

ARTICLE

Evaluation of Ecclesial Innovations as Empowerment

Felix Eiffler

Abstract

The article introduces into the scientific evaluation of an ecclesial innovation programme initiated in 2015 by the Evangelical Church in Central Germany called *Erprobungsräume* (spaces of trial). By doing this, the text sketches the German socio-religious context and discusses the term “ecclesial innovation”. The main part of the article offers and debates the key findings of the evaluation undertaken from 2016 to 2023. The results show how an institution like a German regional church can undergo a broad transformation and what can be learned by this example for innovative church development in general as well as for the scientific evaluation of such a process. Finally, the article connects the evaluation of ecclesial innovation with the discourse on empowerment and outlines the potentials of more participative forms of empirical research as a kind of empowerment.

Keywords: Ecclesial innovation, Evaluation, Learning process, Secularity

1 Introduction¹

The *Missional Church Development* research unit (*Forschungsstelle Missionale Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung* – MKG) at the Centre for Empowerment Studies – Christian Empowerment in Secularity (*Forschungszentrum Christliches Empowerment in der Säkularität* – CES) at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg² is engaged in the scientific evaluation of ecclesial innovation programmes of the Lutheran-Evangelical Church of Saxony and of the Evangelical Church in Central Germany. These efforts towards church innovation are taking place against the backdrop of increasing

1 The text was written with the support of DeepL.

2 See www.ces-halle.de (11.4.24).

societal secularity. With the so-called *Erprobungsräume* (spaces of trial), the Evangelical Church in Central Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Mitteldeutschland – EKM) is looking for ways to be a church in new expressions that is welcoming people who have had no contact at all with the church or the gospel or no contact for a long time.³

The majority of people living in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic (where the EKM is located) do not belong to any church, denomination or religious community. As far as statistics and surveys show, only very few of these non affiliated people have any kind of private religious practice (EKD 2023a: 42–67 and 20–22).⁴ This secularized majority of society in turn exerts an influence on the religious minority (as “atmospheric pressure”, Müller, Pollack and Pickel 2013: 144). In view of the results of the sixth church membership survey (EKD 2023a: 16–39) and the consistently high number of people leaving the Protestant and Catholic Church in recent years (EKD 2024),⁵ the area of former West Germany is also increasingly developing into a secular society and so the German society as a whole (see Bertelsmann-Stiftung 2022).

On the other hand, do the results of the Religion Monitor 2023 show that “the majority of the German population can still be considered at least partly religious: Two thirds of those surveyed classify themselves as at least moderately or somewhat religious; three quarters at least believe in God, even if their faith is not very pronounced. The findings, therefore, do not reveal a clearly secularized society” (Bertelsmann-Stiftung 2022: 4). But if one compares the Religion Monitor’s results from 2013 with those from 2023 the general societal trend points towards a growing secularism in Germany. The proportion of people who state that they were brought up religiously has fallen from 45% to 38%. At the same time, belief in God has become less important: in 2013, 47% said they believed in God very or quite strongly – this dropped to 38%. The same applies for prayer: the proportion of the population who pray daily has fallen from 23% to 17% (Bertelsmann-Stiftung 2022: 3). According to the slightly more recent sixth church membership survey, this applies only for 11% of the population and in contrast 47% never pray at all (EKD 2023b: 18). This survey shows, that “a large majority of the population (68%) consider themselves neither religious nor spiritual.” (EKD 2023a: 25).

The evaluation and scientific monitoring of efforts to develop missional, contextual and innovative forms and new expressions of church should help to learn and better understand how a shrinking former so-called people’s church (*Volkskirche*) can

3 Both churches belong to the Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland – EKD).

4 In East Germany, 73% of people can be described as secular.

5 In 2023 some 380,000 people left the EKD.

develop sustainably under the conditions of secularity. This is not only a task for the church in eastern Germany, but for the whole country and beyond for large parts of Europe (Bertelsmann-Stiftung 2023: 1–3).

