

Practising civil society. Philanthropic investment in 20th century Denmark

Abstract ;

Since the beginning of the 1990's, civil society has attracted both scholarly and political interest as the 'third sphere' outside the state and the market, strongly amplified by the sectorial conceptualization of state, market and civil society. In contrast, this article shows that civil society is and have never been a pre-existing location separated from state and market. Its boundaries are constantly produced through practices interweaving political, economic and moral components. This will be studied through an exemplary Danish historical case of the Egmont Foundation 1920-2014. The study shows how different and changing philanthropic investments practices took part in producing distinction between state, market and civil society by demarcating categories of deserving and undeserving needy as part of the "common good" through changing donation practices and organisational forms. As a consequence, we can trace ongoing re-distributions of power relations in society over time. The developing of a post-sectorial concept of civil society is two-fold; First, by showing how political, economic and moral components are interlinked through the negotiation of the "common" and the "good". Second, by showing how these interlinks and transgression constantly re-distribute power relations in society and in turn creates possibilities and limits for actions both in past, present and future.