CHAPTER 3

Adult Education in German Refugee Camps in Denmark following the Second World War: Study Circles and Democratic Learning

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INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War, Denmark experienced two substantial inflows of German nationals. The first consisted of soldiers who invaded and occupied the country in April 1940. The second was very different, comprising German civilian refugees who arrived during the winter of 1944 and spring of 1945. When the German forces in Western Europe surrendered in May 1945, there were close to 250,000 refugees in Denmark.[2] A swift return to Germany proved impossible for most, and many were required to remain in Denmark for an extended period of time. In the autumn of 1945, there were still more than 200,000 refugees in Denmark. In response to this situation, the Danish government established the Refugee Administration in September 1945, which soon afterwards set up two committees in November 1945—one focusing on education and one focusing on refugee enlightenment through information—responsible for schooling,

education, information distribution, and cultural activities for children, young people, and adults.[3] The two committees planned and implemented a wide range of activities in the camps in which the refugees and former soldiers were held, some of which were primarily aimed at young people and adults. An important underlying principle of these initiatives was their democratic foundation, and some were explicitly intended to promote democratic education and learning. These included organised study group activities, some focusing on the ideas and practice of democracy, which constituted particularly distinctive contexts for dialogue, reflection, and debate.[4] The participating adults were often concerned with, or personally engaged in, such issues, and reactions and discussions could be intense, all of which were augmented by the dramatic years of the Second World War.

This chapter sheds light on the educational and informational activities planned and implemented in the refugee camps, with a particular focus on the study groups, their purpose, and the challenges entailed in their implementation. By focusing on attempts to promote democratic learning and development through dialogue and study group activities, and by recognising the special conditions under which these efforts unfolded—namely within refugee camps isolated from Danish society by barbed wire fences—this chapter explores what characterised these activities, the nature of the ideas underlying them, and the challenges that were involved in the facilitation of them.[5]

This chapter draws on primary sources from the Refugee Administration's archive found in the Danish National Archives, with a particular focus on the records of the Information Committee, including an example of a study group process narrated by its leader. This is supplemented by documents from the Odense City Archives, memoirs written by refugees, and other relevant publications regarding the subject. The selected study group example is highlighted because it documents a process taking place over the course of several months and contains a wealth of detail that helps elucidate the core of the matter that is investigated here. The testimonies and anecdotes from participants are drawn from the relatively few existing instances found in memoirs where such activities are mentioned and they have been chosen to highlight the key points and distinctive aspects of this work with the German refugees and former soldiers.[6]

The German Refugees in Denmark

Towards the end of the Second World War, the large number of German citizens mentioned in the introduction arrived in Denmark as refugees, having been

forcibly evacuated. They came from East Prussia, fleeing the advancing Soviet army. In February 1945, Germany ordered a general evacuation of these civilians from East Prussia. Denmark, which had been occupied by German troops since 1940, became one of the destinations for this flow of refugees. After the end of the war in the spring of 1945, roughly 50,000 were able to return to Germany immediately, but more than 200,000 refugees remained in Denmark.[7] Despite the efforts of the Danish authorities to secure quick repatriation, such decisions were not left to the individual countries in which the refugees were located but were determined by the Allied High Command in Europe. A swift return of the refugees located in Denmark was therefore not considered possible.[8]

Following their initial accommodation in temporary lodgings all across Denmark, dedicated refugee camps were gradually established after the German capitulation, and camp administration regulations were drafted and adopted in the autumn of 1945.[9] The camp regulations did not permit refugees to have contact with the surrounding population and Danish society at large; they were to remain isolated in the camps until they could be repatriated back to Germany. By the autumn of 1946, many camps of different sizes had been established. The largest camp was known as the Oksbøl Refugee Camp which was located in the western part of Jutland and accommodated around 35,000 people.[10]