2 A Brief History of *Erprobungsräume* in Central Germany

The *Erprobungsräume* (EPR) were initiated in 2015. They were preceded by the realization that the previous efforts to organize the church had reached their limits and that the structures, as well as the legal and organizational framework conditions, were proving to be increasingly dysfunctional in the face of progressive dismantling. This realization was accompanied by an ecumenical learning, which was inspired by processes of missional and ecclesial innovation in France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Herbst 2006). Finally, a synodal discussion process lasting several years (2009–12) was carried out on the future contours of congregational and church development. The EKM was founded in 2008 through the merger of two formerly independent churches. The result of the discussion process was a twofold strategy: to continue the merger process that had already begun and at the same time to try out new approaches (Elhaus et al. 2024: 91–4; Elhaus and Hein 2023: particularly 56–66). In 2015, the *Erprobungsräume* programme was launched, which, according to § 1 of the EPR regulations (as of 2020), pursues two goals: On the one hand, “new forms of congregation in a secular context [and] other social forms of church are to be tested”. On the other hand, the projects are “important for the future development of the church” (EKM, 2020b).

This dual objective makes the EPRs exciting in terms of church theory, as they are not only about local trials and experiences, but also about the question of what conclusions the entire church, as a learning organization, draws from the insights of the EPRs. The topics and levels of possible conclusions are diverse and concern, for example, the allocation of financial resources, the organization of employment and service relationships as well as questions of church law.

The EKM’s willingness to learn from the individual EPRs regarding the overall church strategy reflects a learning attitude on the part of the church leadership, which has recognized that it is not just individual initiatives that are operating in trial mode, but the church as a whole. In this way, the EKM promotes the diffusion of the experimental approach and, thus, also the emergence of new ecclesial social forms in the entire church. Therefore, it fulfils a central criterion for innovation. The fact that the funding guidelines were adapted in 2020, and that church districts and parishes are now also supported in their experimental activities shows that this is successful (see Elhaus et al., 2024: 95–101). This brings us to the topic of ecclesial innovation.

3 What do we Mean by Ecclesial Innovation?

According to Tom Kelley (2016: 18–41), there are various ways or occasions for innovation: the misuse of an object (“crazy users” or “rule breakers”), trying out something new and unfamiliar or just observing people. Simon Sinek adds dissatisfaction (or frustration) as a further resource for innovation, as it can open up the possibility of improving a product, a concept, a way of doing things, etc (Sinek 2011: 1–7 and 38–50). By initiating the EPR, the EKM has already demonstrated the potential of dissatisfaction for innovation: Bishop Ilse Junkermann’s statement at the 2014 Autumn Synod that previous attempts to secure the life and ministry of the church had come to an end did not lead to resignation, but to a fresh start (Elhaus et al. 2024: 105–6). In addition, trying out new paths offers the church the opportunity to ask important and groundbreaking questions, as it now has to do many things for the first time or in a completely new way. This provokes the kind of questions that someone who has been doing something for a long time rarely or never asks. Questions like: How do people discover the beauty and relevance of the gospel for the first time? What can the church build on in communicating the gospel? What do people expect from the church? What do they fear?

Catholic theologians Matthias Sellmann and Florian Sobetzko describe the following pastoral-innovative three-step process: ideation + application + diffusion = innovation (Sobetzko and Sellmann 2017: 27–43 and 59–95).

Ideation is the idea, the new approach, the inspiration. Sellmann/Sobetzko emphasize that innovations are ideas and behaviours “that are perceived as new by the members of a social system, regardless of whether they are *objectively* new or not” (Sobetzko and Sellmann 2017: 64). Consequently, an idea does not have to be absolutely new and original to form the starting point of an innovation.

Application describes the examination of whether the idea can be implemented, is suitable or makes sense at all.

