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The case study methodology in place management research and practice

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Keywords

case, study, methodology, place, management, research, practice

Disciplines

Business | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Keywords: Place Management, Place Marketing, Place Branding, Case Study

Category: Viewpoint

Introduction

The call for papers by the Institute of Place Management for its inaugural conference defined place management, *in a practical sense*, “as the process of making places the best they can be”. In a world where competition between places for the increasingly mobile resources of capital, labour and enterprise is intensifying (Mommas, 2003) there is a need for places to have strong leadership, management and marketing skills at both the political and operational levels (van Ham, 2001). There is a need for place managers. Place managers need an ability to engage multiple stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2004) and be able to change in response to challenges and opportunities. They need to be visionaries, strategic thinkers and ‘doers’. As with accepted practice in strategy formulation, (Grant, 2002) place managers must be aware of the existing status of their place as well as the competitive environment; they must consider the available resources and capabilities to act and use this knowledge as the basis of their decision making. Place managers need to understand the existing structural and operational frameworks within which they must work or seek to change. Place managers need to be aware of best practice. Research into place management is important not only as it provides the foundations upon which to make decisions but it helps to provide greater understanding of what is a relatively new field.

This paper suggests that an appropriate research methodology available to place managers who are in a field which is at the ‘introduction stage’ of its life cycle is the case study. The reader is provided with an overview of place management and then the need to undertake research in place management. Following this, the approaches to research (i.e. the methodologies) are introduced and then within each methodology the various methods which are available. It is emphasised that methodology and method are not synonymous as will be made clear within this work.

Place Management in Context

No one discipline can claim ownership of place management. Even its general definition of “the process of making places the best they can be” would include the domains of politics, geography, economics, management, marketing, tourism, town planning, education, health and law. Place management as a

profession is gaining more recognition with the introduction of specialist tertiary courses, the formation of professional bodies and increasing academic interest. Similar to the overlap of management and marketing functions in the organisational context, place marketing and place branding have commonalities with place management (Kerr, Noble and Glynn, 2007). While a place manager may be employed by a local government authority or an 'arms-length' entity, a place manager needs to operate outside the organisation and adopt a 'holistic approach' to the place. This will involve the support and participation of the multitude of stakeholders who constitute a place (Kavaratzis, 2004; Green, 2005). It is likely that a place whose major stakeholders see place management as being solely a government function will be unlikely to maximise the yield which may be delivered by a holistic place management approach.

The Need for Research in Place Management

The newness and growing interest in place management has given rise to a demand for knowledge of theory and practice of place management. Relevant models and established theories are in short supply. A search of databases including Emerald and Proquest using 'place management' as key word yielded limited results. There is a need for both academic and practitioner research into place management - to build and share knowledge which will provide continuous improvement to the profession and to the places which decide to implement place management strategies. Research in place management might include finding out:

- What are other places doing?
- What is best practice?
- Why are some places more successful at place management?
- How can place management strategies be formulated?
- How can place management strategies be implemented?

As stated earlier, place management is multidisciplinary in nature. The field however lies within what is referred to as 'social science' and 'behavioural science' (Boot, Cowling and Stanworth, 1979) as distinct from 'natural science' such as physics and chemistry (Klemke, Holloinger and Kline, 1980). Natural science adopts a rational approach - the scientific method - to the study of the universe and is underpinned by rules and laws. Although focusing on the study

of the human aspects of the world, research in social science and behavioural science tends to apply the scientific method of natural science. This involves the use of established and accepted techniques to acquire knowledge. A rational approach to the process of understanding and applying research in place management is shown in Figure No. 1.

