



Smart Specialization – The Tyrolean Path

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We live in a time of worldwide change. We try to understand and look for guidance. We feel the pace of development is accelerating making it hard for us to gain a foothold, to keep up. Our values are challenged.

Technological progress is changing the way we live and work. How should we respond to future industrial revolutions, such as Rapid Prototyping which gives everyone the opportunity to design and print daily use products at home? How to react to advancements in digital technologies? – What will be possible in medicine, especially neurology?

How are we going to face the big global challenges of the years to come, such as climate change, demographic development, globalisation, natural disasters and ‘rural exodus 2.0’, which does not stop at the Alps? Quite on the contrary, the Alpine regions are more affected by it. Developments are felt earlier and the magnitude of a single shock will be bigger than in the urban areas.

How to act and how to react? Are we castaways clinging to the plank left at the mercy of the roaring sea?

Or are we rather the experienced pilot cutter ploughing resolutely through rough waters leading the way for others to follow?

Personally, I clearly prefer the latter image. We are influenced and changed by challenges. Let’s take this chance and change ourselves!

Tyrol is one of the nine Austrian Federal States and is home to 715.00 residents on an area of 12.640 km², of which only 12 per cent is suited for permanent settlements. Tyrol is internationally known as tourist destination. 44 million overnight stays last year seem to justify this perception. Tyrol, however, is also a dynamic centre of business and research having supported and collaborated with companies, research and educational institution for the past 15 years. Tailor-made programmes to advance research and development made possible highly sophisticated centres of excellence and professorships at the Tyrolean Universities and Technical Colleges. Especially in the fields of mechatronics, life sciences, IT, renewable energies and wellness the cooperation of business and research generates innovative products and services.

In order to meet the future challenges, Tyrol had to bring its two “identities” together; tourist destination and centre of business and research have to be united under one brand. Moreover, Tyrol’s reputation as tourist destination and its expertise in this respect is absolutely suitable to make the region of Tyrol one of the smartest in the Alps, which clearly faces the global challenges and provides exemplary solutions.

The ambitious goal is to turn Tyrol into the most desirable Alpine ‘place of energy’ through Smart Specialisation. Based on its reputation as tourist destination, Tyrol is developing into an authentic place brand. Tourism, commerce and research are the main industries to achieve this brand recognition. Tyrol builds on its strengths in tourism, business and research, e.g. in the sectors of energy efficient building, health, renewable energies, travel in Alpine areas, handling of natural disasters, telecommunication and nutrition. Here is one example: Within the scope of the EU project Sinfonia, Innsbruck, together with Bozen, is presently becoming a pilot city for energy efficiency, low CO₂ consumption and, therefore, a city of higher living standards through the collaboration of companies and research facilities. Linking various special knowledge fields creates new products, services and procedures with unique selling points, which will be very helpful to master the challenges of the future. By combining Tyrol’s strong brand with its excellence in research, development and innovation, an internationally visible unique selling point is created that will be noticed far beyond the region. Smart and sustainable growth is not only a slogan, but an inherent part of the Tyrolean economic policy.

The specialist and technical know-how needed for this project is provided by basic as well as application-oriented research at the six Universities and Technical Colleges, e.g. the Department of Biotechnology, of Medicine or of Physics. Innovative transfer and cooperation models allow small economic systems, such as the Tyrolean, access to know-how. Business as well as research benefit from this close collaboration in clusters and so influence the economic development: Economic development embedded in the system of "integrated location management" does not only count on the implementation of regional measures, but rather focusses on the "creation of conditions" to advance regional networking.¹

This process also challenges the Tyrolean regions as they have to develop core competencies, have to excel and to understand how to build the brand 'Tyrol'. Tyrolean research facilities and companies, for example, have great potential in the sector of energy efficiency, which is also partly due to Tyrol's credibility in this matter. Tyrol's special geographical position and its characteristics as tourist destination make it especially suitable to become a model region for modern travel. The valleys of Tyrol seem to be ideal for this purpose.

The impetus and the energy for such a project always have to come from the region itself. Regional endogenic potentials must be used and carefully combined to create something new. This new approach stands out for its clearly defined outline, its uniqueness and distinctiveness.

Flagship projects like this generate the appeal necessary to secure work and income for the people of Tyrol, but also attract companies and experts from abroad.

The essence of the "Tyrolean path" can best be described by Simon Anholt's '3S': Strategy, Substance and Symbolism. In the case of Tyrol, strategy means to develop solutions for the big challenges, with focus on tourism. Strategies require substance. Just to talk about it is not enough. Specific activities are needed. New travel plans, information systems or energy technologies to reduce CO₂ emission are developed within the scopes of our clusters and networks. By combining technologic excellence and tourist know-how, we develop successful projects for the future. These symbols strengthen the brand 'Tyrol' and help to further its powerful position within the Alpine world. Presently, we are working on concepts and projects regarding energy autonomous tourist destinations, travel in Alpine regions and medical tourism.

John Schaar's statement also applies to Tyrol: "The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made. And the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination."

¹ Cf. Bachinger, Pechlaner in Bachinger, Monika/Pechlaner, Harald/Widuckel, Werner - Regionen und Netzwerke; Kooperationsmodelle zur branchenübergreifenden Kompetenzentwicklung, Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag, 2011