

Selection of cases

Important questions

Major problems

Why do we study cases?

1. Applying quasi-statistical thinking

2. Ignoring case analysis when selecting cases

What is a case?

3. Confounding empirical object and theoretical case

When should we select cases?

4. Trade-off between time restrictions and knowledge about cases

How many cases?

5. Trade-off between breadth and depth

Which cases?

6. Unclear research strategy

7. Refusal to hypothesize

Why do we study cases?

[Discussion limited to multiple-case studies.
[Distinctions like testing theory - creating theory are useless]
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“

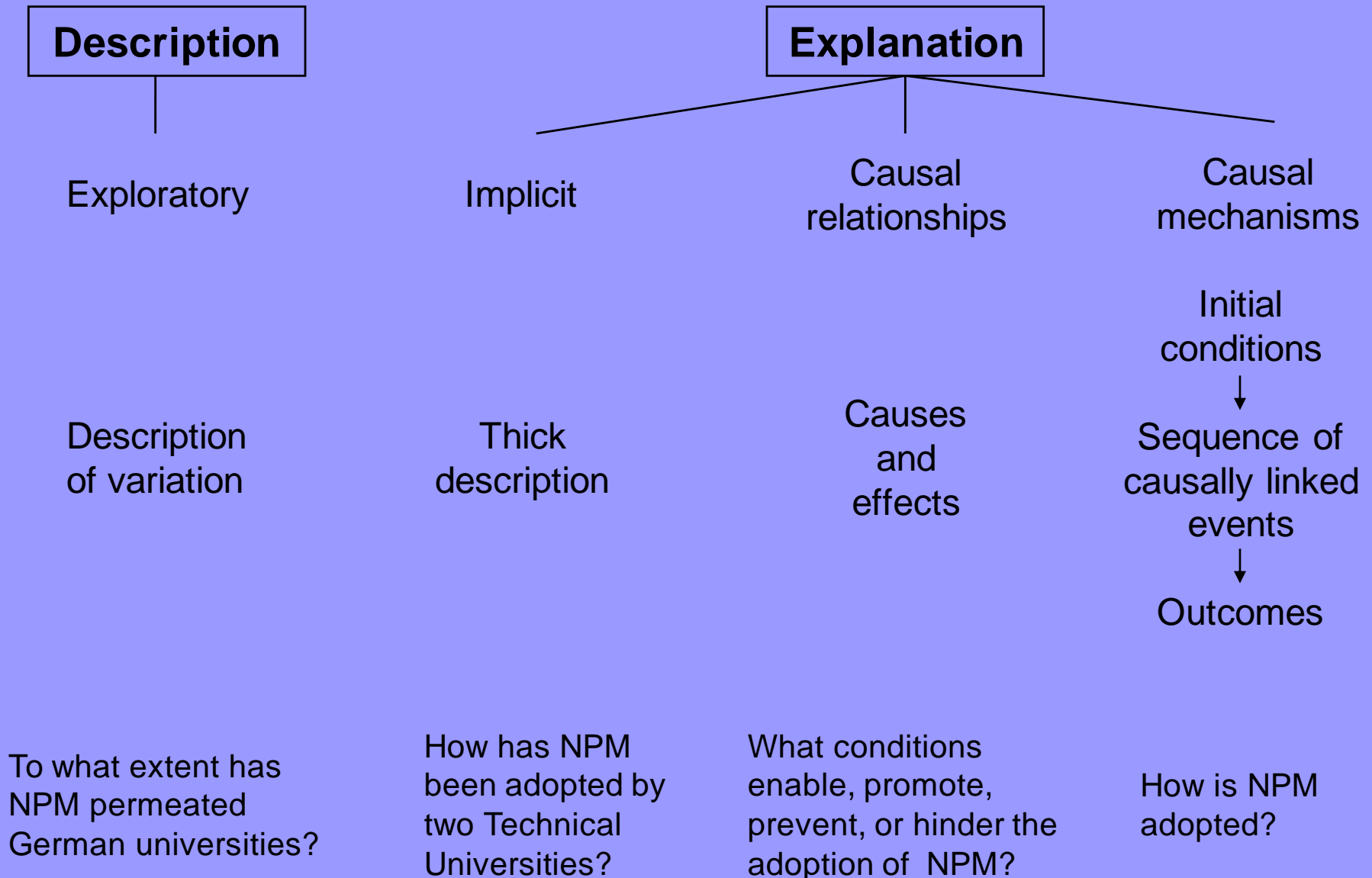
Representativeness of cases remains central concern

- 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?