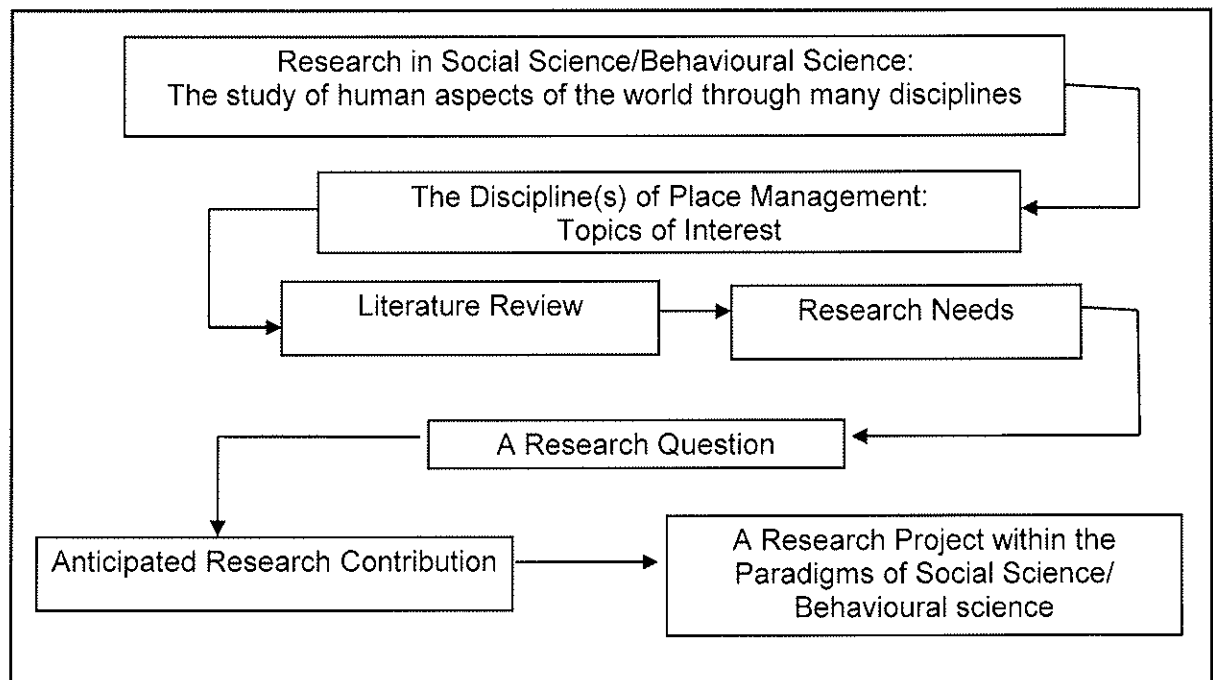


Figure No. 1 – Place Management as a Social/Behavioural Science

Research Paradigms

Fundamentally, a research project in social science and behavioural science may be influenced by the researcher's view of the world – influenced most likely from mentors, supervisors, fellow researchers and readings. The research paradigm is “a cluster of beliefs and dictates ... for scientists in a particular discipline ... what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted” (Bryman, 1988 p. 4). There are a number of paradigms in social and behavioural sciences. Researchers to some extent can be categorised by their fundamental research beliefs and their approach to research – the research paradigm(s) within which they work. Ontology is “a patterned set of assumptions concerning reality” and epistemology is “the knowledge of that reality” (Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002; Guba, 1990). Both are influential in the methodological approach and the research method. Importantly as will be shown below, the methodologies are often founded on different ontological and epistemological foundations and use methods that are

designed to identify or measure different phenomena. For example a 'positivist' would argue that science is characterised by empirical research which can identify constructs or concepts (items of interest) which can represent the truth. There is a belief in 'objective reality' in which the researcher is very separate from the research - "inquiry takes place as through a one way mirror" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994 p. 110). Positivists are more interested in causal relationships and mostly use quantitative measures involving experiments and surveys comprising structured questionnaires. Having a different approach, the 'interpretivists' and the 'constructivists' adopt an ontology based on multiple realities. Reality is constantly changing and is based on the researcher's involvement and interpretation. These researchers are often more interested in processes and meanings. Generally, the positivists are more aligned to quantitative research whereas the interpretivists and constructivists more aligned to qualitative research. Perry (1998) provides more detail about research paradigms but essentially when compared, the researchers have different beliefs about reality and they utilise different research methods as they seek to research different phenomena. Figure No 2 provides a conceptual explanation as to how research method, measurement and analysis is influenced by the higher belief levels of ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