The living space of the refugee camp constitutes a unique kind of social environment which determines the human existence found there and has been the subject of much sociological and cultural research and analysis. The sociologist Erving Goffman developed his theory of total institutions through the study of secluded institutional settings that are both physically and socially isolated from the surrounding society.[11] The specific nature of refugee camps has also been analysed and conceptualised by ethnologist and anthropologist Michel Agier, who highlighted three primary characteristics governing these spaces. One is extraterritoriality, as camps are often located in remote areas. Another is exceptionality, since camps operate as exceptions to national legislation and are therefore governed by legal and administrative frameworks that differ from those that apply to the society that surrounds the camp. The third characteristic embodies social exclusion, as the inhabitants of the camps are not seen as belonging to the society and culture of the country in which the camps are located. These characteristics of refugee camps naturally make effective and meaningful education and learning activities challenging. Despite this, such activities can be argued to carry indispensable importance and meaning, because they provide social

engagement within the otherwise monotonous and routine survival conditions of camp life itself and may offer potentially valuable perspectives.[12]

THE DANISH REFUGEE ADMINISTRATION AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

When the Danish government established the Refugee Administration in September 1945, the Danish Social Democratic politician and former minister Johannes Kjærbøl was appointed as its head. Among the major tasks facing the Refugee Administration was the organisation of schooling for children, as well as the provision of information, education, and cultural opportunities for refugees of all ages found in the camps.

Historically speaking, the utilisation of state power within the context of refugee camps has most often been enacted to control refugees and their behaviours rather than providing them with meaningful opportunities.[13] The Danish refugee camps were, of course, also subject to strict measures of control. However, in contrast to many other historical cases, the Danish government assumed responsibility, not only for providing health and welfare for the refugees in the camps, but also for offering a wide range of cultural activities to them. Many of these activities directly involved and were primarily organised by the German refugees themselves. The Danish government also sought to establish forms of in-camp governance through which refugees could participate in everyday decision-making, allowing the foundational principles of democracy and citizenship to shape the practice of the camps. Schooling for children and young people, as well as learning activities for adults, were implemented to reach the intended goals of the camps. Non-formal adult learning activities—often referred to in the Danish educational tradition as "enlightenment"—formed an important part of this effort.

The rules for the camps, which were decided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, stipulated that the children should be taught lessons or play at least six hours a day, and that the older refugees themselves should help organise this within a framework decided by the Danish authorities.[14] After the establishment of the Refugee Administration, the framework for educational activities was gradually developed by the administration's two committees for education and information respectively. In November 1945 a new regulation was also issued for the camps. It is this phase of the development of the camps and their activities that will be the primary focus of investigation in this chapter.

The efforts of the Refugee Administration and its emphasis on education trying to teach the values of democracy should be understood in light of developments taking place in both international and Danish contexts in the years before

and while the camps were established. At the international level, key events included the Yalta Conference and the Potsdam Conference which were held towards the end of the war. It was here that the heads of state of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union discussed and agreed upon the roles and responsibilities each country would have in governing Germany following the war. The final agreements reached at Potsdam emphasised the values of democracy and stated that one objective of the post-war effort was to prepare "...for the eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis." They further declared that "German education shall be so controlled as completely to eliminate Nazi and militarist doctrines and to make possible the successful development of democratic ideas."[15]

These objectives were also important and foundational for the efforts of the Danish authorities. Furthermore, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which was established in November 1945, also emphasised that education was a key component for the development of peaceful societies.[16]

At the national level, the approach to education in the refugee camps was influenced by the political climate dominating Denmark at the end of the war, but also by educational initiatives that were undertaken before and during the war. In the decade preceding the war and during the occupation, the political climate in the country had been shaped by Social Democratic governments, which introduced initiatives and reforms within the field of education heavily championing democratic ideals and values giving them a central role.[17]