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.

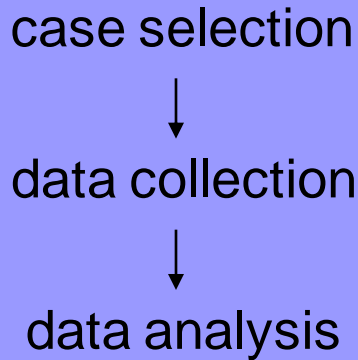
- 1) We cannot dismiss our social scientific perspective.
- 2) All empirical analysis is selective.
- 3) Our decisions about the boundaries of our case are based on theory.

[We routinely use names of empirical objects as labels for cases.]

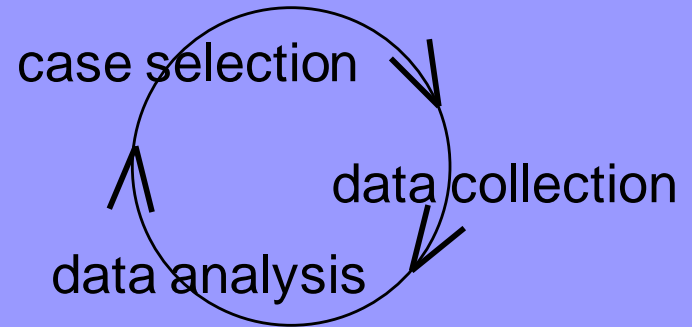
When should we select cases?

Two ways to go about this

All at once



Select as you go



Advantages

Efficient, consistent

Adaptation of case selection to new insights

Disadvantages

Insufficient *a priori* - knowledge about cases may distort investigation

Time-consuming, first results may distort the investigation

How many cases? Which cases?

The major problem is the trade-off between quantity and its depth



How many cases? Which cases?

Theoretical and practical considerations

Theoretical considerations:

Importance of variation

Degree of variation needed

Depend on

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

Practical considerations:

Number of cases that can be studied

External audiences that
must be kept happy

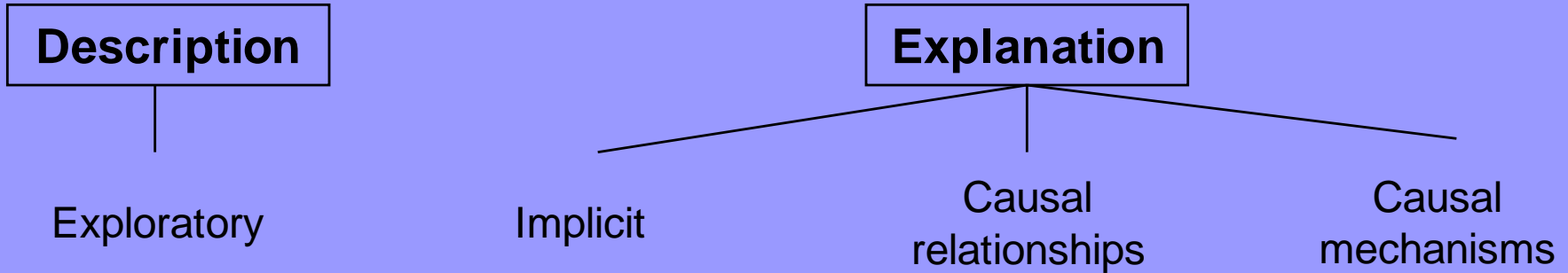
Access to empirical objects

Depend on

1. Resources
2. Conditions of funding
3. Empirical methods,
empirical objects

How many cases? Which cases?

Research strategy and variation



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?