

The Narrative-Textual Case Study as the Tool to Understand Sustainable Development in Developed Countries

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Abstract: There is a number of research methods used in social sciences. The abundance of these methods confronts the researcher with the task of deciding on the most suitable investigation technique for addressing particular research question. This is very significant when we want to look at the challenges facing the researchers in investigating the issue of sustainability and sustainable development. Information about fields of social science has been traditionally less accessible in the public domain. The sustainable development research is strongly related to basic fields such as Management, Entrepreneurship, and Economics. Today there is a lot of material about the local and regional environments and about their key players. Adli Abouzeedan and Svante Leijon introduced specific form of the case study method to benefit from this fact. They called this technique The Narrative-Textual Case Study. In this paper we argued that the Narrative-Textual Case Study or NT Case Study is the best method to be used in the sustainable development research and in particular in the developed region of the world. The findings of this paper are of practical benefit to policy planners who work to incorporate sustainability as an important component in development schemes.

Keyword: Narrative-textual case study, NT case study, Innovation balance matrix, IBAM, Developing countries, Sustainable development, Sustainability, MEE disciplines

1 Introduction

Social sciences have become the focus of thorough investigation during the last two centuries, as scholars saw the connection between the materialistic progress of humanity and the advances in social sciences. As a result scholars started to look at how we can build a solid social theory research techniques within the new environment (see Silverman, 2001, p. xi). New technological breakthroughs have given us better capacities due to two fundamental changes. The first is the higher availability of printed material about individuals or groups due to the advances, in the printing industry. The second and even more significant alternation is the new worldwide availability of information about people, groups, organizations and societies via electronic medium such as *Intranet*, *Internet*, and *World Wide Web* domains. Actually, there is a tendency today to give higher weight of the narrative side of story-telling than to focus on the pure numeric part of the investigation. In social research, the subject has merged as an actor who causes things to stir around it. Abouzeedan and Leijon (2007) argued that Actor Network Theory (ANT) can be looked upon as an outcome of that narritism. The actors provide the society with the capital needed for program. Researching sustainable development requires in-depth understanding of how societies build their entrepreneurial nature through innovativeness. The entrepreneurial intensity of an economy is a reflection of the richness of the various forms of capital.

There are different types of capital which enhance the entrepreneurial capacity of a country. These include three basic types: *Human Capital*, *Financial Capital*, and *System Capital* (see Abouzeedan and Busler 2004, 2006). The first two types are known ones and have been historically discussed by different researchers. The *System Capital* is a new concept which was established recently in Abouzeedan and Busler (2004, 2006). The three types present a single combined component expressing the total input of a society toward the entrepreneurial activities. Abouzeedan and Busler (2004, 2006) suggested o call this aggregate input as the "*Innovation Capital*".

The first section of this paper is a general introduction. In the second section we discuss, in short, the entrepreneurial society. The third section discusses the innovation capital and how it is related to entrepreneurial economy. The fourth section exposes the reader to the Narrative-textual Case Study technique. In the fifth section we look at the abilities of NTCS to solve obstacles in sustainable development research. The final section is a short concluding note.

2 Entrepreneurial Society

2.1 Human Capital

Documented investigations indicate clearly a strong relationship between the quality of human capital in society and the degree of innovations. Romer (1986) postulated that R&D leads to the creation of knowledge that can have a direct affect on technological change in societies. Schultz (1959) argued that the high rising in productivity of certain countries is attributed to investments in human capital. Polachek (1995) stressed that, human capital theory has its roots back in the work of Sir William Petty who considered labor 'the father of wealth' (see also Kiker, 1971, p. 62). According to that scholar it is paradoxical that a country export labor intensive commodities in a time when its wages were relatively high compared to the other countries.

2.2 Financial Capital

The early economic studies assumed that growth in the short run was largely driven by capital investment, while long-run growth was due to exogenous technological change (Corley *et al*, 2002). Studies in financial capital area are based on the neoclassical theory of growth. They include works of Jorgenson and Griliches (1967) whose focus on the measurement issues of tangible investment was an attempt to reduce the size of the unexplained portion of growth due to exogenous changes. Later studies attempted to explain the determinants of growth by taking into consideration intangible investment, such as R&D. Lichtenberg (1992) explained the productivity differences among countries using degree of investment in physical, R&D and human capital. Lichtenberg's view is confined to the manufacturing sector and does not take into consideration cross-country effects. Other studies have shown that even when the tangible and intangible investment factors are taken in consideration, still we find cross-country differences in productivity.