At the end of the war, a new Danish coalition government was formed led by the Social Democrat Vilhelm Buhl as Prime Minister. Although it existed only for a brief period, it was during this time that the Refugee Administration was established. Some of the actors involved in the educational reforms before and during the war became members of the Refugee Administration and took part in the planning and implementation of educational and informational activities. Social Democratic policies, values and ideas can therefore reasonably be assumed to have influenced the political doctrines and goals of the Refugee Administration and its work.[18]

EDUCATION, ENLIGHTENMENT AND IDEAS OF DEMOCRACY

From the outset, Kjærbøl emphasised the importance of education and information activities in the camps and argued that these should be based on democratic ideals and values, yet the Refugee Administration needed to stay politically

neutral in its guiding operating principles. Following the establishment of the Refugee Administration, he delivered several speeches in which this view was emphasised and justified, noting that many of the refugees had little familiarity with democracy and democratic ideals. In his view, educating in this way had to be regarded as a moral obligation. He expressed this, for example, in a speech broadcast by the Danish Radio Service on 11 December 1945: "However, it was clear to us that we had a moral duty to initiate such educational and informational activities on a democratic but politically neutral basis."[19] He adds that after: "... 5 years of Nazi occupation, we all have the goal of eliminating all forms of Nazi sentiment and beliefs."[20] In another speech, the thoughts behind the information activities were elaborated on by Kjærbøl when he stated the following: "... 13 years of Nazism have made Germans completely unfamiliar with the social conditions that dominate the world today. That is why we need to launch further information activities, for example in the form of lectures, distribution of pamphlets, establishment of libraries and the like."[21] Kjærbøl acknowledged the challenges posed by this endeavour, including securing a sufficient number of qualified teachers and providing fit for purpose textbooks and materials in the camps.

The Refugee Administration's Education and Information Committee planned and initiated a comprehensive range of educational and informational activities, including schooling for children and young people, information initiatives primarily aimed at adults, short courses for adults responsible for teaching or pedagogical tasks, as well as education and information regarding the ideals and values of democracy. This latter element was also reflected in the structure of everyday camp governance, which partly drew on democratic principles. Despite the inherent constraints imposed by the physical confinement of the refugees in the camps and the many other practical challenges involved, "democracy" appears to have been a key value defining the way the Danish authorities approached the task at hand. This approach was strongly influenced by the ideas of the Danish philosopher and theologian Hal Koch, who emphasised democracy as a concept grounded in dialogue and as a way of life. Koch expressed these ideas in a Danish newspaper article from 1945, writing: "This is Democracy. It is the conversation (dialogue) and mutual understanding and respect that is the essence of democracy. (...) Thus understood, democracy is something far more comprehensive than a specific form of social governance. It's a way of life ...."[22]

The concept of democracy that was emphasised by Hal Koch epitomises the idea that it is far more than just a form of government: it is a set of practices that can engender a complete way of life. In many respects, it corresponds with the

conceptions of democracy that were developed by modern critical social science scholars such as Jürgen Habermas, who emphasized the role of public communication and debate as a cornerstone in democratic governance.[23] However, promoting and teaching such ideas in enclosed and segregated refugee camps might seem ambitious and contradictory. It would require sensitivity, pedagogical considerations, and a well-planned approach that fully accounted for the special contexts that defined the very nature of the camps.

In October 1945, the Education Committee of the Refugee Administration consisted of twelve Danish and German members with a wide range of expertise in schooling and education. Key members included the head of the Refugee Administration, Johannes Kjærbøl, and Johannes Novrup who was an adviser in the Danish Ministry of Education. The committee also included German émigrés, among them the former Regional Minister of Justice and Education Hans Sievers and former teacher Walter Schulze.[24]

