Abstract:

Throughout more than two decades changing governments in Denmark have been cultivating a certain role for civil society organizations by emphasizing the legitimacy of voluntary social work as part of the “solution” to maintaining a certain level of social service provision in a hard-pressed welfare state. At the same time, political and public actors praise the civic virtues and democratic benefits of voluntary work. In this article, we place these contemporary trends in a historical context and present data from a long-term ethnographic study that explore one of the organizational forms on the rise in the current civic landscape. We demonstrate, that while this organizational form, termed “program volunteering”, aptly navigate the turbulent, welfare oriented, institutional environment, the space for civic action is limited. On these grounds, we question the public celebration of civic virtues as an indisputable outcome of voluntary work.

Keywords:
Program volunteering, civic action, hybrid organizational forms, virtual volunteering, ethnography.