who visited Ishøj-Planen as part of their education. During the 1980s, topic-related theme work (*emnearbejde*) and problem-based project group work had started to enter the Danish education system in primary and lower secondary school (*folkeskolen*), higher secondary school (*gymnasiet*), and in tertiary education, and as a topic and “problem”, “immigrants” became an attractive object of knowledge. The archive after the office contains a collection of reports from pupils and students that made excursions to collect information and impressions in Ishøj-Planen and used the office as a gateway and the officers, Edith Tabassum in particular, as a source of information.

In September 1987, for instance, a group of nurse students visited and produced the project “About Turkish women in Ishøj”. The project report was on the one hand concerned with the experience of information and knowledge among the female immigrants regarding the Danish health system, and on the other hand it dealt with “the cultural and religious background of Turkish immigrants”, for instance “Women in Islam”.⁶⁰ The student project hence mirrored and formed part of the growing attention paid to women as a particular object of interest and concern in the public and professional debate and knowledge production about migrant, something that had occurred in Denmark since the early 1980s with the educational field as a powerful site of production.⁶¹ The list of literature in the project report included Nils Ufer’s *Seen from Ishøj* articles and book, together with the work of another Ishøj-visiting scholar, psychologist Gretty Mizrahi Mirdal, namely her study on the somatic and psychological conditions of Turkish women in Denmark (1983).⁶² Also, Immigrant Report I and II and Ishøj municipal consultant Klaus Slavensky’s report on immigrant education in Ishøj (1984) figured in the list.⁶³ “Immigrants” as a curricular topic was hence formed by knowledge from the Ishøj Plan as distributed by the office combined with knowledge and policy paper production that also had Ishøj and the office as a central source and object.

Did “Ishøj” influence national politics? Discussion and concluding remarks

The immigrant office ceased to exist in 1991. When asked why it was closed down, Anders Hvid Jensen, former municipal director and at the time head of the municipal housing office, explains:

60 “Omkring tyrkiske kvinder i Ishøj,” June 16, 1966 (Frederiksberg Sygeplejeskole), “Flygtninge, indvandrere,” 42222, box 1, Ishøj City Hall.

61 Mette Buchardt, “Educating Migrant Children and Women in the Political Projects of the Welfare Nation-State and Secularization: The Danish ‘Extreme Case’ in light of the French,” in *World Yearbook of Education 2022*, ed. Taniel Tröhler, Nelli Piattoeva and William F. Pinar, (London: Routledge, 2021), 251–66.

62 Gretty Mizrahi Mirdal, “Tyrkiske kvinder i Danmark. Deres somatiske og psykiske tilstand” (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 1983).

63 Klaus Slavensky, “En status over indvandrерundervisningen i Ishøj Kommune 1976–1980 (Ishøj: Ishøj Municipality, 1984).

It closed after we received a verdict from the Eastern High Court (Østre Landsret).⁶⁴ [...] Because Østre Landsret says to us that we must not treat applicants for social housing associations differently based on nationality. And then Per Madsen says that then we cannot have the office for immigrants. [...] So it was a bit of an irritation that we lost the case, but then we turned it into a tourist office. Then Edith became the head of our tourist office. And then we went from selling single tickets to selling return tickets. So, tourists come and go, while guest workers came and stayed. And not that there's anything wrong with that. But Edith's new task was to remember that tourists had to go home again. We laughed about that.⁶⁵

Also, the location changed: from the apartment in the Ishøj Plan to a shop in Ishøj Town Mall. Correspondence between the mayor's office and AAB about the maintenance bill after the office moved out of the apartment in Strandgården shows a tense relation between the two organisations.⁶⁶ Having lost the court case and the ability to use quotas for immigrants in the governance of the social housing areas of Ishøj, the municipality also lost a tool to control AAB's part of the Ishøj Plan.

In the city council there were tensions, too. The association Ishøj against xenophobia (*Ishøj mod Fremmedhad*) that on behalf of two rejected applicants for apartments in respectively Ishøj-Planen and the nearby social housing area Gadekæret had started the court case was in the city council backed by not least the Socialist People's Party (*Socialistisk Folkeparti*) which on other questions collaborated with the Social Democrat majority. However, inside Ishøj, the political landscape was more complex than the political dichotomy pro and con quotas, as the two sides of the court case suggests.