Shortly after the establishment of the Education Committee, an Information Committee was also established. Some of its thirteen members were also members of the Education Committee. Members included Johannes Kjærbøl who functioned as chairman; Poul Hansen, head of Esbjerg Workers' Folk High School and of the committee's activities; Jens Th. Arnfred, principal of Askov Folk High School; Christian Christiansen, Member of the Danish Parliament, co-founder and business manager of the Danish Workers' Education Association; and Johannes Novrup. German émigrés on the committee included Hans Sievers and the politically active Social Democrat Karl Rowold, who served as secretary. Several of the German members of the two committees had previously been active in the German Social Democratic Party but were forced to flee Germany after the Nazis came to power in 1933.[25]

Several of the appointees were active Social Democrats, and some of the Danish members had, in the preceding years, been involved in the development and implementation of a new type of national schooling for young people. Some, including several of the German members, had taken part in resistance activities during the war and had contributed to the production of the magazine Deutsche Nachrichten, which circulated anti-Nazi propaganda. After the war, the magazine continued to be published on a weekly basis, now under the auspices of the Refugee Administration.[26]

Above, the chapter briefly outlined some of the many initiatives and types of activity that were planned and implemented through the education scheme that was enacted by the Refugee Administration. Below the focus will shift to

the study group activities that were conducted in the camps with the ideals of democracy as the main theme.

STUDY GROUP ACTIVITY. DEMOCRATIC LEARNING IN STUDY GROUPS

In April 1946, the information committee of the Refugee Administration issued a ten-page document titled: "Plan for a Youth School in the German Refugee Camps". The activities outlined herein included lectures, youth school teaching and study group activities.[27] Information activities aimed at young refugees were considered particularly important given the propaganda and experiences that most German children and young people carried with them from their time in the Hitler Youth organisation and its Nazi ideology teachings. The guidelines in the document emphasised that the plan should be initiated as soon as possible, with a goal of being implemented by 15 September that same year.[28] The committee wrote: "The first task must consist in finding a sufficient number of assistants for the Youth school by carrying out Hal Koch study groups for leaders and teachers. (...) it must be emphasized that a study group in a democratic spirit can only be carried out if the participants have volunteered." [29] Furthermore, it is stipulated in the document that "this study group activity for potential teachers should be carried out at 2 to 3 double lessons a week".[30] This refers to a specific plan for the training of the teachers who were to lead the study groups. It was meant to guide people who were considered to be suitable teachers and educational leaders, and they were to complete Hal Koch study groups before teaching them. In this way, Hal Koch's writings and ideas about democracy came to play an important role in the general dissemination of the ideas of democracy and democratic practices in general during this time.

This outcome can probably be seen in light of the respect Koch wielded in Denmark during the occupation, as the pragmatic chairman of the Danish Youth Association formed in 1940 that functioned as a unifying organisation for youth associations. His book *What is Democracy?*,[31] published in 1945, was well suited for the project, and many members of the committee were, like Koch, affiliated with the Social Democrats and the Danish folk high school movement, which was highly receptive to ideas such as these. In March and April 1946, Deutsche Nachrichten published a series of five articles based on chapters from Koch's book. Questions were also prepared to accompany the texts, in order to support the study circles in the camps and to promote constructive debate. For example, for the article titled "Freedom", the following questions were formulated: "1) Can democracy be secured through a constitution? 2) Can democracy offer absolute

and unrestricted freedom? 3) If not, what restrictions on freedom may be introduced?"[32] The texts were also subjected to discussion in the magazine. For example, a refugee wrote the following: "In the series of articles: study circles by Hal Koch on "What is democracy?" it is emphasized that voting is not the essential thing about democracy. But the vote must reflect the will of the people. Again, the question is asked: 'Is the majority always right?' In a general sense, the answer to this question can only be yes because the majority also bears the consequences, so in reality the responsibility."[33]

Koch's contributions were used in various forms of teaching and information activities, where they constituted the basis for debates in the study groups.[34] Regarding the study groups, it was emphasised in the plan that these could create opportunities for personal development and for the formation of desirable anti-autocratic attitudes. For example, it was stated that: "The importance of the study groups lies in the personal development they can bring the participants into, and it seems clear that the effect on opinions formed by participants can be spread from them to less developed people in the camps."[35]