Finally, *diffusion* (spreading) is required, i.e. the sustainable implementation of the new idea, the “penetration of the market”, so to speak. The English theologian Michael Moynagh writes: “innovation is the modification of the ‘rules of the game’ so that church develops in new ways” (Moynagh 2017: 8). This quote makes it clear that an innovation does not only have to be new (at least in this context) but must be sustainable in order to be considered as innovation.

Andrew Root and Blair D. Bertrand warn against seeing effective innovation as *the* solutions to the church’s current challenges and problems. They discover in it the transfer of a secular paradigm to church development (Root and Bertrand 2023: 1–13). In doing so, they point to an important fact: Innovation is not an end in itself but should serve to enable the church to communicate the gospel with as diverse a range of people as possible under changing (and increasingly secular) conditions. To do this, the church must acquire new knowledge, try out new steps and learn

from the experiences of others. In this sense, we are talking here about ecclesial innovation. Efforts to innovate are in no way a substitute for a spiritual process of repentance and revival. Innovation does not replace the work of God's Spirit, but I am convinced that the Holy Spirit can (and might) use innovative action to awaken and renew his church.

4 Evaluation of Church Innovation – Key Findings

From 2016 to 2023, fifteen selected EPRs were evaluated by the Sozialwissenschaftliche Institut der EKD (Institute for Social Science of the EKD – SI) and the Institut zur Erforschung von Evangelisation und Gemeindeentwicklung of the University of Greifswald (Research Institute for Evangelism and Church Development – IEEG). From 2022, the MKG research unit has taken over the tasks of the IEEG. The research team (Philipp Elhaus, Felix Eiffler, Tabea Fischer, Michael Herbst and Niko Labohm) summarized the results of the first evaluation as follows: “Missional outward orientation and contextual reference as well as lived spirituality in various forms are the strengths of the Erprobungsräume” (Elhaus et al., 2024: 102). This makes it clear that the EPRs investigated partially live up to their own claims. The EPRs were evaluated on the basis of seven guiding criteria:

- (1) in them, the church of Jesus Christ comes into being anew;
- (2) they transcend the logic of the mainstream church in at least one of the following places: parish, full-time pastoral ministry, church building;
- (3) they reach the unreached with the gospel and invite them to follow Christ;
- (4) they adapt to the context and serve it;
- (5) they involve volunteers in a responsible position;
- (6) they open up alternative financial sources;
- (7) spirituality plays a central role in them (EKM 2020a: §1; see also Schlegel 2021: 30–6).

The EPRs evaluated fulfilled four out of seven criteria (2, 3, 4 and 7). They form different ecclesial expressions that are organized both interparish and transparish. Five types can be identified: (1) church “reloaded” (volunteer-based and socio-spatially oriented); (2) youth culturally oriented forms between network and church formation; (3) network-shaped Christian communities that offer experiences of a liquid church; (4) new church spaces (e.g. at schools); and (5) forms of conviviality with a communitarian core (e.g. housing projects in panel buildings) (Elhaus et al. 2024: 102–3). Amongst the initiatives are

- a social start-up;⁶

6 <https://pixel-sozialwerk.de> (25.04.2025).

- a form of monastic community of young families living in a former monastery;⁷
- housing projects with groups of Christian families and individual Christians living in panel buildings and developing ways of being church with those living next to them;⁸
- two middle-aged female musicians, who visit elderly people, sing songs and spend time with them;
- an organ academy;⁹
- different social-diaconal projects;¹⁰
- a social-cultural project, where kids and youth are trained in the field of art and creativity;¹¹
- a co-working space for entrepreneurs and start-ups;¹²
- as well as various forms of new expressions of Church;¹³
- and many more.¹⁴

Most of the EPRs evaluated succeed in communicating the gospel to people who are both unchurched and non-churched. In addition, the majority cooperate with (church and non-church) partners in the social space. Finally, lived spirituality is a resource: “The central role of spirituality forms the common mark of the projects and expresses their catholicity as well as their public representation as a Protestant church” (Elhaus et al. 2024: 102).

