## Selection of cases

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Why do we study cases?

[Discussion limited to multiple-case studies. See e.g. Siggelkow 2007 on the uses of single-case studies.]

**Two approaches to case studies in the literature:**

1) Intensive study of a small number of cases in order to shed light on a population.

   „Weak approximation of the statistical method“

   Representativeness of cases remains central concern

2) Intensive study of a small number of cases in order to explain a specific social phenomenon.

   Theory development by (predominantly) qualitative research

   Generalization on the basis of a match to the underlying theory rather than a larger universe
Why do we study cases?

Description
- Exploratory
- Description of variation

Explanation
- Implicit
- Causal relationships
- Causal mechanisms
  - Initial conditions
  - Sequence of causally linked events
  - Outcomes

To what extent has NPM permeated German universities?
How has NPM been adopted by two Technical Universities?
What conditions enable, promote, prevent, or hinder the adoption of NPM?
How is NPM adopted?
What is a case?

**Case:** Social phenomenon (event, process, constellation of actors) that can be analytically separated from its environment.

**Empirical object or theoretical construct?**

It is impossible to use empirical objects as cases.

1) We cannot dismiss our social scientific perspective.

2) All empirical analysis is selective.

3) Our decisions about the boundaries of our case are based on theory.

[We routinely use names of empirical objects as labels for cases.]
When should we select cases?

Two ways to go about this

All at once
- case selection
  - data collection
    - data analysis

Select as you go
- case selection
  - data collection
    - data analysis

Advantages
- Efficient, consistent

Disadvantages
- Insufficient *a priori* - knowledge about cases may distort investigation
- Adaptation of case selection to new insights
- Time-consuming, first results may distort the investigation
How many cases? Which cases?

The major problem: Trade-off between breadth and depth.

Maximum variation
- Extreme or deviant case
- Criterion
- Opportunistic
- Snowball or chain
- Theory-based
- Homogenous

Confirming and disconfirming cases
- Intense case
- Convenience
- Typical case
- Stratified purposeful
- Random purposeful
- Politically important cases
- Critical (crucial) case

Which strategy for which research question?
# How many cases? Which cases?

## Theoretical and practical considerations

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<th>Practical considerations:</th>
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<td>Number of cases that can be studied</td>
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<td>Degree of variation needed</td>
<td>External audiences that must be kept happy</td>
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Depend on

1. Maturity of theory
2. Research strategy
   (Description? Which kind of explanation?)
3. Assumptions about cases

Depend on

1. Resources
2. Conditions of funding
3. Empirical methods, empirical objects
How many cases? Which cases?
Research strategy and variation

**Description**
- Exploratory

**Explanation**
- Implicit
- Causal relationships
- Causal mechanisms

What should vary between cases?

- At least independent and intervening variables
- Irrelevant
- All relevant variables*
- At least independent and intervening variables

Why?

- Representativeness
- Few cases, typical cases, crucial cases
- Causality is established from covariation
- Causality is established from process-tracing

*See Lieberson 1992
Questions for group sessions

How are cases defined in the project? What constitutes a case?

Which empirical entities correspond to these cases?

Which variables should vary between cases, which should not?

How can information about these variables be collected for all possible cases?

What role do pragmatic criteria play (ease of access to empirical objects, costs ...)?

How can ‘cases’ be best accessed and co-operation be gained?