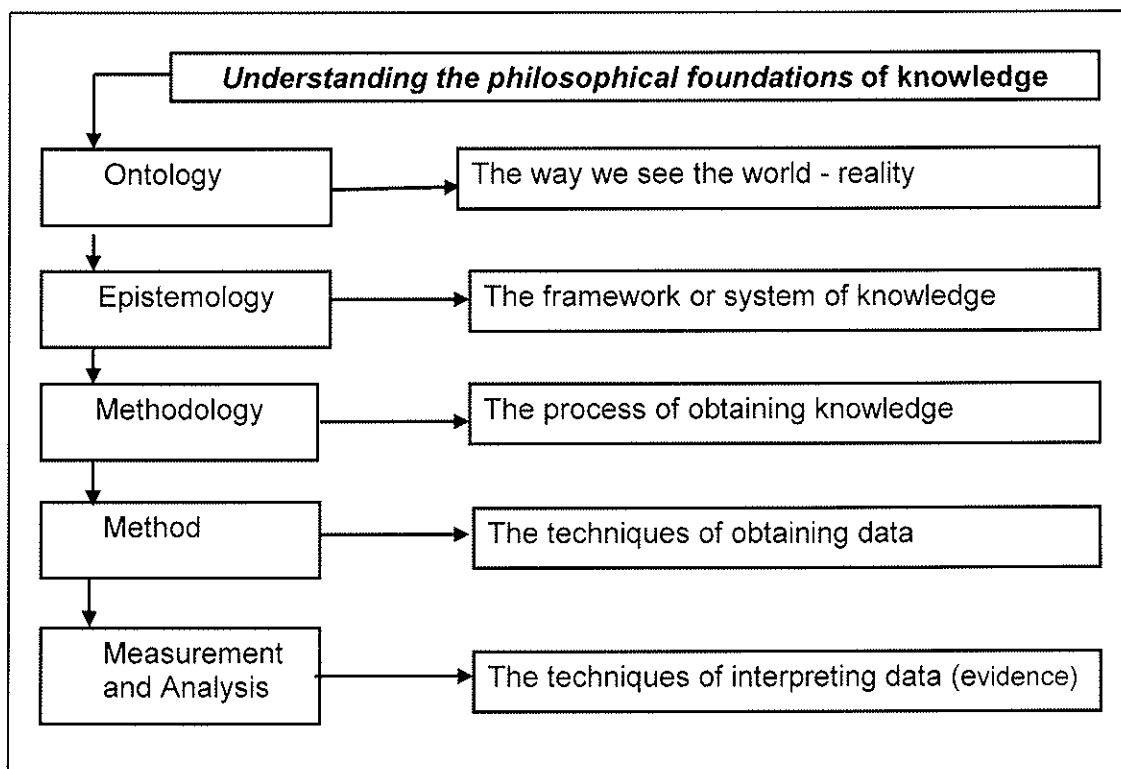


Figure No. 2: Understanding the Foundations of Knowledge

Research Methodologies

Methodology refers to the processes used to obtain knowledge of 'that' reality identified by the adopted ontology and epistemology (Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002). The literature, both inter and intra disciplines, offers an array of meanings of the words 'methodology', 'method', 'ways', 'strategies' and 'approaches' as applied to research. In some situations the words are interchanged implying that their meaning is the same. What is proposed here is an approach that may be useful in providing some clarity (although not consistency with other authors). Two dimensions of the process of obtaining knowledge (methodology) are provided.

