



Effective Church Planting in Europe

The language may change with each generation but the formation of new Christian communities has been one of the features of the advancement of the gospel since the time of the apostles.

Church planting is often claimed to be the most effective form of evangelism, or the surest way to impact a community for God, yet can this claim be justified? And just what do we mean by effectiveness? Putting it in other words, how can we measure the effectiveness of church planting, especially in a challenging context like Europe?

In some parts of the world churches can be planted in a matter of weeks so church planters can easily evaluate their efforts. Church planting in Europe is often much harder, needing years to see fruit among the rocky ground. How can church planters measure the effectiveness of their work in these conditions? Reflecting on these issues led us at the Nova Research Centre to conduct a unique survey of church planting effectiveness in Europe.

Methodology and sampling issues

We contacted some 500 church planters across Europe making use of the eurochurch.net church planting database. Responses were gathered using a self-administered online questionnaire.

Our research looked at three principal questions:

1. Do European church planters use specific tools to measure the effectiveness of their church planting approach, and if so, which ones?
2. Do European church planters use specific tools to measure their own personal effectiveness, and if so, which ones?
3. Do European church planters use specific tools to measure the impact or influence of their church plant on the local community?

Further questions were added on prior training in church planting, the use of mentoring by church planters, training needs, their identification with missions, church denominations and church planting networks, as well as demographic questions.

In total 125 people responded to the survey. On average they have just under 12 years of experience of church planting. The sample included nationals from 18 different countries but there was a distinct Anglo-bias with one third of respondents being of British origin and one in six from the USA. However these church planters were working in 24 different European countries.

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EDITORIAL

Effectively Ignorant: Do European church planters measure impact as well as growth?

Gone are the days when the church used to be just the church! Once, it was safe to assume that a sizeable portion of Europe's population attended church. Today the crowds stay away and we observe the planting of missional churches, emerging churches, simple churches, mission-shaped churches, virtual churches, network churches, fresh expressions of church, healthy churches, multiplying churches, mobilising churches, transformational churches, youth churches, messy churches, night churches, motorway churches, and many others (including all the non-English language variants).

The creativity and energy of church leaders and planters deserves respect and is a partial explanation for the rapid multiplication and diversity of these new forms of the church. The forms adopted are clearly attractive to some Europeans and are frequently touted by their advocates as the best way of reaching societies which are themselves increasingly diverse, even fragmented.

The Vista team is committed to the study of the church, its missionary nature and its missionary task. This fact alone explains our interest in these more recent forms of the church. As a research centre we are, moreover, fascinated with how it might be possible to assess and measure the impact that these forms of the church have upon their members and upon the communities in which they are located. How, for example, can you measure the simplicity of a simple church? How much emergence must a church demonstrate before it is 'emerging'? Are there agreed standards for determining the levels of missionality of a church? How is 'freshness' to be measured and how expressive must the same church be? Who decides what the appropriate levels of

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saturation and engagement are for mobilising churches?

Of course, some will quickly dismiss the need to ask such questions on the basis that they are simply being obedient to the Holy Spirit in their church planting. Some readers will point to a prophetic word or a sense of inner calling as justification enough for what they are doing. However, genuine Christian research is a search for truth and stays close to the prophetic question 'Did the Lord really say?' Of course, it is easy to become obsessed with measuring levels of church activity and there are strong arguments in favour of simply allowing the church to be the church.

Yet, as an increasingly wide range of adjectives is used to qualify 'church', there is an accompanying need to assess the impact of these new forms of church. In fact, a first task might even be to see if the strap-lines that delineate one form from another can actually be justified. Jesus told a parable about a man setting out to build a tower and warned his listeners about doing so without first counting the cost. That suggests the need for planning and for research.

In recent years, church congregations have been able to take stock of progress using a variety of tools. Mission Action Planning is currently popular across the Church of England, Natural Church Development originated in the Protestant churches of Germany, the National Church Life Survey has been used in the UK and the Netherlands. However, none of these is either immediately or obviously appropriate to a new church-planting situation. Using them requires some adaptation and amendment and many church leaders will simply object that they are too busy leading their congregation to engage in this kind of thing.