The guide emphasised the importance of including both genders and all different social groups, so that the activities could contribute to personal development and social integration forming across the differences determined by gender and social circumstances , while also facilitating the dissemination of desirable ideas and content.[36] The study group methodology is best understood in detail through formulations like the following:

"A study group normally works in such a way that the participants take turns presenting the readings for the class in an introduction. (...) In practice, the lessons should probably be completed as conversation sessions without introductory speakers. This means that the teacher or leader is always the prime mover, who point by point discusses the material with the young people. It is sound method for the teacher to prepare for each lesson questions for the readings and address them to the circle."[37]

The intention of the study group activity was largely based on an approach of inquiry, thereby fostering inquisitive dialogue among the participants ultimately constituted through a dialectical method. It was designed to provide a framework for the participants' personal reflections and to contribute to the formation of desirable changes in attitudes and personal development that would favour democracy as an institution and way of life. While these activities were participant-driven, the study group leader remained as the 'prime mover' of the ongoing dialogue.

The study group practice had evolved within the Danish folk high school milieu that was dominant around the early part of the twentieth century as a means of ensuring public education and learning. It corresponded well with the ideas of Danish scholar N.F.S. Grundtvig and his followers with regard to education and popular enlightenment, which had gained a strong foothold in Denmark during the nineteenth century. Study groups could be organised as self-directed activities based on inquisitive dialogue among participants, and they proved highly successful in the Danish labour movement's adult education initiatives from the early twentieth century. As part of adult education in Germany during the Weimar years (1918–1933), the study groups were also an activity with which some of the refugees and the German émigrés affiliated with the information committee were familiar.[38]

From the perspective of the Refugee Administration, the study group methodology offered significant potential for attitude re-formation and desirable personal development as part of the activities provided to the refugees. In the camps, the study group format created favourable opportunities to ground discussions and content in the specific circumstances and experiences of the participants that were likely to take part in such activities. In addition to texts on democracy, the guidelines also proposed the use of texts on subjects relevant to the general situation of the refugees, thereby providing opportunities to discuss issues such as democratic practices even within the confinement of an undemocratic setting such as a refugee camp.

REFUGEE EXPERIENCES WITH STUDY GROUP WORK

Key elements of adult education in the camps included lectures, reading circles, and the study group activities described above. These study group activities covered a wide range of topics, allowing for dialogue on a diverse range of issues and from a multitude of different perspectives. The adult education programmes in the camps were generally defined by a broad cultural focus without explicit political content, although more overtly political issues relating to democracy were also addressed.

Reports from the camps submitted to the Refugee Administration indicate that numerous lectures were given on a wide range of topics, cultural subjects were particularly popular, but lectures of a political nature were also prevalent. In Kløvermarken—a large camp consisting of 17,000–18,000 refugees—a very high number of participants were reported to participate in the lectures on "What is democracy?", which were to be delivered in all camps: 1,100 refugees partici-

pated in one session and 1,600 at another.[39] In 1946, there were also four study circles on the topic "What is democracy?", each with between thirteen and thirty participants. The number of participants may not seem high, but a key point in study group activity was that the ideas could spread from the individuals in these groups to the rest of the refugees.[40]

It was decided that study groups on democracy should be held in all Danish camps, and they were also mentioned in the reports. For example, reports from camps in the Copenhagen district in early 1947 noted that: "The Teachers' Further Training takes place in a study group (...). All the teachers participate in Neue's political study circles."[41]

In the reports prepared by the Refugee Administration's staff from the camps, activities linked to study groups based on Hal Koch's texts, and on the theme of democracy, were also documented. Examples of this include reports from the Stabrand and Tirstrup camps, where it was noted that: "All young people participate in the study group "What is democracy?" for two hours a week."[42]