At the same time, there are also weaknesses: Only some of the EPRs evaluated succeeded in acquiring alternative funding and for “half of the projects, the fund-raising criterion proved to be dysfunctional” (Elhaus et al. 2024: 103). The participation of volunteers in responsible positions takes place, but there is room for improvement and falls short of the expectations of the criteria. After all, a third of the EPRs examined are led on a voluntary basis.

Since 2023, the SI has carried out an annual monitoring of all EPRs (as far as possible) and the results of the first survey from September 2023 supplement and expand the picture of the first evaluation. Concerning the acquisition of alternative funding, it can be seen that – contrary to what the results from the first round initially suggested – a larger proportion of the EPRs surveyed (n=32) do succeed in finding

7 <https://800-jahre-kloster-dambeck.de> (25.04.2025).

8 <https://www.senfkornd-stadtteilmission.de> and <https://www.stadtteileben-gotha.com/community> (28.04.2025).

9 <https://www.orgel-akademie.de/willkommen.html> (25.04.2025).

10 <https://www.eckstein-stendal.de> and <https://jesus-projekt-erfurt.de> (28.04.2025).

11 <https://www.villa-wertvoll.de> (25.04.2025).

12 <https://gruenderhaus.bartho.org> (25.04.2025).

13 <https://www.herzschlag.me/start.html> (25.04.2025).

14 <https://www.erprobungsraeume-ekm.de/die-initiativen/> (25.04.2025).

alternative sources of funding. This also applies to the involvement of volunteers: seven EPRs are run entirely by volunteers, eight have volunteers involved in their leadership and a further eight have subdivisions managed by volunteers.

These results are confirmed by a study on the impact orientation of the EPR, which the MKG conducted in spring 2024 under the direction of Tabea Fischer. The results on finances and volunteering are more of a by-product of the survey but offer a helpful addition to the monitoring results. 21 EPRs took part in the survey on impact orientation.¹⁵ Of these EPRs, only one receives more than 45% of its finances from the EPRs fund. In 11 of the EPRs surveyed, more than half of the available funds do not come from church sources, but from different foundations, private donors and public funds. The team composition also presents a heterogeneous picture:

More than half of the [surveyed] EPRs (n = 11) stated that they tended to be organized on a full-time basis (with voluntary support), the second largest group (n = 5) affirmed that they tended to be organized on a voluntary basis (with full-time support), and two EPRs each described themselves as being organized entirely on a voluntary basis or entirely on a full-time basis. (Fischer, Tabea and Eiffler 2024: 6).

An interesting finding about criteria 3 and 5 is that people from the target group are part of the team in two thirds of the EPRs surveyed.

Overall, the first evaluation has shown that criterion 1 is more difficult to fulfil than expected. There are probably various reasons for this, not least the fact that the term “church of Jesus Christ” (German *Gemeinde* i.e. congregation) is complex – both theologically and in terms of church law (see Hermelink 2018). The evaluation makes it clear that the development of new expressions of church is demanding and takes longer than expected, so that “the EKM would be well advised to make the first the seventh criterion and thus follow the Anglican logic of fresh expressions of church, which places the new form of church at the very end of the missionary process” (Elhaus et al. 2024: 105–6). At the same time, the diversity of ecclesial expressions that have emerged under the EPR label shows that the “potential of the projects to foster new expressions of church is considerable” (Elhaus et al. 2024: 102).

15 Regarding the sample, Tabea Fischer writes: “As participation in the survey was voluntary and therefore not random, it can be assumed that the sample cannot be considered representative of the population of the EPRs: If EPRs who found the topic interesting or relevant were more likely to participate in the survey, the results would be biased in favor of impact orientation. [...] The results of the survey should therefore not be classified as representative and generalizable, but rather as exemplary and exploratory, whereby the patterns and correlations found nevertheless point beyond the data.” (Fischer 2024: 3).

