

What defines innovation in South Tyrol? In summer 2018 the IER - Institute for Economic Research of the Bolzano Chamber of Commerce - interviewed 32 stakeholders from public institutions, research centres and private companies in order to find out how they perceive innovation in the region. The summary of the interviewees' statements and opinions therefore adds to the quantitative data traditionally used to determine the degree of innovation in a region.

The answers to the following questions outline the main findings of the report:

- > **What does "Innovation" mean?** The answers by the interviewed provided different perspectives on the topic, depending on the sector and field of activity.
- > **How innovative is South Tyrol?** Whether South Tyrol is innovative or not, and in which areas, is assessed very differently. Throughout the interviews we observed various levels of innovation awareness: Public institutions regard South Tyrol as rather innovative, while companies and researchers tend to be more critical about the region's innovation capacity.
- > **How is innovation lived in South Tyrol?** In recent years, the South Tyrolean government has taken various steps to promote innovative activities by both defining a long-term innovation strategy (RIS 3) and passing legislation regarding innovation promotion. However, these documents are little known outside of the public service sector. Many representatives of companies and research institutes can't tell where the South Tyrolean innovation strategy is heading to and would welcome a more intensive exchange of information.
- > **What are the strengths and weaknesses of the South Tyrolean innovation landscape?** The high-quality vocational training and the creativity in crafts professions as well as the infrastructural development were rated very positively. In this context, great hopes are placed in the NOI Techpark which is expected to increase innovation awareness among the population. On the other hand, there are concerns about a rising skills shortage and a lack of "smart people", especially in technical fields. Furthermore, the complex and non-transparent funding procedures for innovation are criticised.
- > **What about traditions?** Traditions are important to the South Tyroleans and hence are to be preserved, at the same time everyone wants to and has to be innovative. Many of the interview partners are concerned with the

question of how to balance and manage this alleged contradiction between tradition and innovation.

- > **And now?** As expected, both the understanding of the term “innovation” as well as the perception of the degree of innovation differ widely among the interviewees. A further result of the study is that information on the regional innovation strategy and on funding procedures is asymmetrically distributed. This causes great uncertainty and hinders the region's innovation capacity. To close this communication gap and intensify cooperation in the field of innovation, companies and research institutions should be involved in the strategic planning to a greater extent.