2.3 System Capital

As pointed by Abouzeedan and Bulser (2004, 2006), *System Capital* is an indicator of the level of support that individual firms receive from the different institutions both governmental and non-governmental. The non-governmental institutions includes: public establishments, private firms, unions, associations.. etc. The form of such support is varying in accordance with the structure and aims of such institutions. The System Capital differs from the first two types, because it has both a macro and micro dimensions in its nature. All the major scholars of the institutionalism point to the large impact institutions have on organizations (see Selznick, 1949 and DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

3 Innovation Capital and the Entrepreneurial Character of Economy

Abouzeedan and Busler (2004, 2006) argued that there is a combined concept which encompasses the three types of capital, i.e. *Human Capital*, *Financial Capital*, and *System Capital*. According to the scientists, the three types of capital are integrated in a new type of capital, the "*Innovation Capital*". Abouzeedan and Busler (2004, 2006) theorized that when the components of the Innovation Capital are in balance, and contributing in equal proportion to the total input, the society will be rich in innovation activities leading to an entrepreneurial economy. To clarify better the relationship between the three components of Innovation Capital, and the possible outcomes out of such relationship, Abouzeedan and Busler (2004, 2006) invented the Innovation Balance Matrix (IBAM). The Innovation Balance Matrix is an analytical tool to

look at different situations regarding the state of the components of the Innovation Capital. When the three components of the Innovation Capital are at a right level, then we have an economy which is innovative and entrepreneurial (see Abouzeedan and Busler 2004, 2006). Another scenario is produced when only one of the three components is at exaggerated level. We would then have a less-entrepreneurial economy. The extreme case is to have all the three components of the Innovation Capital at exaggerated level. That will produce high level of unbalance in the system leading to the creation of a hyper-capitalistic environment (see Abouzeedan and Busler 2004, 2006).

4 Narrative-Textual Case Study Approach

4.1 Traditional Case Study Approach

Researchers introduced new concepts to account for the changes in the business environment due to IT impact. Abouzeedan and Lejion (2007) argued that the IT-tools are even having impact on the way we can conduct our research in various fields. The *Intranet, Internet, World Wide Web (WWW), Online Databases* and *E-libraries* bring between our hand tremendous rich sources of data and information. This facilitates combining traditional methods of social research, to produce a new research method, Abouzeedan and Lejion (2007), called this technique *Narrative-textual Case Study* (alternatively *NT Case Study* or *NTSC*). David Silverman (2001, p. x) used two contemporary social science theories, *Ethnomethodology* and *Semiotics* in his research. The first theory has to do with the ethnographical observation of the subject, while the second theory has to do with analysis of literary text (Silverman, 2001, p. x). The *Narrative-Textual Case Study* methodology utilizes the *Semiotics theory* (Abouzeedan and Lejion, 2007).

4.2 The Narrative-Textual Case Study Method

Abouzeedan and Lejion (2007) defined the *Narrative-textual Case Study* as "A research methodology in social sciences which is using intensively the data and information available at the public domain and produced through the diverse Information Technology media such as *Intranet, Internet, World Wide Web (WWW), Online Databases, E-libraries* etc. The *NTCS* method combines the qualities of the three traditional social research methods: the *Observation; the Textual content analysis, and the Official Statistics, in different ratios depending on the nature of the research problem.*" Based on this definition of the *Narrative-textual Case Study*, Abouzeedan and Lejion (2007) looked at the general research characters of the new *NTCS* method. These include: *Type of Research, Source of Text/Data, Nature of Analysis, Significance of Statistical analysis, Fields of focus, Ontological aspect, Epistemological aspect, Axiological aspect, Contribution to knowledge, and Canonical development.* In figure 1, we stated the meaning of each of the characters and how they manifest themselves in relation to *NTCS*. In the coming subsection we will look at how these characters are related to the demand of sustainable development.

4.3 The Narrative-Textual Case Study Method, Characteristics of Concern

The first character to look at when discussing the extent to which the *Narrative-textual Case Study* is suitable to be used in the sustainable development research is *Type of research*. According to Abouzeedan and Lejion (2007), *NTCS* covers both types of research, the quantitative and qualitative. The sustainable development research requires also both methods of investigation. Thus the character (*Type of research*), is very significance to the sustainable development research. The second character to look at is the (*Source of text/Data*). *NTCS* approach is very practical in multilevel and multidimensional investigations. The research in the sustainable development is often multidimensional requiring different sources of data. Thus this character is of high significance to the sustainable development research. *NTCS* is more focused on narrative story building. This nature of the method is clarified through the character (*Nature of analysis*). The sustainable development research requires a lot of narrative approach to tackle it. This character is of very significance to the sustainable development. *Significance of statistical analysis* represents the fifth character

