

Strategic planning is a central governance instrument in public administration. It provides guidance on long-term goals and priorities, links different policy areas and contributes significantly to the coherence and transparency of planning processes. South Tyrol currently has a large number of planning documents on key issues such as climate, mobility and tourism. However, a systematic overall perspective and in-depth analysis have so far been lacking. Against this backdrop, the IER – Institute for Economic Research of the Chamber of Commerce of Bolzano, at the initiative of the South Tyrolean provincial administration and in collaboration with the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) Vienna, conducted a comprehensive in-depth analysis of 24 selected strategic planning documents of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano. The study focuses on the goals formulated in these documents, the measures envisaged, and their interdependencies. The analysis first examines the structure and formal quality of the goals and measures. Building on this, it examines the interlinkages within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), based on surveys of experts from public administration as well as academics from South Tyrol, Tyrol, and Trentino. Finally, the systemic effects of selected socio-economic and policy measures are assessed.

The analysis of the 24 examined planning documents, totalling more than 3,000 pages, reveals considerable heterogeneity – both in terms of the scope and structure of the documents and in terms of the formal quality and thematic focus of the objectives and measures formulated therein.

Goals in the Planning Documents

A total of 483 goals were identified, with the number varying widely across documents. The evaluation based on the three SMART criteria examined – specific, measurable and time-bound – reveals clear differences in formal quality: around half of the goals meet all three criteria and are therefore clearly formulated, verifiable, and time-defined. Around a further quarter meet two of the three criteria.

In terms of content, the goals are distributed relatively evenly across the three classic dimensions of sustainability. 178 goals (37%) relate to environmental issues such as climate and resource protection or biodiversity, 150 goals (31%) are economically oriented (including economic growth, productivity, innovation, resource efficiency), and 139 goals (29%) concern social aspects such as education, health, equality and participation.

Measures in the Planning Documents

Alongside the goals, the measures constitute the second core element within the planning documents. A total of 1,575 measures were identified, with the number again varying greatly between documents. Organizational and administrative measures account for the largest share (358 cases, 22.9%), followed by awareness-raising, educational, and preventive measures (344 cases, 22.0%). Infrastructure-related measures represent the third-largest group with 288 entries (18.3%).

The financial dimensions vary considerably as well: around two-thirds of all measures require an investment of less than €5

million, while only 2% require a budget of more than €50 million. The analysis of the linkage between goals and measures shows that 46% of the measures can be clearly assigned to a specific goal, while about 44% show no recognizable reference to an objective in the document. Another 10% (158 measures) are either linked to several goals or not clearly connected within the text.

Interdependencies between the UN Sustainable Development Targets in South Tyrol

Following the analysis of goals and measures, the study explores how the UN Sustainable Development Targets (SDG targets), as well as the goals formulated in the planning documents interact with one another – specifically, where do synergies arise, where do conflicts of interest occur, and which targets are particularly strongly interconnected. This analysis is based on a survey of experts involving representatives from public administration, academia, and research.

The results show that positive interdependencies between SDG targets predominate: about half of all examined target pairs exhibit a synergetic relationship, and a similarly large share is assessed as neutral. Conflicts between targets occur only in a few individual cases, for instance, between economic growth and environmental sustainability, or between the expansion of renewable energies and the protection of cultural and natural heritage.

The analysis of influence and dependency structures highlights clear differences between targets related to the three sustainability dimensions: social targets generally exhibit a low degree of dependency but a high level of influence on other

targets. Ecological targets tend to be more dependent on other targets, while still exerting noticeable systemic effects. Economic targets are mainly characterized by a high level of dependency, often assuming a stabilizing role within the overall system.

Overall, it is evident that South Tyrol's system of targets is characterized by synergies, but at the same time critical areas of tension, particularly between economic and ecological dimensions, remain.

When transferring the results of the SDG interdependency analysis to the concrete goals formulated in the examined planning documents, similar systemic patterns emerge: Social goals typically exert relatively high influence and low dependency. Economic goals are tendentially moderately influential but strongly dependent. Ecological goals exhibit the least amount of influence while displaying the highest dependency, indicating strong systemic embeddedness.

Systemic Effects of Selected Measures

The analysis of interlinkages also enabled an assessment of the systemic impact of selected measures. Four measures, drawn from the planning documents or the current economic policy debate, were evaluated by experts from South Tyrol, Tyrol, and Trentino: the expansion of the ultra-broadband network, the construction of a new railway connection in the Rhaetian Triangle, the construction of new water reservoirs, and a smoking ban in the city of Bolzano. These examples illustrate differing ranges and patterns of impact: while the expansion of the broadband network and the new railway line create broad synergies across several policy areas, the

construction of new water reservoirs generates both synergies and goal conflicts. The smoking ban, in contrast, shows very limited systemic effects.

Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of the 24 planning documents demonstrates that South Tyrol's planning landscape covers a wide thematic spectrum, though there are notable differences in how goals are formulated and linked to measures. Overall, the system of targets is marked by numerous synergies, while conflicts between targets occur only sporadically, such as in the area of tension between economic and ecological priorities. The assessment of selected measures also illustrates that their systemic effect varies significantly: some generate broad, interconnected effects, while others remain more limited in scope.

Two central recommendations for action emerge from the analysis:

1. Further develop planning quality

The results indicate that planning quality can be further improved through greater harmonization and precision:

- > **Standardize planning document structures:** Comparable formats improve clarity and facilitate cross-sectoral coordination.
- > **Ensure clear goal–measure logic:** A transparent linkage between goals and measures supports accountability and facilitates progress evaluation.
- > **Consistent application of SMART criteria:** Precise, verifiable, and time-bound formulations strengthen both steering capacity and evaluability.

- > **Consider systemic effects:** Since measures produce different effects on the overall system, it is essential to reflect on these interdependencies at an early stage.

2. Strengthen communication of the overarching strategy

Given the multitude of sectoral plans, improved communication of the overarching strategy could provide additional value:

- > Consolidate long-term visions and development goals,
- > Highlight thematic priorities to address key challenges in a targeted manner,
- > Make conflicting goals visible and enable prioritization in order to make decision-making processes even more transparent.