

ABSTRACT

From Neoliberal Restriction to Control of Roma Population. Czech System of Social Protection and Disappearance of Social Citizenship.

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Equal position in society – and the ability to claim citizenship rights – is shaped by the feelings of recognition. This thesis examines the process of the disappearance of social citizenship in the Czech Republic, a gradual change in the social protection system targeted to poor and low-income households, which deprives poor people not only of an economic protection but also of their equal status and recognition.

2004–2012 reforms reduced the Czech system of social protection of poor and low-income households to a conditional and stigmatizing system, similar to countries that embraced a neoliberal approach to social policies. This thesis focuses on the “post-neoliberal” development of these systems in the following decade. The period is characterized by a greater involvement of politicians representing regions with higher proportion of inhabitants facing economic insecurity. In most cases, however, the involvement of these players did not reverse the restriction of social policies but rather accelerated and strengthened it.

The thesis examines how the construction of social benefits (especially social assistance scheme) became part of a struggle over control, social status and feeling of dignity in the Czech post-industrial periphery. The debates still follow the neoliberal categories of deservingness, but rather than labour market inclusion, the main goal of legislative changes is the strengthening of municipal power over the behaviour and movement of benefit recipients-Roma. The distinction between the undeserving poor (Roma) and the “decent” citizens legitimizes further restrictions of the system. The social system that is no longer understood as a tool of social protection is turning into a tool of a proactive border-making and racialized hierarchisation between different groups of inhabitants experiencing economic insecurity.