
Social development and social contradictions in Southern China's industrialization

Chiara Pollio*¹

¹EmiliaLab – The network of the departments of Economics of Emilia Romagna Region; Dept. of Economics of the University of Ferrara; c.MET05 - National Centre for Applied Economic Studies (Italy): <http://www.cmet05.it> – Italie

Résumé

The process of continuous industrialization in China raises a series of concerns in terms of social and environmental sustainability. Chinese industrial growth - and its contradictions - is the result of the planning efforts of its governments, in interaction with international capitals, to pursue the country's growth and structural change (Di Tommaso et al., 2013; Nolan, 2012). However, China's industrialization pattern acquires also a general interest in that it largely sustains the current model of consumption at the global level. In fact, to sustain the global production/consumption structure, some Chinese industrial clusters have become the centre of production and export of specific product niches or entire sectors. On the side of global consumption, some of these goods are considered strategic to foster inclusive and sustainable development. This is for instance the case of ICT, which is considered to empower people and communities by fostering their agency. However, ICT is also a result of specific production processes that involve workers, capitals and territories, which may come at – sometimes high – social and environmental costs (NLC, 2009), although these aspects remain a mostly neglected issue.

This paper stems specifically from the urgency of shading some light on the social sustainability and social contradictions that arises in these places of production, and Southern China clusters offer a peculiar point of observation in this regards. Our analysis focuses on the case of Dongguan city, in Guangdong Province, which is a core area in the global production of ICT (Zhou et al., 2011). This city's industrialization was mainly led by FDI to serve international ICT market, and the degree of industrial specialization has been fostered by a Guangdong Province-level industrial specialization policy – the Specialized Township program (Barbieri et al., 2012; Di Tommaso et al., 2019). With this paper, we aim at understanding under what conditions specializing in ICT products pays to a territory in terms of socially sustainable development, and we analyze a series of aspects, based on data and information gathered through fieldwork and data mining processes, including innovation, social clash and class struggle, environmental pressures, urban development and poverty.

References

Barbieri, E. Di Tommaso, M.R. & Bonini, S. (2012). Industrial development policies and performances in Southern China: Beyond the Specialized industrial cluster program. *China Economic Review*, 23(3) 613-625.

*Intervenant

Di Tommaso M.R., Pollio C., Barbieri E., Rubini L. (2019), *Chinese industrialization, planning and policies: local growth and global equilibria*. In Bianchi P., Ruiz Duran, C., Labory S., (2019), *Transforming industrial policy for digital age: production, territories, and structural change*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, forthcoming

Di Tommaso, M. R., Rubini, L., & Barbieri, E. (2013). *Southern China. Industry, Development and Industrial Policy*. London and New York: Routledge.

NLC (National Labour Committee) (2009). *High Tech Misery in China: The Dehumanization of Young Workers Producing our Computer Keyboards*, Pittsburg.

Nolan, P. (2012). China and the global economy. In *Charting China's Future* (pp. 55-64). Routledge.

Zhou, Y., Sun, Y., Dennis Wei, Y. H., & Lin, G. C. S. (2011). De-centering 'spatial fix'-patterns of territorialization and regional technological dynamism of ICT hubs in China. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 11(1), 119–150.

Mots-Clés: Southern China, clusters, social sustainability, ICT