Characteristics of concern	Explanation of the research character	Narrative-Textual Case Study	Significance of the NTCS character to Sustainable Development
Type of research	Whether quantitative, qualitative or combined	Both quantitative and qualitative	Very high
Source of text/ Data	Whether. traditional or based on new sources such as the ones based at IT	Information technology media	Very high
Nature of analysis	Whether explanatory, descriptive, narrative. etc	Narrative-Story building	Very high
Significance of Statistical analysis	The importance of statistical analysis	Depends on the research question	High
Fields of focus	Preferences given to specific fields	The MEE fields	Very high
Ontological aspect	The <i>ontological aspect</i> is concerned with the choice of research question.	Research questions involving rapid dynamism of change of facts/conditions.	Very high
Epistemological aspect	The <i>epistemological aspect</i> is concerned with the choice of research method	Penetration-narrative re-structuring	Very high
Axiological aspect	The <i>axiological aspect</i> is concerned with the justification for the choice of the research method.	Voluminous -broad-deep	Very high
Contribution to knowledge	Whether the method is seeking to bring better understanding to that reality and not stopping at the explanatory aspect.	Understanding the reality	Very high
Canonical development	The degree of bringing and combining together older and new knowledge	Significant	Very high

Figure 1 General characteristics of the *Narrative-textual Case Study* (alternatively *NT Case Study* or *NTCS*)

to look at. In NTCS technique the intensity of the usage of the statistical analysis depends on the research question. Statistics represent an important component in the sustainable development research. Thus the character (*Significance of Statistical analysis*) is of high significance to sustainable development. However, a lot of research in sustainable development relies more on descriptive and narrative data. That is why this character assumes less significance in comparison to the other character. *Fields of focus* is concerned with the preference given to specific field of knowledge. The MEE fields are the major areas for which NTCS is applicable. The MEE disciplines refer to the three areas of knowledge: *Management, Entrepreneurship and Economics* (see Abouzeedan and Leijon, 2007). Thus (*Fields of focus*) is very significant to sustainable development when utilizing the NTCS method.

The *ontological aspect* or the choice of research question is an essential component of a good research design. In NTCS method the research is tackling rapid dynamic change of facts and conditions. Rapid changes and dynamism is a central component of a good research design in sustainable development. As thus, the *ontological aspect* is very significant to sustainable development. On the other hand, *The epistemological aspect* is concerned with the choice of the research method. The choice of research method in the NTCS approach favours penetrative, narrative and restructuring approach. These are basic ingredients in the requirements of a good sustainable development research work. *The epistemological aspect*, as thus, is very significant to sustainable development. *The axiological aspect* of research is more concerned with the justification as to the choice of specific research method to tackle selected research questions. In case of NTCS, the purpose is to produce a voluminous, broad, and deep analysis. These are important features for sustainable development. *The axiological aspect* is thus very significant to sustainable development. NTCS promotes a *contribution to knowledge* which is based on understanding reality. This is very essential component in the sustainable development research and thus *contribution to knowledge* is very significant to sustainable development.

Finally, the NTCS approach demands a combination of old and new wisdom. This combination is designated as *canonical development*. This is a very vital aspect of a successful research in sustainable development. *Canonical development* is very significant to the sustainable development.

What we have explained above is summarized in figure 1. In the next section we shall look in depth as to how NTCS tackles research problems which are relevant to sustainable development.

5 The NT Case Study Capacities to Solve Research Issues in Sustainable Development

5.1 Background

The Narrative-Textual Case Study has the ability to tackle a lot of the issues, which hinder good research in social sciences. The said plays a very central role in our understanding that NTCS is the best to use in sustainability research. Below is a discussion of the most important issues of concern in social sciences, within the context of the NT Case Study approach.

5.2 The Policy Factor

A dominant factor, which motivates scientists in their choice of investigation methods, is the demand on research to direct itself out of practicality and policy-benefit toward the scientific value of the investigation (Brannen, 2005). Hammersely (2000) expressed concern for the said fact. Other scholars have touched on the subject also. For example, Janet Finch argued in the 1980s that the British government has long preferred quantitative evidence in contrast to pluralistic methodological preferences maintained by US government (see Finch, 1986). That is very true in sustainable development research which is much politicized. The nature of the Case Study technique, in general, makes it less sensitive to policy manipulation, because the method uses a type of data, which is available in the public domain. In such situation, manipulative actions can be discovered and pointed out early.

5.3 The Issue of Generalizability

A problem which can affect experiment design and can elude the investigator to give preference to quantitative research method, is the concept of *generalizability* (see Welch and Comer, 1988, p. 23). Often the term *generalizability* is coupled with the statistical representativeness of the sample, which is characteristic for quantitative research. However, qualitative research findings can be generalized in a different sense. They maybe generalized to other similar settings or contexts or they may involve theoretical generalization. The value of the research output in sustainable development is strongly related to the ability of the researchers to generalize the findings. Generalizability is achievable in NTCS methodology, by focusing on theoretical

generalization. That is even more feasible when using the NTCS technique. The method is concerned with deep-narrative penetration for the research question, allowing for a learning process of significance and thus a more sound theoretical applicability.