However, reports also indicate that these study group activities were carried out to varying degrees of success. This must be seen in light of the specific context of the refugee camps, which could highlight ambiguous outcomes in democratic learning, as described by one participant: "The female teachers at the vocational school were taught about democracy by a Dane no more than 24 years old, and he was often cornered by the brash matrons with questions concerning the contradictions between theory and practice."[43]

Karl Blutau, who for a period served as cultural manager in the Esbjerg area, reflected in a report on cultural work on the educational activities related to democracy. He described his encounter with resistance to the overall effort and even questioned the feasibility of pursuing such educational initiatives: "As for the establishment of the Hal Koch study circles, I can refer to my previous report from the Esbjerg district. As in that case, after detailed discussions with German colleagues, I have formed the impression that there is no interest among camp residents in discussing the problems of democracy behind barbed wire under the guard of machine guns."[44]

He notes, however, that there was considerable interest among the refugees in knowing what was happening in the wider world. The same issue is highlighted in a report by a Danish leader of another study group on democracy: "20 April 1946. (...) Today things came to a head, prompted by Hal Koch's short chapter on freedom—a sensitive subject in this cramped camp, where they have now been

confined for a year. 'Why do we have to stay here? Why can't we at least go out and do some work, dig our own peat, help the farmers?"[45]

That the task of carrying out these activities could be challenging is thus evident in the various reports from the committee. Discussing the concept of 'freedom' as Koch's text suggested, must have appeared paradoxical to a refugee who lived under the circumstances of camp-life that defined their everyday experience. This points to evident limitations of the educational activities. A report on study group work in the camp Karrebæksminde provides a more elaborate example of this which will be investigated below.

PROCESS AND CONTENT IN A STUDY GROUP

As described, the aim of the study group format was to contribute to democratic education through thematically based activities that sought to involve participants in discussions and reflection through dialogue. However, the study group activities themed around democracy could create tensions among the refugees and were carried out to a varying degree of success which is illustrated by the examples above. Democracy was a subject that could provoke a multitude of different opinions and strong reactions because of the philosophical and political wounds that were inflicted by Nazism and the Second World War. It is important to remember how the refugees had been subject to strong cultural propaganda and political messaging over the last couple of decades in Germany. The conditions for teaching and learning in the refugee camps were not exactly ideal which did not help matters, it is understandable that such study circles could be fraught with conflict. This becomes evident when reading a report from the Karrebæksminde camp prepared by a study group leader who served there.[46]

The refugee camp in Karrebæksminde was relatively small and existed only for a short period of time. The leader of the study group, a provost responsible for the group between May and August 1946, details in his account that it was important to earn the participants' trust and to ensure that they felt able to express themselves freely without fear of consequences, something he suggests was achieved relatively quickly. Regarding the participants in this particular group, he reports an average attendance of around thirty refugees, with women outnumbering men roughly two to one; most were between thirty and fifty years of age, although a few were older.[47] The meetings lasted between one and a half to two hours. He continues: "As might be expected, the study group largely represented the more mature and intellectually engaged segment of the camp's population. Among the participants were a university professor, who took part in leading the

group, an engineer, a teacher, two farmers, a foreman, several female teachers, two officers' wives, the wives of a doctor, a dentist, and a clergyman, as well as two nurses and several middle-class housewives. Most were from urban backgrounds."[48] He further notes that many of the participants held types of responsibility within the camp, including roles such as teachers, sanitation workers, and block leaders. One of the participants, a German professor, assisted the Danish official in leading the group.[49]

