

Case Study Research: A Framing Overview

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Our research has diverse units of analysis:

More Concrete

- Individuals
- Small Groups
- Organizations
- Neighborhoods
- Cities
- Countries

Less Concrete

- Communities
- Relationships
- Decisions
- Partnerships
- Projects

Our research methods are partly influenced by how *comparable* we think the units are.



Each Unit Is Unique
(Ideographic)

Method: In-depth studies

Aim: New insight, understanding. Conclusions aren't intended to easily or readily translate to other units.

Examples: Some in history and anthropology

Units are Comparable
(Nomothetic)

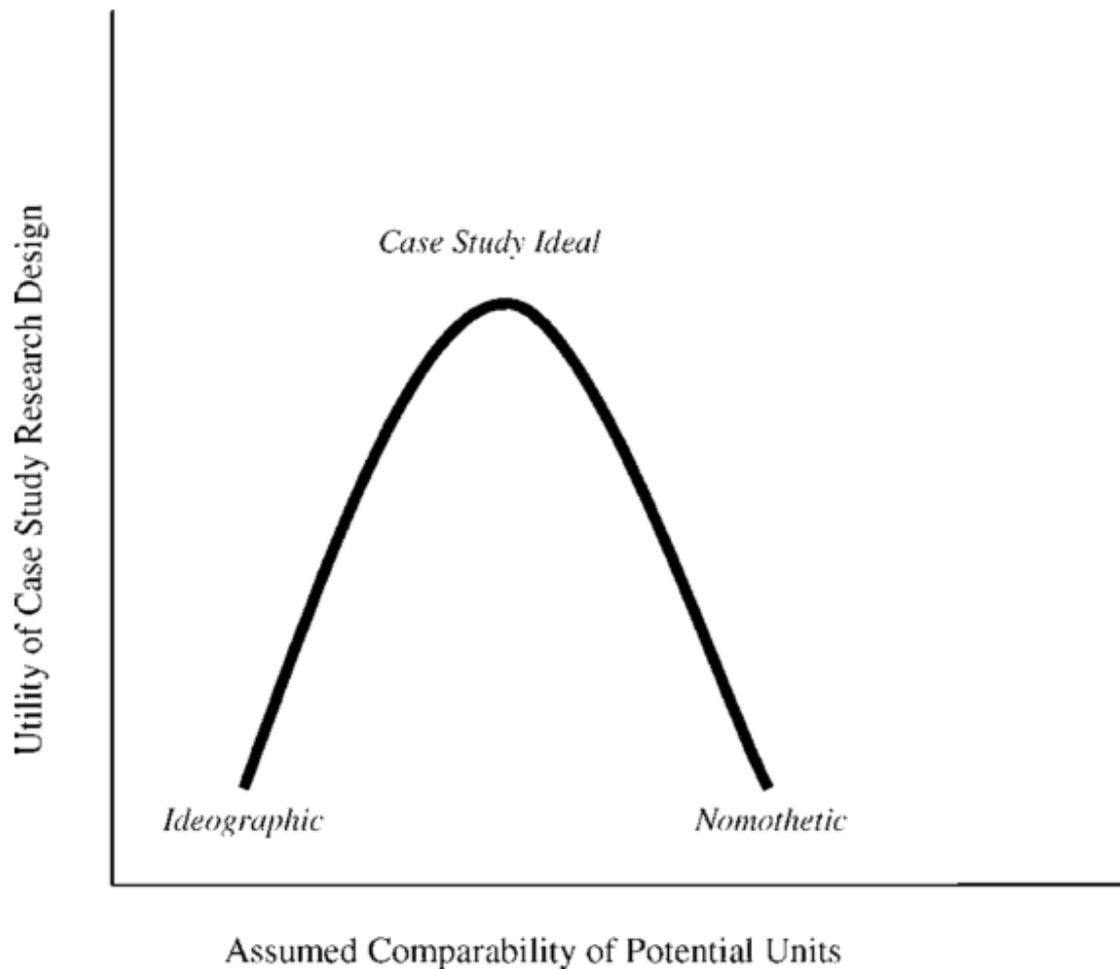
Method: Large-N, variable-oriented studies.