The early stages of any new movement are typically chaotic and inevitably resist simplistic attempts to categorise or measure what they are doing. However, this cannot be used as an excuse to avoid addressing some of the questions that go to the heart of why and what is being done across these networks and streams of new church-planting initiative. Essential questions that every leader needs to be asking include 'What is the spiritual and missional impact of this new church?' and 'How different might this church be as a result of what we know about God's own missionary heart for the people we are called to serve?'

DJ

The question about affiliation revealed a significant diversity in the dataset with over 20 different church denominations, 12 mission organizations and over 20 local or international church planting networks. Nevertheless it should be noted that 24 of the respondents said they were associated with the Baptist Church and 19 were missionaries with the European Christian Mission. It should also be stated that 90% of respondents were male.

Preliminary results

1. The effectiveness of the church planting approach (Figure 1)

47% of respondents said they did use some sort of tool to evaluate the effectiveness of their church planting approach, though many seemed reluctant to specify it. The most popular tools (20 mentions) were simple quantitative measures: the number of church plants or groups, leaders trained, attendance, conversions, disciples, financial data and so on. Some use specific tools such as ChurchMetrics but most simply count heads.

The second most popular tool (13) was some sort of peer evaluation. This might be a formal evaluation with colleagues or leaders, monthly ministry reports, participation in a learning community or reflective practice. Other respondents (9) focus on the qualitative tools to assess the spiritual health of the new Christian community, the quality of discipleship, the development of leaders, and/or the spiritual health of participants. As one respondent put it, "Are authentic relationships built? Is love encouraged and practiced?"

Seven people used surveys to evaluate their work and four made specific mention of Natural Church Development (NCD). Seven others measure progress by reference to objectives, purposes or a vision statement, such as the strategic plan of the mission agency or Rick Warren's five purposes. Just one respondent saw the community around the church as a valid measure of the effectiveness of their strategy, citing the visibility, witness, reputation and integration of the church in the community as significant.

2. The personal effectiveness of the church planter (Figure 2)

Only 37% of church planters in this survey say that they consciously evaluate their own personal effectiveness. Most do this by measuring themselves against the objectives, purposes or vision statement of their mission or ministry (15 respondents). Some do this for themselves; others do it as part of their periodic evaluation with their leaders. Two measure themselves by a timesheet!

Quantitative tools are also popular with eight people saying that the number of attendees, converts, baptisms, cell groups, giving, reflect on their personal effectiveness. Five consider peer evaluation to be important enabling accountability and feedback from other missionaries. Only three consider the spiritual health of their congregation as an indicator of how well they are doing their work. Those that do, however, seem to ask some valuable questions: "Am I praying for the community, for the church plant and for all the relationships being established? Am I being bold and meeting new people regularly? What is my motivation when I meet people?"

3. Measuring the impact or influence of the church on the community (Fig. 3)

When it comes to evaluating the impact or influence that the church plant is having on its community only 32% of respondents said they had some way of measuring this. Once again, most (10) who suggested a specific measure focussed on the numbers attending activities, the size of the group, the number of leaders or the number of missional communities.

"Nothing else – not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes – will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting."
Tim Keller and J. Allen Thompson

Seven respondents use some sort of survey to evaluate the impact or influence they are having on the local community though three of those were in reality internal church health surveys like NCD. Only six engaged

more directly with the community to ask their evaluation of the church plant. The specific methods include listening and observation, dialogue with visitors, feedback forms, interviews with people outside the church, developing partnerships, and "finding out what people in town are saying about the church".

Surprisingly five said their peers were the best people to evaluate the impact they were having on their community, and one said the discipleship vision of their organization was the only legitimate measure for this.

Conclusions

Given the small sample size, the gender and nationality bias of the respondents and the over representation of Baptists and ECM missionaries, we cannot say that the sample is representative of church planters in Europe. Nevertheless, it does indicate issues which might be addressed in future studies, or taken into account by mission agencies as they reflect on their own evaluation strategies.

1. Many church planters don't take time to evaluate what they do

More than half of the church planters in this study say they do not use any tool to evaluate their work. That church planters are more interested in action than reflection is not

surprising, but that only half of them engage in any evaluation of their ministry is perhaps indicative of a blinkered overactivity which may weaken the impact of their ministry longterm.

