What is a case study?

A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident

The case study inquiry:

- Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis

(Yin 2003)
Why a case study?
- Case studies are suitable to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions.
- Often used to examine contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated.
- Case studies rely on direct observation, systematic interviewing, and other data collection methods.

What is a case?
- Individuals, groups, organizations, political systems, and so on.
- Cases as empirical units:
  - Cases are found
  - Cases are objects
- Case conceptions specific or general:
  - Cases are made
  - Cases are conveniences

Sources of data
- Interviews
- Direct observation
- Participant observation
- Artifacts (e.g., technology)
- Archival records
- Documentation
- Digital traces
- ...
What is a case study good for?

- Case study Vs. large-N studies: trade-offs derive from goals like:
  - Orientation towards hypothesis generating or hypothesis testing
  - Internal validity or external validity focus
  - Causal mechanisms or causal effects
  - Scope of the causal inference is deep or broad
  - The population of cases under study is heterogeneous or homogeneous
  - ...

(Gerring 2007)

Exercise:
With your PhD topic in mind, what would be your arguments for selecting the case study as method? (10 minutes)

Case Study Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Spatial variation</th>
<th>Temporal variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Several</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross-case &amp; within-case</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>Time-series/sectional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-case</td>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
<td>Hierarchical time-series</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Gerring 2007, p. 28)
Case selection techniques

- Goals of case selection:
  1. Identify cases that reproduce the relevant causal features of a larger "universe" (representativeness), and
  2. Provide variation along the dimensions of theoretical interest (causal leverage)

- Case selection when "randomization" is impossible?

- Nonrandom selection techniques: Guided by purpose

  (Gerring 2007, chapter 5)

Case selection techniques

- Typical
- Diverse
- Extreme
- Deviant
- Influential
- Crucial
- Pathway
- Most-similar
- Most-different
Typical

- Cases (one or more) are typical examples of some cross-case relationship
- The typical case is representative
- May be used to confirm an existing hypothesis, disconfirm that hypothesis, or reframe it in a way that is consistent with the findings of the case study

Diverse

- Cases (two or more) illuminate the full range of variation on the variables of interest
- Represents the full variation (but not distribution) of the population
- May be used for both theory generation and theory testing

Extreme

- Selecting case because of its extreme value on an independent or dependent variable of interest
- Cases that corresponds to a case that is considered prototypical or paradigmatic of some phenomena of interest
- Used for generating theory or new insights
With your PhD topic in mind, what opportunities and restrictions would the different case selection techniques imply? (10 mins)
Q & A & Discussion

References