

A justification of the question

In Chapter 4 we saw that planning academics usually justify their published research on two grounds: practical and academic. In relation to the first, one of the generic purposes and justifications of cross-national study outlined above is that this might lead to learning some lessons about good practice.

An academic justification could be that an interesting question has not been answered, that there is a gap in the literature, or that there have been attempts to answer it but these answers have not been satisfactory. A review of the literature either confirms the argument that there is a gap in the coverage of the question or the argument that the literature unearthed by the review has certain limitations that mean that further research is warranted.

When it comes to cross-national studies, the same argument applies. It is important to establish what claims and conclusions previous researchers have made. But there may be difficulties here. Booth (1996) referred to the paucity of sources in English and of accessible French sources on French planning. The output of work on planning has grown substantially since then. For various reasons, much is published in English language journals. There is a substantial literature in other languages referring to research on planning in specific countries, but in order to read this literature you need some language skills.

Comparative research can also be stimulated by published research into planning in Britain. For example, if there is a study of the preparation of local development plans in Britain, this could be used as the basis of a comparison with the production of a local plan in another country. The study by Wilson (1983) of local plans in France, although restricted to observation of working groups preparing local plans in four départements in France, with no equivalent research in Britain, was effectively a cross-national comparative study. It was a study of local plans in France from someone whose perspective on local plans was shaped by her understanding of the system in Britain with explicit comparisons being drawn between the nature of participation in the process between the two countries.

An appropriate logic for answering the question

Cases and sampling

A question which arises in designing research with both descriptive and explanatory aims is 'what is the population?' that is, the widest set of