The first dimension is provided by Yin (1994) who suggests that there are five 'ways' to undertake research in social science – experiment, survey, case study, histories and analysis of archival information [Yin also refers to these as 'strategies']. It is suggested that these 'ways' are the processes used to obtain knowledge of reality – the methodologies. [Gillham (2000 p. 13) takes the view that, "Case study is a main method. Within it different sub-methods are used].

The second dimension of the process of obtaining knowledge relates to the purpose and context of the research question; what is the subject of the research question? what body of knowledge exists? For example, human behaviour in the discipline of psychology is supported by established and confirmed (or yet to be disproved) theories which are less likely to be the situation in newer disciplines. Although other disciplines might share a mutual interest in human behaviour, the context of the research question and its relativity to existing discipline knowledge may be very different and therefore require a different process to acquire knowledge. This second dimension of methodology is now discussed.

Bryman (2004) distinguishes between inductive (theory building) and deductive (theory testing) methodologies. Deductive methodology commences with a hypothesis relative to a theory following which a research design is undertaken and implemented (methodology, method and measurement) with data being collected and interpreted - the result being that the hypothesis is not rejected or rejected. The inductive process does not commence with established theory but starts with data collection with the aim of developing theory (theory building).

The inductive approach however, may not necessarily start from a 'clean slate' but may identify frameworks and concepts from either established theory and/or professional practice and then proceed to identify relationships between concepts (Dul and Hak, 2008). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest the construction of a conceptual framework to identify the likely constructs in the inductive approach.

It should not be assumed that there is an automatic link between the five 'ways' identified by Yin and the deductive and inductive methodologies referred to by Bryman. All of the methodologies referred to by Yin could adopt either an inductive or deductive methodology – or a combination of both. There is however a strong link between the rationale suggested in Figure No. 1 and that in Figure No. 2. There should be a link between the research question, based on a need identified by a review of literature within the discipline(s) - (Figure No. 1), - and that of the accepted beliefs and processes of obtaining knowledge within the discipline(s) as outlined in Figure No. 2. If the research question is not aligned to a need of the discipline and an acceptable process of obtaining knowledge then the merit and validity of the research is questionable.

Despite differences between research paradigms they do have a number of important things in common. First, there is a shared desire to contribute to knowledge and second, there is a desire to ensure that research adopts a scientific approach. Paramount, regardless of the paradigm or the discipline, is the importance of what Gillham (2000 p. 3) refers to as the "raw material of research" - the evidence. Researchers must be able to justify that they have taken the approach to research as shown in Figures No. 1 and 2 to justify and defend the evidence that they have obtained and the contribution to knowledge which they may claim.

Methodologies for Place Management Research

Being within the social and behavioural sciences, the processes of obtaining knowledge of place management can include the methodologies of experiment, survey, case study, histories and analysis of archival information and can be based on deduction (theory testing) or induction (theory building). Its newness as well as its multidisciplinary nature results in there being few (if any) established theories 'owned' by place management which can be the basis of

deductive research. The opportunity does exist however to borrow theory from other disciplines and use this as the basis for a deductive process or identifying likely concepts for inductive research. Using an established but 'borrowed' theory as the basis of a deductive approach will commence with an assumption that the theory is relevant and transferable to place management, in which situation, the research may confirm or disprove the application of the theory in the context of place management. [A rejection of the theory may not only disprove the relevance of the theory to place management but possibly even disprove the theory – a black swan!]. The selection of methodologies for research in place management will be given attention following the sections on methods and measurement.

Research Methods and Measurement

Within the established methodologies there are different research methods or techniques of gaining data. Again, some readers of the literature may become confused possibly as a result of the use of terminology. It could be assumed, based on the array of text books, that there are two methods - quantitative methods and qualitative methods. These are however methods of measurement and analysis (see Figure No. 2) not methods of data collection. Methods of data collection include questionnaires, interviews, observation and documents (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2001). A characteristic of the case study methodology is that it can use more than one method of data collection – hence the term 'case study methods'; not implying that a case study is a method but a methodology having access to more than one method. Once the data is collected, methods of measurement and analysis can be applied. Importantly the measurement and analytical method should be planned prior to commencement of the research project – certainly not after the data has been collected!

