Seattle: Ingenious Metropolis as a Guest in the Tyrolean Mountain Village

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During the Alpbach technology talks, Seattle was discussed as hot spot of the start-up scene.

No question: the numbers are impressive. Nearly half of Seattle's population has at least a bachelor's degree, while in Washington state, the concentration of mint (math, computing, science, technology) people is highest in the US. According to Forbes magazine, Seattle is one of the top 15 "most inventive" cities in the world: 4.25 patents were granted to 10,000 inhabitants in 2017. And in 2016, Washington was at the top of the league in terms of economic growth in the booming US economy.

The roots of this development are often attributed to the so-called "Boeing Bust" in the early 1970s. At that time, the aircraft manufacturer laid off more than half of its approximately 80,000 jobs within a few months. Subsequently, diversification was sought in the region, which should keep the well educated workers in the region. The University of Washington provided the right talent, followed by companies such as Microsoft and Amazon. In the meantime, critical voices are increasing - for example, against the influence of Amazon on politics.

For the biochemist Gustav Oberdorfer (University of Graz), Seattle's classification as an innovation center is "absolutely justified". Oberdorfer worked as a postdoc from 2012 to 2017 as part of a research project at the University of Washington. "As a hotspot for start-ups in the IT sector, it is certainly comparable to the Silicon Valley," said the researchers. "Of course this has to do with Amazon. Additionally Google has the second largest location there, and Microsoft is practically around the corner in Redmond, with 90 percent of the people I've met over there working in IT." In addition to the large companies Oberdorfer also mentiones another factor for the innovative power of Seattle: "There is the most open society in which I have ever lived." The society is much less conservative than in Austria.

He sees the rents as the downside of the boom discussed in Alpbach: "The rents are skyrocketing: in 2012, we paid $ 1580 per month for 15 square meters (1365 euros), and it's now doubling. Gentrification is advancing much faster in Seattle that affects all parts of the city center."

Even Andreas Pedroß-Engel sees Seattle ambiguous: The quality of life is indeed relatively high in the US comparison, but "significantly lower than in Austria." The graduate of Graz University of Technology has been conducting research at the University of Washington since November 2014. In 2017, together with colleagues, he founded the company Thruwave, which utilizes technology applications in logistics and ensures that, for example, there is actually the correct number of potentially mixed items in a package or warehouse. Seattle has a relatively large startup scene clustered in the many startup incubators. The proximity to high-tech companies is certainly helpful. Many start-up founders and employees used to work for the software giants and wanted to leave the corporate culture behind.

As one of the fastest growing cities Seattle is faced with problems: The city is overwhelmed by the increase in passenger traffic, the development of the urban railway is progressing slowly. (red, APA, 30.8.2018)

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