2. Many church planters are solely focussed on numbers

When church planters do stop to evaluate what they are doing they depend on quantitative measures more than anything else. For some this involves a simple head count of attendees, conversions or leaders in training, for others it involves financial data, or the number of groups established in a given timeframe. Given that the very mission of a church planter is to see new Christian communities formed some degree of evaluation by numbers is useful.

More worrying however was the significant number of church planters who judge their own personal effectiveness in this way. Take this comment for example: "If the church grows by a couple or more people becoming Christians every week my work as a missionary has been effective". Given the challenging context of mission in Europe, this way of thinking puts huge pressure on the missionary to produce results and may lead to frustration or worse.

3. Peer review is a very important tool for the evaluation of CP strategy

After raw numbers, the second most important tool for evaluating the church planting approach or strategy is some form of peer review. Church planters look to their colleagues to validate their work, to give them meaningful feedback and thus evaluate the effectiveness of their approach. In some cases this happens formally, through regular team meetings, participation in a learning community, or by coaching, supervision and review, but however it happens, it is clear that a significant number of church planters do engage in reflective practice and look to their peers for an honest appraisal of their work.

4. Quality is important to church planters

The spiritual health of the planted congregation is the third tool that this group of church planters mentioned as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of their approach. Often this is done through questioning: "Is the church growing spiritually? How are the people doing in their personal growth in Jesus? How are they using their spiritual gifts?" Most church planters use either quantitative or qualitative measures. Only a small minority use both.

5. The personal effectiveness of church planters is principally measured against objectives

It is common for church planters or their leadership/organization to establish a vision, purposes or objectives to orient and evaluate the development of a church planting initiative. What this research has shown, however, is that these objectives are not used as much to evaluate the strategy or impact on the community, but rather as the principal means to evaluate the church planter's personal effectiveness. This might satisfy the requirements of the mission organization and or sponsoring agency but one wonders whether a timesheet, the setting of goals and an annual review by checklist satisfies the church planter's need for meaningful feedback on their effectiveness.

6. Church planters do use surveys to evaluate their work but not always for the right things

Surveys are used by church planters to evaluate their work, especially the Natural Church Development approach of Christian Schwarz. However the church profiles resulting from the NCD survey focus on the internal quality characteristics of the congregation, not the effectiveness of the planter nor the impact on the local community, yet several of the respondents said they used NCD to evaluate these things.

Key findings

- Only half of the church planters surveyed engaged in any sort of evaluation of their ministry.
- Those that do evaluate tend to use numbers (head counts) as the principal measure of effectiveness.
- Validation by their peers (either formally or informally) is very important to church planters.
- Surprisingly few church planters measure the impact their church is having on the community

Other surveys were used to evaluate the impact of the church on the community by some church planters though no specifics were forthcoming.

7. Very few church planters measure the impact that their church has on the community

My final observation from this data is that church planters seem reluctant to use their community to evaluate what they are doing. Even when the question is specifically asking for what tools they use to measure the impact or influence of the congregation on their community only six respondents said they looked to the community to find this out. Surely some degree of contextual research would give church planters valuable information and feedback on their impact in the locality they are working.

Perhaps all those engaged in church planting in Europe would do well to ask themselves the types of questions that one of our respondents posed : "is the church plant identifying with the community by fully being a part of the community? Is the church plant working towards a better future for the community and enabling transformation to happen?"