With regard to methods of measurement and analysis, quantitative methods are often applied to measure and analyse causal relationships between variables within a value-free framework (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). This associates quantitative methods predominantly (although not exclusively) within the deductive methodology influenced by a positivist epistemology – the value free framework of objectivity. This often involves a survey (methodology) and includes the use of structured questionnaires (method) with a range of

predetermined responses. It is important to apply statistical sampling techniques (quantitative measurement and analysis) to ensure that the survey and the findings are representative of the population of interest.

Also having regard to methods of measurement and analysis, qualitative methods has a greater emphasis on processes and meanings. Methods used in qualitative studies include in-depth and focus group interviews and participant observation. Samples in qualitative research are not meant to represent large populations (e.g. the population of consumers) but are smaller and carefully selected to provide important information and be representative of the population of ideas or processes (Reid, 1996) in (Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002). The case study methodology for example can use a variety of 'data collection methods' followed by the use of qualitative methods of measurement and analysis.

Amaratunga and Baldry (2001) distinguish between "analytical generalisation" to explain patterns and linkages of theoretical importance to that of "statistical generalisation" as it applies to populations. Newman and Robey (1992) provide an interesting contrast between factor models; – 'that' the behaviour of a dependant variable can be explained by the application of an independent variable by the use of quantitative methods such as multiple regression and, process models - 'how' and 'why' the degree of association between variables occurs by use of qualitative methods.

In studying the likely success of place management for instance, the questions 'what causes success?' and 'how does success occur?' are very different questions and will require differing research designs. As Amaratunga and Baldry (2001 p. 96) state, " ...ignoring philosophical issues, though not necessarily fatal, can seriously affect the quality of research in management science". Dul and Hak (2008) point out, different research methodologies might use the same research methods (e.g. questionnaires) but it is how the data is measured and analysed (e.g. statistically or visually) that is the point of difference.

In summary, not only is a researcher's approach influenced by their 'view of the world' (Figure No. 2) but importantly the purpose and context of the research question should be influential (Figure No. 1).

The Purpose of the Research Question

The purpose of a research question needs to be fully understood and as such carefully worded by the researcher.

“Good” research questions are those which will enable you to achieve your aim and which are capable of being answered in the research setting” (Gillham, 2000 p. 17).

The form of research questions is shown in Table No. 1 below taken from Rowley (2002) and adapted from Yin (1994) [note the authors have referred to ‘strategy’ in what is referred to as ‘methodology’ in this paper]. These ‘strategies’ are influenced not only by the research question as developed pursuant to Figure No. 1 but the overarching researcher beliefs as shown conceptually in Figure No. 2.

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Form of research question</i>
Experiment	How, why
Survey	Who, what, where, how many, how much
Archival analysis	Who, what, where, how many, how much
History	How, why
Case study	How, why

Table No. 1: Types of Research Questions

Source: Yin (1994) Rowley (2002)

Different types of research strategy (methodology) are best suited to different types of research problems. For example, the suggested research questions posed at the beginning of this paper commenced with ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’.

Yin (1994) explains that there are two types of ‘what’ questions. The first is really asking ‘what are’ and as this is an exploratory question any of the research strategies (methodologies) could be used. The second ‘what’ question is asking ‘how many’, in which situation Yin suggests that survey or archival strategy would be appropriate. It should be noted from Table No. 1 that ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are best suited to the strategies of experiment, history and case study. Yin suggests that case studies and experiments are best suited to study contemporary issues, although Dul and Hak (2008) and (Woodside and Wilson (2003) argue that case studies are also appropriate for the study of

instances that occurred in the past. Given the appropriateness of the methodologies of experiment and case study to investigate 'how' and 'why' questions researchers in place management will need to consider the 'context' in which the research is to be undertaken.

