

Case Study

INF5220

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WHAT IS CS?

Methodology

- The study of complex phenomena in their context (Baxter & Jack 2008)
- A case study is a situated and detailed inquiry (see also Flyvberg 2006)
- Case studies focus on activities, functionings and local meaning within specific case(s) – a case should be defined in terms of it being a specific, unique, bound system (Stake 2005)

PARADIGM

Origin: Social sciences (see also Glaser and Strauss (GT))

- Interpretive
- CS can also be critical and lean towards positivism

TYPES OF CASE STUDIES

- Intrinsic
- Instrumental
- Collective case (Stake 2005)

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

- Figure out what is important about the case within its own world: its own issues, contexts, and interpretations, its “thick description”¹
- Focus on the case and its activities and functioning + its contexts (social, cultural, economic, legal, political, historical)
- What is going on? – What can be learned from the case?
- Be reflective: think about what you encounter. Dig into meanings, relate them to contexts and experiences.
- Seeking the particular rather than the ordinary

(Stake 2005)

1) Clifford Geertz is one of the founding fathers of this notion by which is meant that ethnographic accounts should include contexts to fully capture and lay bare a case. For an article by Geertz see syllabus “Deep play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”. This essay is a famous piece + an exemplary case study. For further readings on Geertz and ‘thick description’ see e.g. Atkinson & Delamont (2005) + Hylland Eriksen (2006).

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

When probing the particular and common (but mostly the uncommon) of a case, take into account and gather material on:

- The nature of the case, particularly its activity and functioning
- Its historical background
- Its physical setting
- Other contexts, such as social, economic, political, legal and aesthetic
- Other cases through which this case is recognized, and
- Those informants through whom the case can be known
(Stake 2005:447)

METHODS

- Documents
- Interview
- Observation
- Coding (GT)
- Interpretation (GT)

(Stake 2005)

SELECTING A CASE

- Learn from atypical cases
- Gives possibility to learn
- Accessible cases
- Possibility to stay long

(Stake 2005)

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of study
- Selecting phenomena, themes, issues (e.g. the research questions to emphasize)
- Seeking patterns of data to develop issues
- Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation
- Selecting alternatives to pursue, and
- Developing generalizations about the case
(Stake 2005)
- Generalizations – the black swan (Flyvbjerg 2006)

Literature not listed on syllabus

Atkinson, P. & Delamont, S. (2005): Analytical Perspectives. In Denzin & Lincoln (eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications.

Hylland Eriksen, T. (2006): *Hav er Socialantropologi*. Universitetsforlaget, Norge

Group work

- Do you see relationships between the 3 types of CS that Stake describes and the types described by Flyvbjerg?
- How would you approach a CS?
- When/for what is it a suitable methodology to use?