Regarding the participants' attitudes, he reported that he did not detect any overt expressions of Nazism. As the group included several individuals entrusted with responsibilities within the camp, this was perhaps to be expected. Hal Koch's articles were used as the basis for discussion, and they proved to provide a productive starting point for many conversations.[50] However, he noted that the participants were more concerned with the practical aspects of democracy rather than the more philosophical and abstract dimensions of the political doctrine, such as the concept of 'freedom' and its inherent meanings. Each session began with the leader presenting a section of a Hal Koch article, which some participants had read in advance. The professor then provided a summary, after which the floor was opened for discussion. Following the discussion, the leader summarised the session and outlined themes for the next meeting. At the first meeting of the circle, the discussion focused on the issue of Germany's guilt and responsibility for the war. While the participants did not defend Nazism, the leader nevertheless experienced: "... a certain distrust of democracy and a pronounced tendency to defend Germany by shifting as much of the blame as possible onto others. (...) The professor's view was that the other powers had not given Germany a fair chance when, under the Weimar Republic, it was genuinely seeking to build a democracy, and they had thereby paved the way for Hitler."[51]

As study circle leader, the provost saw this debate as unfruitful in relation to the goal of the exercise. In light of this, when the circle gathered for the second time, he stated:

"... some remarks about the purpose of the circle (...) I then gave several stark examples of German injustices and cruelties in Denmark, including accounts recently shared with me by a personal acquaintance, and explained that it was against this background that we must understand our task and, through cooperation, seek a new and better way forward. This made a certain impression and helped to curb the tendency towards self-defence."[52]

He followed up on this approach in the ongoing efforts of the circle:

"In the subsequent meetings, where I sought to clarify democratic principles, the discussion readily turned to current and contentious issues (...). At the end of Hal Koch's series of articles, he addresses the fundamental ideas on which democracy rests: law, freedom, and human dignity. This gave rise to discussions about broader outlooks on life. I sought to show that democracy as such is merely a form, the content of which is determined by the spirit of the people (...). This was met with lively support and no objections from those present."[53]

Following the completion of the study group, the provost goes on to describe how two new groups meant for young people were established and led by former participants of the initial group: one of the groups focused on democracy, which was led by the professor, and another on Goethe, was led by a woman. The study group leader noted that:

"... at least some of the participants in the study group at the Karrebæksminde camp left with an impression of a view of life and society that stood in stark contrast to that from which they had come, and of a human outlook that made them more open."[54]

CONCLUSION

The sources describing the study circles on democracy that were planned by the Refugee Administration illustrate several key aspects of the endeavour. On the one hand, they describe how study circles were implemented, how they were intended to function, and finally how the underlying ideas of the project were aimed at fostering democratic learning. On the other hand, they describe the challenges of such activities in a refugee camp setting and how it affects dialogue, learning, and reflection which was apparent when the accounts of the participants were included. The sources unfortunately do not document the extent to which the study circles were implemented across all Danish camps; the number of available accounts are limited and represent only individual perspectives. However, reports from the inspectors and cultural leaders in the camps make it reasonable to assume that many refugees either participated with genuine interest or at least became aware of the theme and format of such activities. This positive engagement is also reflected in participants' accounts, as illustrated in the examples above.

The sources indicate that, despite the contradictions—or perhaps because of them—the study groups functioned largely as intended by providing a space in which opinions could be exchanged and the nature and potential of democracy could be discussed. The strong views that could emerge in these debates are also

evident in the accounts, and leading such study groups was undoubtedly not always an easy task. However, the activity could also make a positive contribution to everyday camp life. One refugee later wrote that: "The lectures were of key importance for coexistence and for the German administration of the camp on a democratic basis."[55]

It is difficult to assess the long-term role of the study group activities in terms of how much the refugees took the lessons to heart and brought democratic ideals with them back to Germany. However, the activities undoubtedly provided meaningful engagement and distraction for the refugees in an everyday reality that was characterised by uncertainty, isolation, and the absence of family and homeland. As the study group leader puts it in his account: "How much of this will bear fruit in the future no one can know, but through the cultural work in the refugee camps Denmark has at least made a modest contribution to addressing what is perhaps the most important and difficult problem in Europe today: the building of a new, democratic, and peaceful Germany."[56]