The Importance of Context to the Research Question

As well as the type or form of the research question, the researcher must consider the importance of the context or setting to the research question as well as the researcher's adopted paradigm. For instance, is the researcher influenced by a positivist or constructionist view of reality? A contrast between experiment and case study is provided by Bonoma (1985) and reference is now made to Figure No. 3.

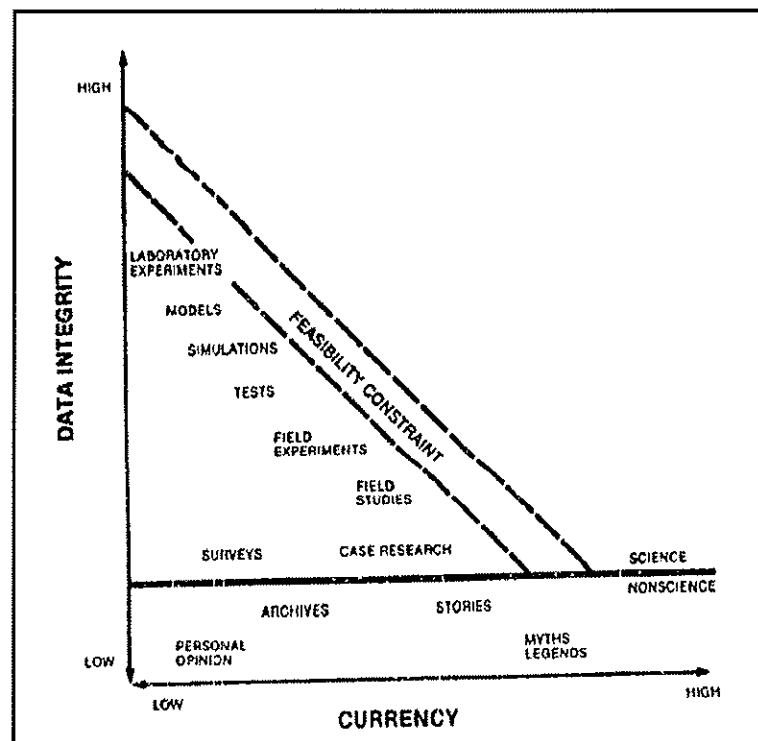


Figure No. 3: Knowledge Accrual Triangle

Source: Bonoma (1985 p. 200)

Bonoma, as shown in Figure No. 3, introduces the concepts of data integrity and currency. Currency refers to the contextual relevance of the results across measures, methods, persons, settings and time. Integrity refers to the characteristics that influence error and bias in research. Bonoma points out that

ideally researchers should seek high levels of data integrity and results currency. The dilemma is that there is a trade off between data integrity and currency. An experiment for instance is high in data integrity and lower in currency while the reverse is the situation with case study.

"A study which seeks high data integrity requires a precise operationalization of the research variables, a relatively large sample size and quantitative data for statistical power, and the ability to exercise power over persons, settings and other factors to prevent causal contamination. In contrast a study which seeks high currency typically demands situationally unconstrained operationalizations of variables to allow cross-setting generalization, and observations within natural, ecologically valid settings - 'noisy' settings - where samples, quantitative measures, and control are more difficult to achieve" (Bonoma, 1985 p. 200).

In response to the data integrity/currency dilemma a reader might ask, 'Why not use both an experiment and a case study to address the one research problem?' The answer is that:

- These are different methodologies and usually exist in different research paradigms (Figure 2) – the process of obtaining evidence must be defensible within the presently accepted laws of science and the paradigm,
- The methods of data collection are usually different (although case studies can use multiple methods),
- The methods of measurement and analysis are different as experiments usually use quantitative methods and case study qualitative methods, [Concepts with the same label may be defined differently and measured differently within each methodology],
- Often the methodologies are seeking to study concepts differently. For example, an experiment may examine the relationship between concepts seeking to infer a causality (and perhaps develop a factor model) whereas a case study may examine concepts seeking to interpret meanings and processes (and perhaps develop a process model),
- Remembering Gillham's (2000) point:

