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The paper is an outline of my recently started project on the relationship between mediated public discourse and political decisions on immigration issues in Scandinavia from 1970-2015.

The three countries first experienced immigration at slightly different times – Sweden first, Norway last. Thus, Sweden had a head start became a supplier of experience and ideology for the other two.¹ During the period from 1970 until today, public debate on immigration developed differently in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, three otherwise so similar countries, and so were their immigration and integration policies.

The aim of my sub-project is to study the relationship between the public debate on immigration, including contributions to the debates from various arts (literature, documentaries feature films etc.), and political decisions on the issue. In a deliberative democracy, public discourse should provide a basis upon which citizens and politicians should make informed decisions. The views of the public should be relevant to policy-making. However, governments are free to listen to the public opinion or not, and to take a negative, affirmative or indifferent attitude towards it. Although the Internet and social media have made it easier for people to communicate their views publicly, this does not necessarily mean that it has become easier for the public to influence decision-makers and policy. Perhaps it was easier for politicians to notice and give attention to feedback from the public thirty years ago, when the communication channels were fewer?

The project seeks to understand of this relationship by asking the following research questions:

- How, under which conditions, might what goes on in the mediated public sphere – including input from culture and art – impact on decision-making in the area of immigration policy.
- Is immigration policy related to a degree of consensus, and if so, what characterizes such a consensus?
- To which extent are decisions informed by the arguments of organized minority groups, think tanks, and scientific experts?
- What are the differences between the Scandinavian countries in the politicians' handling of the public debate on the topic, and how may we explain the prospective differences?
- How has the relationship between the debate and the policy developed over the past 45 years?

The scope of the study will be twofold: comparative and historical. It is a qualitative and primarily an empirical study: Through observational fieldwork in the Scandinavian ministries of immigration and justice, analyses of parliamentary debates on immigration and, not least, through interviews with current and former civil servants and politicians working with immigration policy, the project seeks a better understanding of these mechanisms.

¹ Brochmann, Grete & Anniken Hagelund (2012): *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare State 1945-2010*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, p. 227