5 Evaluation of Church Innovation as an Ecclesial Learning Process

The dual objective of the EPR (see EKM 2020b: §1) identifies the potential of the EPR for the whole church and assumes that the insights gained at project level are not only relevant for this specific context and its framework conditions but can also be used strategically at church level and offer insights for theory of church development.

The very fact that the church is having the process of testing extensively and permanently evaluated and scientifically monitored shows the church's self-image as a learning organization that is – in contrast to the logic of an institution – not just given, but is in the process of becoming and (further) developing.¹⁶ This corresponds to the organizational logic of the church and Michael Herbst discovers an assistance function of the institution, which supports the church as an organization in trying out new forms of ecclesial expressions (Elhaus et al. 2024: 108–9). To this end, the institution provides human and financial resources and offers a legal framework that opens up opportunities and helps to circumvent some laws in certain areas – as provided by the EKM's Testing Act (*Erprobungsgesetz*), which was passed by the Synod in November 2023 (EKM 2024). Michael Domsgen points out that the assistance function of the church goes beyond testing: "It aims to support the communication of the gospel in various social forms" (Domsgen 2021: 38). Like innovation, the church as an institution does not have an end in itself but is intended to help communicate the gospel. That is its purpose, function and task.

Concerning the results of the first evaluation, Herbst mentions two aspects of the EPR that are relevant for church-wide action:

1. The EPRs show that "even relatively large and old institutions can at least partially reinvent themselves and have the courage to experiment" (Elhaus et al. 2024: 104). An institution that acts in this way fulfils its mission and supports individual Christians in sharing their faith in a variety of ways and under changing conditions, and in bearing witness to what they have "seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).
2. The EPRs "show the way for a much smaller and poorer Protestant Church to be a witness to the Gospel in the future, to be close to the people and to try out life in faith together with them" (Elhaus et al. 2024: 104). The church is changing, but that does not mean that it ceasing to exist, nor that it can no longer fulfil its mission. The EPRs show that even a smaller and poorer church has the mission to "proclaim the message of God's free grace to all people" (Barmen 6). In this sense, the Protestant Church is and remains the people's church (*Volkskirche*).

16 "The evaluation clearly shows that and how the program level sees and acts as a learning organization. Intensive process observation, reflection loops, a culture of feedback and the ability to take criticism as well as follow-up management characterize the process of the past seven years. The central role is the assistance function for the processes in the project" (Elhaus et al. 2024: 100).

6 Evaluation of Church Innovation as a Scientific Learning Process

The willingness to learn not only characterizes the church in its efforts around the EPR, but also concerns the scientific research. In the first phase (2016–23), the research was more of a (summative) evaluation in the narrower sense, which used the seven criteria to examine the extent to which the EPRs evaluated live up to their self-imposed standards, what helps them to do so (success factors) and where challenges arise.

The partners involved (EKM, SI and MKG) used the conclusion of the first evaluation phase to evaluate the evaluation itself. It became clear that an adapted approach was required, as the challenges were diverse and their possible management complex: “Instead of a broad-based ‘all-round evaluation’, future research should be leaner, more flexible and more dynamic, and take a more formative or responsive approach” (Elhaus et al. 2024: 112). This makes it possible to react better to current developments and changes as well as to results. This requires intensive and intentional communication between the various stakeholder groups and all persons and levels of action involved (see Döring and Bortz, 2016: 981–3). In view of these framework conditions, the SI and MKG teams have focused on the “dialogue and learning” function of evaluation (Döring and Bortz, 2016: 987).¹⁷ The significance of this function has become increasingly important over the course of the first phase and it is now to be considered methodically and structurally in the second phase.

In terms of methodology, further research is to become more diverse and will from now on consist of three elements: a) annual monitoring based on the seven criteria, b) an annual focus study with changing focal points, and c) an accompanying reflection on the findings in terms of church theory.

