

has happened or is happening everywhere in Europe. But it is a testable theory and the population to which it refers is all cities or city regions within the EU. Where a small sample of cases may be a problem if the objective of the research is a descriptive one, where there may be an interest in empirical generalisation, in this situation, since this theory is meant to apply to all these cases, research into trends in any one city region within Europe examining the objectives of policy and the institutional context could in principle falsify this theory (see Chapter 6 on the falsification of theories).

When comparing countries, Sharpe (1975: 28) proposed the 'rule of maximum similarity' to ensure that, as far as possible, in any comparative study, and in so far as one can tell from existing evidence, one should compare like with like. 'In this way we can minimise the number of variables to be compared'. If the idea is to compare the nature and working of city regions, and one has the hypothesis that the nature and working of city regions are influenced by, (a) the general constitutional provision for regions within a country, and (b) the nature of urban settlement in the region, then the countries of Germany and England are useful to select for comparative research because they differ in these variables of interest but 'other factors' which might influence the nature and working of urban regions, like the general level of economic development of the country, the democratic nature of the country, and the influence of the European Union on policy and practice are all controlled by this selection (Herrschel and Newman, 2002). This, of course, also restricts the population to which the results of the research can be generalised. A further example of a restrictive definition of the population of interest in cross-national study in Europe is the research by Couch et al. (2003) introduced above. They were interested in how the processes of urban regeneration differed between 'obsolescent urban areas' in Europe, and why they differed. The population of cases to which their theory might be generalised was, however, limited to those that met certain criteria. First, the population was limited to cases within countries which in the European context could be considered to have 'a broadly similar experience of economic development, urbanisation and economic restructuring' (2003: 14) (UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France and Italy). All were described as 'prosperous industrialised countries'. Within those countries they were only interested in: conurbations large enough to be regional centres but not capital cities; conurbations that had experienced large scale restructuring; conurbations that had some distinctive characteristics of locality that could be easily identified and whose impacts could be examined. The