During the national debates in the late 1980s, including the processes in the court room and the media coverage that accompanied them, literature on minority rights, antiracist scholarship, etc., was purchased and read by the municipal administration and leadership, as can be seen from the collections of mayor Per Madsen's papers in Ishøj City Hall. On the national scene, the municipality's political leadership was positioned as critical to immigration, often leading to public controversy, and in this context the literature in question served to enable the political and administrative leadership to defend themselves against accusations of racism publicly. However, this also meant that the knowledge level with regard to minority rights and participation inside the municipality was very high and up-to-date for its time, and might have contributed to making Ishøj a first-mover in multiculturalist de facto policy as well.

In 1986, Social Democrat city council member Ahmet Bayram, still an officer at the immigrant office, headed the first municipal so-called Immigrant committee (*Indvandrerudvalget*), later renamed the council of integration (*Integrationsrådet*). Such municipal councils became stipulated as part of the national Integration Act, passed in 1998.⁶⁷

Another example of washback from the educational integration practices that developed in Ishøj Municipality, not least rooted in practices concerning the Ishøj Plan and

64 The next highest level of the court/legal system in Denmark.

65 Interview with Anders Hvid Jensen, October 31, 2023.

66 Per Madsen's papers, Ishøj City Hall.

67 *Lov om integration af udlændinge i Danmark (integrationslov)*, July 1, 1998.

its inhabitants, came much later and was to become a challenge for the municipality. In 2010, the Liberal-headed centre-right government in Denmark launched the so-called “Ghetto list”.⁶⁸ This meant that tenants in social housing areas with over 40 percent so-called “immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries” should be evicted from their apartments and that selected housing blocks in the area would be sold to private ownership while other blocks should be demolished. While such a quota-based policy originated from Ishøj, it nevertheless meant that the municipality and the social housing organisations of Ishøj were faced with the task of keeping the Ishøj social housing blocks out of “the lists”.

What cuts across these cases of concrete policy washback from Ishøj to the national level is however that knowledge production in the frontline organisations of Ishøj formed part of developing what was later circulated and stipulated as national policy. In this process, also professionals and politicians with a migration history were among de facto policy makers.

Besides contributing to the intersection of the history of education and knowledge, these findings hence also contribute to the history of welfare state policy formation, pointing to the importance of the local frontline level when welfare state policy concerning migration and integration was in the making.⁶⁹ In continuation, the knowledge production and circulation – the scholarly, the formal curricular, and the media attention – meant that “Ishøj” became formative to the public curriculum of “what was possible to know” about integration and about immigrants – how to explain them, discipline them, and educate them – that has been setting the scene for public political discussions up until the present. In their typology of types of political influence of experts, Lequesne and Rivaud point out the expert as provider of meaning in the policy process.⁷⁰ In the knowledge processes that made Ishøj a multilayered symbol on the national political scene and in public debates, the many local and visiting experts can be said to have contributed with such meaning making.

Summing up, all these forms of knowledge productions had links to the practices that centred on the municipal immigrant office in the Ishøj Plan. The office and its staff can hence on the one hand be understood as a street-level form of the welfare state, acting on and creating policies from below in the daily practices in an organisational setup related to social housing associations and municipal administrative functions moved out into the field. On the other hand, the office can be understood as a knowledge and policy-producing educational hub, reaching out its spokes inside and outside the local branch of the welfare state in modern suburban Ishøj.

68 The Government, *Ghettoen tilbage til samfundet. Et opgør med parallelsamfund i Danmark* (Copenhagen: Ministry of Social Affairs, October 2010). The migration criterion was combined with criteria of average income and tax contribution among the tenants, percentage of tenants with no relation to the labour market or under education, and their average share of criminal records.

69 See also Mette Buchardt and Karen. N. Breidahl, “Educating Newcomers for the Modern Welfare State: Danish Frontline Organisations as Educational Sites and Drivers of Knowledge from the late 1960s to the late 1990s,” *Nordic Journal of Educational History*, this issue.

70 Christian Lequesne and Phillippe Rivaud, “Les comités d’experts indépendants. L’expertise au service d’une démocratie supranationale?” *Revue française de science politique* 51, no. 6 (2001), 867–80; Fabio Bolzonar, *Catholicism and the Welfare State in Secular France* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2023), 136–7.

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