In addition, new structures and formats for dialog and discussion are created and used:

- In an annual workshop, the results of the monitoring and focus studies are discussed and interpreted as well as conclusions are drawn for further support.
- The reporting system is adapted so that the results are accessible to the management and program level as well as the local initiatives.
- The results are regularly presented and discussed in the form of presentations and short texts at various levels of the church (e.g. church administration and synod, steering committee and advisory board as well as the projects).
- A representative of the steering committee is a member of the cross-institutional evaluation team.

17 The other functions are: Optimization, decision-making, legitimation, insight.

- The extent to which further education formats such as the Winter Schools can be further developed and used as spaces for dialog and learning is also being examined.

The development outlined above shows that the evaluation of the EPR has been developed into a comprehensive scientific support that takes into account both the complexity of the subject matter and the associated need for a multi-perspective approach. It also reflects the realization that learning processes are necessary at all levels: project development, church management, and scientific reflection.

7 Evaluation of Church Innovation as Empowerment

The scientific support described above also shows an effort to empower people involved in the church at all levels. The research, which is geared towards dialog and learning, gives a voice to those who are involved locally in the projects or in church leadership. Their experiences are collected, arranged and processed. The experiences and findings on the ground can be used to learn something for other contexts and similar circumstances. Practical knowledge and approaches to solutions can be found locally and should be made visible and accessible through the evaluation. This acknowledges the skills of the local actors and enables them to make their own contribution to church development that goes beyond their specific location. By publishing the results, the local and contextual learning outcomes are in turn fed into the wider church theory discourse, which further increases their scope and enables their critical examination and further development.

During an evaluation, the question of objectives and assessment criteria cannot be avoided. By forcing these questions, evaluation stimulates discussion, creates new spaces for dialogue and brings different perspectives into conversation with each other. This helps to ask important questions, like:

- What goals are to be achieved through an innovation programme?
- Do the formally explicit objectives match the implicit objectives of the programme's participants? How are these goals pursued in the programme and project reality?
- How are they adapted if necessary?
- What are suitable strategies and steps to achieve them?

These questions need to be negotiated discursively, especially in the case of emergent programs that are designed for testing and therefore only become constituted during implementation. By asking about the actors involved, bringing them into dialogue with each other and taking their different perspectives seriously, evaluation empowers the groups of actors involved to participate in shaping and developing the church.

We know from learning theories that feedback is a prerequisite for learning processes. We learn from the consequences of our actions. In the course of an evaluation, this feedback is bundled under certain aspects and reflected into the entire church in the form of results – both at project and programme level. This enables everyone involved to reflect on their actions and, if necessary, adapt, readjust or optimize them.

The potential for empowerment of an evaluation as scientific support could be further developed in the direction of practice-based research or even participatory research (von Unger 2014). According to Hans Moser, practice-based research is a “scientific endeavor that is located at the interface between the scientific and practical system and aims to find mutual connections and makes them fruitful” (Moser 1995: 9). Sociologist Hella von Unger describes participatory research as follows:

Participatory research is a generic term for research approaches that explore and influence social reality in partnership. The aim is to understand and change social reality. This dual objective – the involvement of social actors as co-researchers and measures for individual and collective self-empowerment as well as empowerment of partners – characterize participatory research approaches. (von Unger 2014: 1)

In participatory research approaches, different interest groups and stakeholders are involved in the research to varying degrees of intensity and comprehensiveness. According to J. Bradley Cousins and Elizabeth Whitmore, three dimensions of participation can be distinguished:

- a) Control of evaluation process (from researcher controlled to practitioner controlled),
- b) stakeholder selection for participation (from primary users to all legitimate groups),
- c) depth of participation (from consultation to deep participation). (Cousins and Whitmore 1998: 10-17; von Unger 2014: 13–50).

The desired empowerment has a dual perspective: in addition to involving practitioners in the joint learning process and the utilization of local skills, participatory research also endeavours to empower co-researchers, enabling them to critically and reflectively perceive their own practice, obtain feedback and further develop and improve their own work.

