Di Tommaso, Marco R.; University of Ferrara
pllchr@unife.it
Authors: Marco R. Di Tommaso, University of Ferrara and c.MET05 - National Centre for Applied Economic Studies
Chiara Pollio, University of Ferrara and c.MET05 - National Centre for Applied Economic Studies
Elisa Barbieri, University of Udine c.MET05 - National Centre for Applied Economic Studies
Lauretta Rubini, University of Ferrara c.MET05 - National Centre for Applied Economic Studies

Title: Industrialization in Southern China: achievements and limits in a sustainable development perspective

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. However, China's industrialization pattern acquires also a general interest in that it largely sustains the current model of consumption at the global level. To sustain the global production/consumption structure, some Chinese territories have undergone a process of rapid industrialization, urbanization and geographical polarization. As a response, some of the policy initiatives taken at the national and local levels currently seem to recognize the urgency to modify the current mode of production by making it more sustainable and place-based.

In this paper, we will focus on the industrialization experience of Southern China. In particular, we will analyze one of its most important policy initiatives to promote industrialization, the so-called the "Specialized Towns" Program. Starting in 2000, it encouraged the development and upgrading of a long list of industrial towns that have become global production hubs, where huge quantities of goods are manufactured to respond to the international demand. The extent to which such transformations trigger improvements in human development and societal wellbeing still needs to be debated.

In the paper, we will offer detailed and unique data on the program, analysing its role in promoting industrialization and growth. By using city- and county-level data, we will evaluate through quantitative parametric and non-parametric techniques to which extent "specialized towns"-based areas show different performances in terms of economic and innovation growth, on one hand, and social development, on the other, compared with similar neighbour areas. Our results suggest that, while such areas are success-cases for their industrial growth and performance, their achievements in terms of economic and social development are limited. With this paper, we wish to deeper the international scholars' knowledge about this mostly unexplored but very important policy initiative, and to contribute to the understanding of the limits of Chinese industrialization pattern on the side of sustainable development and social change.