Aim: Theories or conclusions which apply broadly to a particular universe

Examples: Many quantitative studies, survey research

After Gerring (2004)

FIGURE 1. The Ontology of Case Study Research Design



**Concern:
Ability/Type of
Generalizability**

**Concern:
Homogenizing
Assumptions**

Source: Gerring (2004)

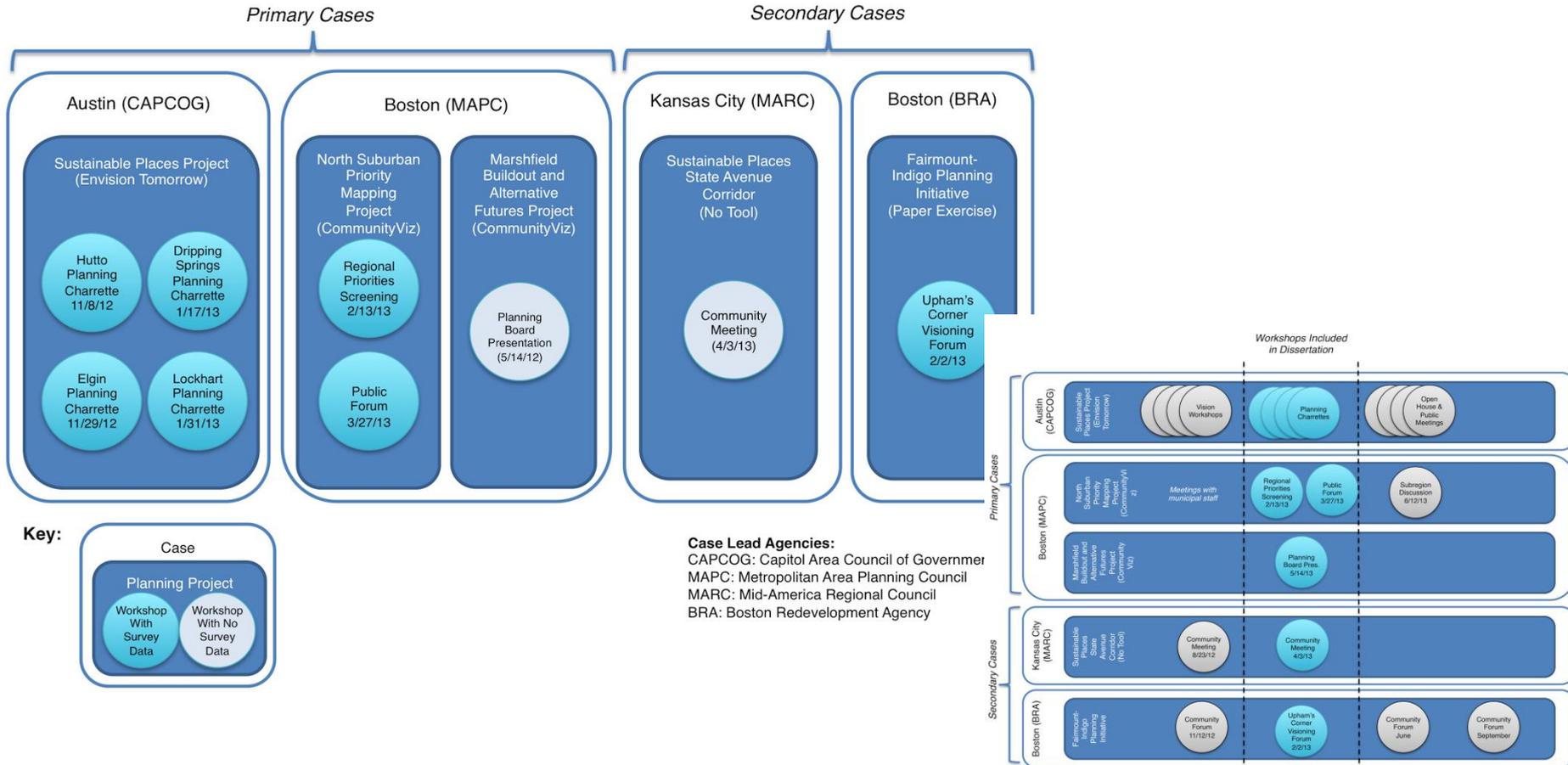
Case Study Flavors (selected)



| Author | Definition | Additional Detail(s) |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Gerring (2004) | “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not defined by methods per se • Single observation of a single unit not an option because cannot be used to identify causal relationships |
| George and Bennett (2005) | “a detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events” (p. 5) | <p>Three strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide high conceptual validity • Deriving new hypotheses • Exploring causal mechanisms |
| Yin (2009) | <p>“1. Empirical inquiry that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when • The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. <p>2. Inquiry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copes with situation where there will be more variables than data points, • Relies on multiple sources of evidence, • Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions.” (p. 18) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on the logic of research design (not fieldwork) • Presented as a research method, separate from history, surveys, experiments, and archival analysis. |
| Burawoy (1998) | The extended case method applies “reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro,’ and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposes two models of science, positive science (limited by context effects) and reflexive science (limited by power effects) |

Case studies are often missing (for theoretical reasons) from conventional books on social science research design and methods, e.g., Singleton and Straits (2010), Remler and Ryzin (2011).

Things can get complicated ...



Source: Goodspeed (2013)

Works Cited

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