8 Conclusion

To summarize, it can be said that scientific-evaluative accompaniment of church innovation processes offers a variety of learning opportunities that are relevant in

terms of church theory, church leadership and congregational development. In view of the current multilayered challenges of the Protestant Church, this approach to the church's situation offers the opportunity to develop constructive contributions that are based on both empirical-practical and theoretical-discursive foundations. The scientific research of ecclesial innovation makes thus its own contribution to theory formation.

Theologically, an exciting perspective can be discovered in this: "What if God creates something new during decline – and we are part of it? What if we not only experience an end (we undoubtedly do!), but also a beginning?" (Elhaus et al. 2024: 111). The church as *creatura verbi* is not dependent on external structures but is renewed in the midst of the profound change of these very structures (Root and Bertrand 2023: 37–80).

About the Author

Dr Felix Eiffler is head of the research unit for *Missional Church Development* at the *Centre for Empowerment Studies – Christian Empowerment in Secularity* at the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg (GER). He also works as ordained pastor in the Evangelical Church in Central Germany. Contact: felix.eiffler@theologie.uni-halle.de

References

- Bertelsmann-Stiftung. 2022. *Die Zukunft der Kirchen – zwischen Bedeutungsverlust und Neuverortung in einer vielfältigen Gesellschaft: Ergebnisse des Religionsmonitors 2023 – eine Vorschau*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus. Available at https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/Projekte/51_Religionsmonitor/Religionsmoni_kompakt_final2.pdf (28.04.2025).
- . 2023. *Religion Monitor Brief: Europe's religious landscape: Faith and religious diversity in an era of rapid change*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- Cousins, J. Bradley, and Elizabeth Whitmore. 1998. "Framing Participatory Evaluation": *New directions for Evaluation: Understanding and Practicing Participatory Evaluation* 80: 5–23.
- Domsgen, Michael. 2021. Wie weiter mit der Kirche? Fünf theologische Spotlights im Theater der Grundlegung und Handlungsorientierung von Kirche. *Evangelische Theologie* 81 (1): 25–39.
- Döring, Nicola and Bortz, Jürgen. 2016. Evaluationsforschung In Döring Nicola and Bortz Jürgen (eds.). 2016. *Forschungsmethoden und Evaluation in den Sozial- und Humanwissenschaften*. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 5th ed.: 975–1036.
- EKD. 2023a. *Wie hältst du's mit der Kirche? Zur Bedeutung der Kirche in der Gesellschaft: Erste Ergebnisse der 6. Kirchenmitgliedschaftsuntersuchung*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. Available at https://kmu.ekd.de/fileadmin/user_upload/kirchenmitgliedschaftsuntersuchung/PDF/KMU6_Auswertung_EVA_2024_WEB_FINAL.pdf (21.12.2024).
- . 2023b. *Wie hältst du's mit der Kirche? Zur Bedeutung der Kirche in der Gesellschaft: Erste Ergebnisse der 6. Kirchenmitgliedschaftsuntersuchung, Elektronischer Anhang 2: Tabellen-Anhang mit Grundauszählungen differenziert nach Konfessionszugehörigkeit*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. Available at https://kmu.ekd.de/fileadmin/user_upload/kirchenmitgliedschaftsuntersuchung/PDF/Anhang_Tabellen_Grundausz%C3%A4hlungen_der_6._KMU.pdf (21.12.2024).

