

The business activity of the master craftsmen in South Tyrol

Master craftsman training is the highest professional qualification for 75 professions in South Tyrol. In addition to specialist and vocational pedagogical skills, the master craftsman training also aims to impart entrepreneurial and business knowledge and thus prepare students for self-employment and management tasks in companies. Based on comprehensive secondary data, the present study examines for the first time the structure and success data of the master craftsman enterprises and compares them with enterprises without this qualification. Do master craftsman companies employ more employees? Do they train apprentices more often? Do they export more frequently? Are master craftsman companies more productive? A survey of South Tyrolean consumers provides additional information on the awareness and image of master craftsman companies.

Of the 6,963 master craftsmen currently living in South Tyrol, 5,029 are younger than 65 and thus still of working age. Half of these people are self-employed and run a business. Looking at the development of the annual master craftsman titles, other further training courses are increasingly competing with the master craftsman training. While an average of 176 master craftsman's diplomas were awarded each year between 1991 and 2000, this number has declined significantly since then. Over the period 2001 to 2016, the average number of degrees is 96 per year. Even though the proportion of women has increased, most living master craftsmen in South Tyrol are still male (86.7 percent).

No fewer than 1,846 (21.7 percent) of the 8,500 "master craftsman enterprises", i.e. companies with activities for which training as a master craftsman is possible in South Tyrol, are in the hands of master craftsmen. The largest share of master craftsmen is found in food processing and wood processing. With an average of 4.7 employees, master craftsman enterprises are considerably larger than enterprises without a master craftsman's diploma (3.1). In addition, a much larger proportion of master craftsman companies (36.1 percent) train apprentices than non-master craftsman companies (14.7 percent). Master craftsman companies also export a little more frequently. However, if one compares master craftsman enterprises with non-master craftsman enterprises of the same size and activity, most of the differences in the success factors investigated disappear. Productivity differences are comparatively small.

The results of a survey show that many South Tyrolean consumers are familiar with the master craftsman training and often perceive a higher quality of the master craftsman companies. However, the fundamentally positive image of master craftsmen's enterprises is comparatively rarely reflected in the actual decision to select a craft enterprise. The following educational and economic policy conclusions can be drawn from the results:

- > Even if the results of the present study do not show any direct evidence that master craftsman enterprises are economically more successful, it is indisputable that this further training can supply a valuable component for a possible step into the independence. Therefore, it is

necessary, as already done before, to constantly question contents and modes to keep providing a high-quality and independent offer in the vocational training landscape, especially in view of the great competition in the sector of further training. However, if the title of master craftsman is to be more than just an offer of continuing training, this vocational qualification must (again) be given greater weight within the framework of the training.

- > Although the master craftsmen are already positively anchored in the consciousness of consumers, it is important to sharpen the image profile and to promote the advantages of the master craftsman companies even more strongly (e.g. regarding their specialist skills).