"Good" research questions are those which will enable you to achieve your aim and which are capable of being answered in the research setting",

a research question which cannot be addressed exclusively by one of the accepted methodologies might be too general and poorly worded,

- Practically, researchers do not always have the time and finance (and sometimes the skills) available to apply two methodologies to address the same research question,
- Also on reflection, methodology is a process. When contemplating how to undertake a task whether it is research or even tasks in our daily lives there may be a number of processes available but the processes are usually mutually exclusive and as such, cannot be done simultaneously.

Despite the above points there is some interest in mixed methodologies, mixed methods of data collection and mixed methods of data measurement and analysis (Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002) particularly with the development of computer software in both quantitative and qualitative data methods of measurement and analysis. The future may hold the establishment of a new research paradigm. For now researchers, unless their specific goal is to develop a new research paradigm, need to work within an existing paradigm.

Case Study Research in Place Management

It is proposed that case study is the most appropriate research methodology for many (not all) research questions associated with place management.

A case study (which may vary from one to multiple cases) is suited to the goal of generating and building theory in an area where little data exists and to study processes over time (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Yin, 1992). "Case study methods [this refers to the 'methods' of data collection] involve systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, events, all group to permit the research to effectively understand how it operates or functions" (Berg, 2001 p. 225). Berg suggests that the case study is not actually a data gathering technique (a method) but a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data gathering measures. Case study allows the researcher to look at the processes and actors using multiple sources of data, including interviews, reports, newspapers and observations. The following reasons are given in support of the use of the case study methodology in place management research.

1. The case study is able to be used to address the 'how' and 'why' questions of place management.

2. The definition of place management is given as the “the process of making places the best they can be”. Case study using qualitative methods of measurement and analysis is the preferred methodology to study processes (Reid, 1996).
3. Place management needs to be studied in its real-life context “where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994). While high in data integrity, experiments require concepts to be taken away from their context and currency is sacrificed (Bonoma, 1985). Case study allows researchers to study place management in its context of a noisy setting involving a complex array of stakeholders. “Case studies emphasise the rich, real-world context in which the phenomenon occur (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). A place is not a closed system but an integrated system (Stake, 1995) which is taken into account by the case study.
4. As a relatively new field, there is a need for a methodology that provides theory building – an inductive approach. Although case study can be utilised for theory testing (Gummesson, 1991; Dul and Hak, 2008), Eisenhardt (1989) argues that case study approach frees the researcher from the shackles of strict procedure and increases the likelihood of generating novel theory.
5. Studies of processes and phenomena in other disciplines that would have similarity to place management have utilised the case study methodology. As shown in Table No. 2, Yin (1994) identifies areas in which the case study is used some of which would overlap with research in place management.

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy, political science, and public administration research • Community psychology and sociology • Organizational and management studies • City and regional planning research, such as studies of plans, neighborhoods, or public agencies • The conduct of dissertations and theses in the social sciences—the academic disciplines as well as professional fields such as business administration, management science, and social work |
|---|

Table No. 2: Areas in which case study is used in research

Source: Yin (1994)

Patton and Appelbaum (2003) also argue for the appropriateness of case studies in organisational science as a “method” of generating theory and testing

theory. Xiao and Smith (2006) identify the diverse authorship background in terms of discipline and location of academics who have used case study methodology in research. The appropriateness of the case study methodology to academic and practitioner research in place management is now given attention.