JM



Figure 1

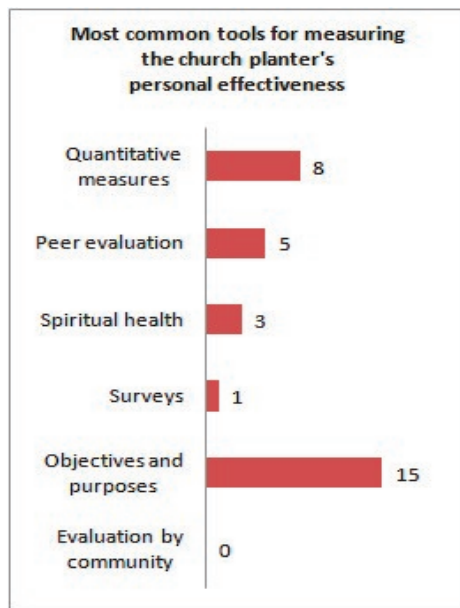


Figure 2

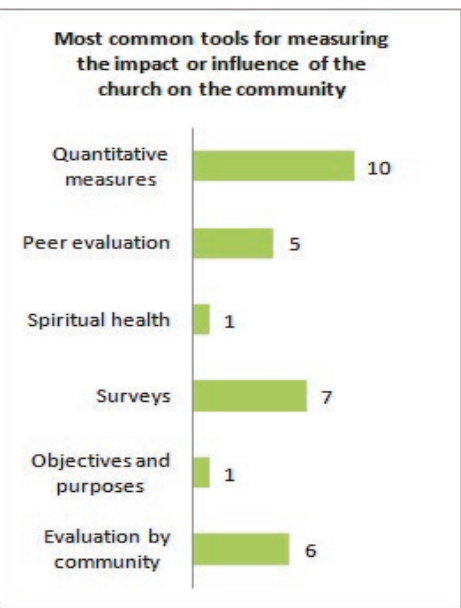


Figure 3

CHURCH PLANTING MODELS IN 21ST CENTURY EUROPE:

New churches are being established across Europe in a multitude of different ways. This article reviews some of the most important church planting models with examples of how Christ is building His church in Europe today.

Throughout the history of Christianity in Europe, there has been a constant stream of innovation and new gatherings of believers meeting and organising themselves as local expressions of the Body of Christ.

Church planting in Europe continues today, at a pace that can be hard to keep track of. The way new churches begin varies, from a 'daughter' church planted by an existing congregation, to groups emerging spontaneously. This article explores some of the models and points to information and resources for you to find out more.

Mother-daughter

'Daughter' church plants tend to be initially dependant on the mother church, with the aim of becoming independent. They can range from an existing church starting a new church in a nearby location, to larger churches and denominations sending teams from one congregation to other cities or even countries to begin a church. International Christian Fellowship (www.icf-movement.org) have planted churches in seven countries across Europe, including Spain, Albania and Germany. Church planters are trained at their college in the original church in Zurich. Individual churches are independent, but have a corporate identity, and are networked together as part of a movement. Other examples might be Hillsong churches around Europe (www.hillsong.se and www.moneglisehillsong.fr); Vineyard DACH (www.vineyard-dach.net) or the churches of NewFrontiers (www.newfrontiersplanting.org).

Adoption

This forms a large part of Holy Trinity Brompton's church planting strategy in the UK. A team of people from an HTB church move to a struggling congregation. Initially confined to London, HTB have used the adoption strategy to revitalise the congregation of St Peter's, Brighton, which was threatened with closure. You can find out about St Peter's first year at <http://stpetersbrighton.org/media/one-year>.

Mission teams

Many cross-cultural mission agencies such as GEM, CAI, ABWE, GLO, OM and ECM use this approach, sending teams of missionaries into an area where they start a church from scratch. The teams may not

work in isolation but where possible partner with local Christians. There are a huge variety of forms of church – for example, *The Well* in Brussels is an innovative example of church planting by CAI missionaries. Church members meet weekly as different expressions across the city, and then gather as a whole church community once a month (www.thewell.be). National Denominations also use this approach for church planting in their own country – for example the Evangelical Free Church of Germany has prioritised church planting and started almost 50 new churches across Germany between 2006 and 2010.

Multiple congregations

Multiple congregations are the main idea behind cell-churches. Network Church, St Albans is an example of a church in which 'the leadership team of the church support and encourage each Cell Group to have it's own sense of identity with each group holding a vision for God's work in the lives of those in and around the cell.' (www.networkchurch.org) in addition to meeting on Sundays.

In Northern Europe, some churches create multiple congregations through mid-size communities with a specific missional focus, for example students, families or amongst the homeless. *Messy church* (www.messychurch.org.uk) and *Fresh Expressions* (www.freshexpressions.org.uk) style services may also form an additional congregation, attracting people to the church who would not attend traditional services.

Immigrant churches may use the same building as an indigenous church, creating multiple congregations. KIT (www.kit-danmark.dk) facilitates local congregations supporting migrant churches in Denmark, and denominations such as the Baptist Union in Portugal also support this kind of church planting in partnership with Ukrainian immigrants.

