

Why Do Megachurches Grow? Conditions and Mechanisms in a Comparative Perspective

Thomas Kern

Megachurches have become a widespread phenomenon around the globe. Some observers regard them as one of the most salient features of an ongoing comprehensive transformation of the protestant field (and beyond). This presentation addresses first of all the organizational features of growing congregations in the United States. It is based on a comprehensive quantitative online-survey of members and more than 60 qualitative interviews with pastors and staff members of three megachurches and one conventional Baptist church in Houston/Texas. The study has been conducted in 2013. In the first step, I will discuss the antecedent cultural and social conditions for the growth of megachurches in the United States. In the second step, I will summarize some of the organizational key features of growing megachurches in our study. In the third step, I will elaborate on whether (and to what extent) the results of the US can be transferred to the megachurches in South Korea. The following questions will be discussed: To what extent is the growth of megachurches in South Korea influenced by specific cultural and social conditions? What do both countries have in common? Are there any typical differences between Korean and US-megachurches with respect to their organizational features?

Thomas Kern is Professor of Sociology at the University of Bamberg in Germany. He obtained his Ph.D. in 1996 and completed his habilitation thesis in 2005. From 2000 to 2003 he spent three years as postdoctoral researcher at the Yonsei University in Seoul. From 2009 to 2016 he held Professorships of Sociology at Heidelberg University and Chemnitz University of Technology. He is Fellow of the Max-Weber-Kolleg for Advanced Studies in Erfurt and Faculty Fellow of the Yale Center for Cultural Sociology. His research activities focus on South Korea, the United States, and Germany. His major research interests are related to sociological theory, political sociology, sociology of religion, and economic sociology.

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