Academic and Practitioner Research in Place Management

As stated, there are few theories that can be claimed to be 'owned' by place management and as such there is a need at this time to focus on theory building. Dul and Hak (2008) provide a framework for theory building research for which an experiment or a case study can be used. This is shown in Figure No. 4 below. They define theory as being a set of propositions about an object of study. Each proposition in the theory consists of concepts [(Anfara and Mertz (2006) distinguish between "concepts" such as age and intelligence which can be used to identify the "construct" of IQ] and specifications of relations between concepts (p.34). They also make a distinction between academic research and practitioner research; the former being referred to as theory orientated research which consists of the phases of exploration, theory building-research and theory-testing research. The objective of practitioner research is to "contribute to the knowledge of a specific practitioner (not practitioners in general)" (p.218) and the objective is to solve a problem in an identified place.

They argue that in academic research, the goal of theory building is to develop and test new propositions with the aim of 'generalisability' as it applies to a theoretical domain while this is not a priority in practitioner based research. It should be noted that Dul and Hak refer to the comparative case in theory building research which is: "a small number of cases in their real life context are selected and the scores obtained from these cases and analyses in a qualitative manner" (p.45).

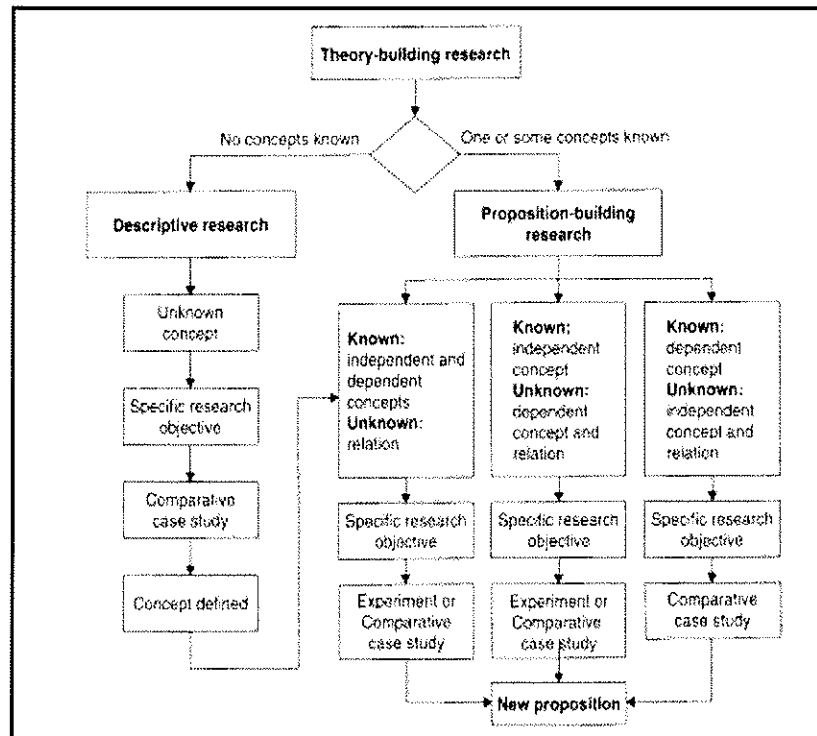


Figure No. 4

Source: Dul and Hak (2008)

Regardless of whether the research is being undertaken at the academic or practitioner domain, Dul and Hak (2008) insist that a scientific and therefore defensible approach should be taken to the design and implementation of the research project.

Conclusion

This work has provided an overview of the approach to research and some insight into the use of a case study methodology in place management. This work does not cover the 'doing phases' of case study research. Readers should consult the specialist writings including Eisenhardt (1989), Yin (1994), Stake (1995), Perry (1998), Gillham (2000), Woodside and Wilson (2003), Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) and Dul and Hak (2008).

It has been the intent of this work to contribute to the establishment of place management as a discipline with a strong academic and practitioner foundation. This can be done by ensuring that there is discipline specific theory developed and tested at both academic and practitioner levels. Good theory needs to be underpinned by a sound methodology which is influenced by the ontological and

epistemological considerations but also the nature of the research question and the importance of the research setting or context to the question. The beneficiaries of sound and defensible research will not only be the increasing number of members of the place management discipline but also, the places and people who will gain from the application of the knowledge and practice of place management.

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