Emerging churches

GCE missionaries in Ukraine are planting 'simple churches' with small groups meeting in homes or other 'secular' spaces (www.simplechurch.com.ua). The aim is to find the 'person of peace' who is open to the Gospel, and to start a gathering within

their networks – whether that is an extended family, amongst drug addicts or wherever God is at work!

Emerging church also includes 'new monasticism' communities, such as the 24-7 Prayer boiler rooms across Europe (www.24-7prayer.com/communities). And networks such as simplechurch.eu have begun to emerge, to provide support for these often small and vulnerable church plants.

Other advocates for new forms of church include Urban Expression (www.urbanexpression.org.uk) based in the UK and the Netherlands and soon to move into Sweden, as well as the aforementioned Fresh Expressions (www.freshexpressions.org.uk).

Partnerships

This is an increasingly significant model for church planting as people realise that they, by themselves, cannot reach the whole of Europe! Partnerships can take place locally, regionally and nationally.

Many of the Saturation Church Planting movements work in partnership with the local churches, training and providing support for church planting pioneers (www.balticchurchplanting.com).

Another example of partnerships between churches and mission agencies is to be found in the province of Cordoba, Spain. Churches from across the denominations together with the team of missionaries from ECM are developing a provincial church planting strategy under a covenant agreement signed by all parties.

The European Baptist Federation's Indigenous Missionary Project (www.ebf.org/imp/) is a denominational example of partnership and facilitation. Church planters and evangelists are funded for five years by the EBF to work in their own country, with around 50 projects underway in Europe/Eurasia.

Church planting in Europe is proof that in God's kingdom there is no such thing as 'one size fits all', and the resources below reflect a wide variety of approaches and theological viewpoints. As always, if you can add to this list of resources please get in touch or leave a comment on our blog: europeanmission.redcliffe.org JA

RESOURCES FOR CHURCH PLANTING IN EUROPE

Once again we try to bring together a selection of resources relating to our theme for this edition of Vista. On this occasion we cover church planting books, courses, web-based resources and networks.

Books

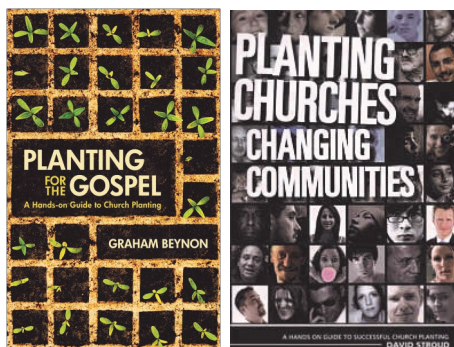


Church Planting: Laying Foundations (1998) and *Planting Churches: a framework for practitioners* (2008) are two key books by Stuart Murray both published by Paternoster. The first lays a firm theological and historical foundation for church planting, whilst the second concentrates on the who, where, why, what, when and how of church planting.



Organic Church (2005) by Neil Cole and published by Jossey Bass sets out the church planting model of Church Multiplication Associates. It explains how anyone can become part of a church planting movement and the

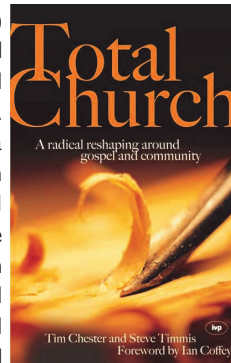
rationale behind small, organic churches that are easily reproduced. Though written from a US perspective its ideas have been taken up by many church planters across Europe.



Planting for the Gospel: A hands-on guide to church planting (2010) by Graham Beynon published by Christian Focus publications and *Planting churches: changing communities* (2009) by David Stroud and published by Authentic are two hands-on guides to church planting from a UK perspective. Whilst the first suggests a variety of models and includes case studies from a wide range of settings, the second is unashamedly a manual for planting NewFrontiers churches.

Total Church (2007) by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis and published by IVP. Whilst not strictly a book about church planting, *Total Church* presents the lessons learnt from The Crowded House, a household church plant based on community life.

The Crowded House has now become an international planting network and this book has popularized the ideas of simple reproducible church planting.

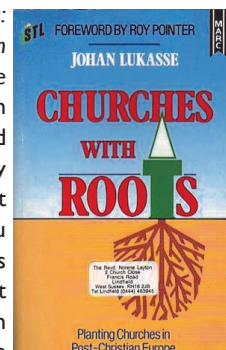


Mission-shaped Church: church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context (2004) published by Church House Publishing is an attempt by the Church of England to wrestle with some of the



challenges of church planting from an inherited church perspective. As such it is relevant to many other European contexts with established or historic churches. It is also one of the best treatments of the Fresh Expressions movement and the multitude of different ways in which 'church' is being expressed today.

Churches with roots: Planting Churches in Post-Christian Europe (1990) by Johan Lukasse and published by Monarch is now out of print. But if you can get a copy it is one of the best treatments of church planting in Europe and is written by a practitioner with many decades of experience of planting making it a rarity in every sense.



Courses

Resource Church Planting www.resourcechurchplanting.com – UK based weekends, with facilitators including Bob and Mary Hopkins and Jonny Baker.

Crucible course www.urbanexpression.org.uk/crucible/crucible-course organised by Urban Expression taking place over 3 weekends in a year. The course has with two streams including one with a church planting element

Porterbrook Network Diploma in Church planting - www.porterbrooknetwork.org/porterbrook-institute/training/ a two year UK based course with residential and distance learning components

Web-based Resources



European Church Planting Network concept papers. These downloadable documents published 2008-2010 cover various aspects of church planting from churches involved in the European Church Planting Network. The subjects include multi-site churches, church planting in post-communist Europe, planting in historic churches and 'Good to Great' church planting. They can be downloaded [here](#).

www.pmgermany.com

Articles by church planter Paul Clark, about church planting and Pentecostalism in Germany

www.kfg.org/archiv/pdf/komplett/106.pdf
A German language magazine about church planting, available for download from the Konferenz für Gemeindegründung e.V website www.kfg.org

CONTINUED

Networks



DAWN European Network

“More, better, and new Jesus communities for Europe”, that is how the DAWN European Network define their vision. “The fact remains: In an age of transition from modern / Christian to postmodern / post-Christian Europe, we believe that “saturating” our cities, villages, towns, cultures, age groups with relevant churches is a huge challenge and a meaningful goal.”

www.dawneurope.net



Eurochurch.net

A network of church planters and reflective church practitioners forged from the relationships between church planters across Europe during the 1980s. It provides resources for reflection, a directory of church planters and organizes conferences and consultations.

www.eurochurch.net



City to City Europe

An urban church planting network, which is hosting a conference about church planting in Berlin from 25-27 Oct 2011.

www.citycityeurope.com



European Church Planting Network

ECPN is an initiative of The Leadership Network. ECPN “seeks to work directly with pioneer churches who are testing and implementing the new ideas that will drive the Church in the future”. This is done principally through participation in Learning Communities where as well as learning together these pioneers suggest ways forward which would be communicated to a wider audience. The resulting concept papers can be downloaded for free from their website.

www.ecpn.org



European Mission Research Group

European Missions Research Group (emRG) is an open network of missions researchers who collaborate toward catalyzing church multiplication in Europe. They seek to provide church planters, mission strategists and mission mobilizers with accurate, relevant research that might aid their work. They also offer a consultation service to aid church planters to research their area and contact potential partners.

www.emrgnet.eu



Hope for Europe
European Leadership Forum

Though church planting is not the focus of Hope for Europe nor the European Leadership Forum, both of these movements have networks for church planters and seek to facilitate consulting, training and partnership opportunities for church planters across Europe.

www.hfe.org
www.euroleadership.org



Simple Church Network

The simple church network seeks to provide access to resources on simple, organic church in an European context. Rather than seeking to build a pan-European network it aims to serve as a connecting, informing, resourcing and envisioning point for people who are interested in planting simple churches in Europe. There are a wealth of resources and a directory of simple church plants around Europe

www.simplechurch.eu

We are very conscious that this list of resources is only a sample of the networks, books and materials on church planting in Europe. Please feel free to suggest other helpful sources on our blog: europeanmission.redcliffe.org

JM and JA



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