5.4 The Problem of Over-Theorization

Silverman (2001, p. x) believes in theoretically-informed research, which focuses on understanding the phenomenon rather than creating them. The writer often warned from over-theorization. In his writings Silverman (2001, p. x) expressed the view that “such over-theorization is an ever present danger given that many social science disciplines still, I believe live in fear of being discovered, like the fabled Emperor, without any cloths”. Such danger of over-theorization is apparent in sustainable development research. The risk of over-theorization is at its minimum level when using the NTCS approach. The method focus is mostly on discovering and understanding reality and thus it has higher degree of objectivity.

5.5 The absolutism Trap

The absolutist trap is manifested in the temptation to accept uncritically the conventional wisdom of our day. There are four such *absolutism traps*, of particular significance. These are: *Scientism*, *Progress*, *Tourism*, and *Romanticism*. *Scientism* and *Progress* is a source of worrying for the quantitative social scientist, while *Tourism* and *Romanticism*, are more of a problem for the qualitative social scientists (see Silverman, 2001, p. 7). *Scientism* involves accepting, uncritically, the notion that science is both highly distinct from and superior to common sense. *Progress*, on the other hand, involves uncritical belief that we could always detect a path leading to progressive historical changes. *Tourism* refers to the desire to see some thing new or different for the sake of the scientific excitement only. In the *romantic approach*, research is justified in terms of its “authentic” representation of the experience when what is authentic is culturally defined (see Silverman, 2001, p. 8-9). In sustainable development all these traps are feasible due to the complexity and multilevel nature of the research in that field. However, using the NTCS technique reduces the risk of their existence of these *absolutism traps*.

The risk of falling into the *Tourism* trap of absolutism is almost eliminated in the NT Case Study approach. The investigator would have a rich amount of data to build on his real story. Reality has better influence on the research analysis in the NTCS than in other techniques including the traditional case study approach.

Scientism and *Progress* can affect indirectly our judgement even when using the NTCS approach. This is due to the fact that these two traps are more related to the mindset of the investigator than to the realities of the external world. However, we do expect the scientists to be objective in their tackling of the research questions. *Romantism* is the only one of the four absolutism traps, which we need to observe carefully when we conduct an NT Case Study analysis. Because the NT Case Study method implies a chance to work with larger quantity of data of textual and numerical nature, there is a risk that such analysis could be culturally influenced. That is why, for issues that are culturally sensitive such as sustainable development, Abouzeedan and Lejion (2007) recommend the usage of multiple NTCS technique contra the single NTCS technique.

5.6 Tackling the Absolutism Paradox

To tackle the *Absolutism* paradox, Abouzeedan and Lejion (2007) argued that we need to be aware of specific sensitivities. According to Silverman (2001, p. 9), there are three types of sensitivities. These are: *historical sensitivity*, *political sensitivity*, and *contextual sensitivity*. The last of these sensitivities, that is the *contextual sensitivity*, is the most related to the NTCS technique. It is important to be aware of the context within which the data is collected, and how it is provided. All of these sensitivities are valid in the context of the sustainable development research. To eliminate these sensitivities, the investigator has to develop sound research strategy.

5.7 The “Canonical Development Approach”

The first step in building on a good research strategy is to look at the connection between past and new knowledge. This is expressed in the terminology “the canonical development approach”. The “Canonical development approach” looks at how we can combine existing knowledge with new discoveries (Hindle (2004). This is very significant aspect in sustainable development research. There is no scientific or political reason to re-produce our existing knowledge in a new research. Hindle (2004) suggested using the wording “canonical development approach” as a best replacement to the two worst alternatives *paradigm conflict* and *philosophic avoidance*. The *paradigm-conflict perspective* attempts to tackle the methods choice based on arguing in the relative merits of different generic philosophies of research. The *philosophical-avoidance perspective* regards any and all matters of metaphysical context as simply too hard to deal with and too productive of conflict (Hindles, 2004). NTCS is able satisfy the need to combine old and new knowledge in sustainable development research.

6 Concluding Remarks

In this work we first looked at how NTCS technique can be judged in relation to the need of sustainable development research. By studying the different characteristics of the Narrative-textual Case Study we found them to be of very high significance to the requirements asserted by the sustainable development research. Only the statistical analysis was of less significance. In the second part of the paper we discussed in depth particular issues of concern in social sciences research and which are highly relevant to sustainable development. These included: *the policy factor*, *generalizability*, *over-theorization*, and *canonical development*. We found that the NTCS technique is able to tackle these problems without great difficulty. The overall conclusion of this paper is that *Narrative-textual Case Study* is a very strong candidate as a method of research in sustainable development techniques. It should be utilized for that purpose and be given preference over other research methods.

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