- . 2024. "Mitgliederzahl und Kirchensteueraufkommen 2023 niedriger als im Vorjahr: Netto-Gesamtaufkommen an Kirchensteuern 2023 um 5,3 Prozent gesunken: Erwartungen an Kirche trotz abnehmender Kirchenbindung hoch." Available at <https://www.ekd.de/ekd-veroeffentlicht-mitgliederzahlen-2023-83806.htm> (08.05.2024).
- EKM. 2020a. "Förderrichtlinie für den Fond 'Erprobungsräume'." Available at <https://www.kirchenrecht-ekm.de/document/47197> (23.04.2024).
- . 2020b. Ordnung "Erprobungsräume". Available at https://www.erprobungsraeume-ekm.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/20200928_ErprobungsraeumeO_2.0-rechtsfoermig.pdf (22.04.2024).
- |———. 2024. "6. Tagung der III. Landessynode der Evangelischen Kirche in Mitteldeutschland vom 22. bis 25. November 2023 in Erfurt, Drucksachen-Nr. 8.3/4B: Beschluss der Landessynode zu TOP 8.3 Kirchengesetz zur Erprobung neuer Strukturen." Available at <https://www.ekmd.de/asset/7f3Ed1F8TiGjgndsTBWLbg/ds-08-3-4-b-erprobungsgesetz.pdf?ts=1700940406818> (21.12.2024).
- Elhaus, Philipp, and Uwe Hein. 2023. "Kirche innovativ gestalten?" In Georg Hofmeister, Gunther Schendel and Carla J. Witt (eds). 2023. *Kirche neu denken – Kirche erproben: Auf der Suche nach neuen Formen kirchlichen Lebens*. Baden-Baden: Nomos: 55–80.
- Elhaus, Philipp, et al. 2024. "Das Erproben erproben: die Evaluation der Erprobungsräume in der Evangelischen Kirche in Mitteldeutschland", in Sandra Bils et al. (eds). 2024. *Erprobung empirisch: Resultate und Reflexionen im Kontext der Erforschung landeskirchlicher Innovations- und Erprobungsräume*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht: 91–126.
- Fischer, Tabea, and Felix Eiffler. 2024. "Wirkungsorientierung: Eine Erhebung in den Erprobungsräumen der Evangelischen Kirche Mitteldeutschlands: Ergebnisbericht." Available at https://ces-halle.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/MKG-Fokusuntersuchung_Wirkungsorientierung-in-EPR_Ergebnisbericht_ed.pdf (20.12.2024).
- Herbst, Michael. 2006. *Mission bringt Gemeinde in Form: Gemeindepflanzungen und neue Ausdrucksformen gemeindlichen Lebens in einem sich wandelnden Kontext*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.
- Hermelink, Jan. 2018. "'Gemeinde' – oder lieber doch nicht? Die 'fresh expressions of Church' markieren alte und neue Probleme mit dem Gemeindebild", *Praktische Theologie* 53 (1): 38–43.
- Kelley, Tom. 2016. *The Art Of Innovation: Lessons in Creativity from IDEO: America's Leading Design Firm*. 2nd ed. London: Doubleday.
- Moser, Heinz. 1995. *Grundlagen der Praxisforschung*. Freiburg i. Br.: Lambertus.
- Moynagh, Michael. 2017. *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology*. London: Wipf and Stock.
- Müller, Olaf, Detlef Pollack and Gert Pickel. 2013. "Religiös-konfessionelle Kultur und individuelle Religiosität: Ein Vergleich zwischen West- und Ostdeutschland", *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Psychologie* 65: 123–48.
- Root, Andrew, and Blair D. Bertrand. 2023. *When Church Stops Working: A Future for Your Congregation beyond More Money: Programs, and Innovation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- Schlegel, Thomas. 2021. "Kircheninnovation: Merkmale der Vor-Ort-Erprobungen" in Thomas Schlegel and Juliane Kleemann (eds). *Erprobungsräume: Andere Gemeindeformen in der Landeskirche*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Leipzig: 21–36.
- Sinek, Simon. 2021. *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Penguin.
- Sobetzko, Florian, and Matthias Sellmann. 2017. *Gründer*innen Handbuch: Für pastorale Start-ups und Innovationsprojekte*. Würzburg: Echter Verlag.
- Von Unger, Hella. 2014. *Partizipative Forschung: Einführung in die Forschungspraxis*. Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag.