Dear reader,

In urban planning, we already design for the utility and convenience of the user. But there is a huge potential to take it a step further to induce positive behaviour. This could encompass anything from a single small nudge to a large-scale multi-nudge system. With either approach, it has been shown through practice that well-designed nudging can effectively change persistent habits.

We hope that with this EPOMM e-update we can provide you with some insights on nudging and how it can influence urban planning and policy-making, but also how it can help citizens to make the right choice.

Nudge me if you can!

Source: anderson.ucla.edu

Nudging is a relatively modern decision-making initiative designed to **introduce a form of behavioural change without limiting people's choices or regulating actions** by punishment or taxation. Furthermore, nudging strategies recognise that people have different attitudes, potentials or skills, while traditional decision-making processes sometimes fail to accommodate demographic diversity.

The idea of nudging people is not a breakthrough psychological insight. However, it did become widely known when Thaler and Sunstein published their book 'Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness' in 2008. Within the past years nudging has been used in governmental strategies around the world and has both been praised and criticised.

On the one hand, nudging **provides citizens the opportunity to make free and responsible choices.** On the other hand, it **tricks them into making the 'right' choice** (according to someone else's perspective). This has led to many opinions regarding the use of nudging in decision-making processes.
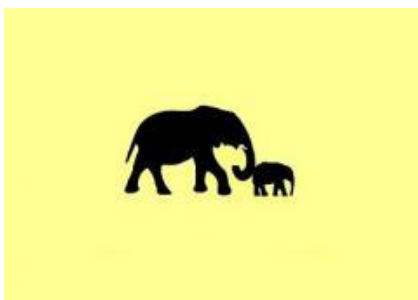
A friendly city is a safe and happy city

Source: prisma-hsg.ch

People are not always rational thinkers, but the choices we all make as individuals together influence the shape and form of our cities. Tiny decisions, such as taking the bike instead of the car, have, when made en masse, the power to tip the scales towards a healthier, happier and more livable city.

Hence, one can argue that **design solutions that encourage small specific human behaviours can be crucial to achieve the results we want to see in our cities**.

And here, nudging comes in. Especially, as we know that urban design tends to be expensive and time-consuming. In recent years however, some of this thinking has begun to evolve with the introduction of ideas that focus on smaller, quicker design projects that are often even temporary, to serve as test-beds for larger design systems.

Let's compare apples with staircases

Source: goodvertising.site

Changes in our cities depend on changes in human behaviour. Public dialogue, discussion and campaigns are essential to raise awareness, and they play an important role in raising awareness. However, most of the time, they have little effect and do not lead to behavioural change.

Nudging creates **change by working with human behavioural tendencies**. A popular example would be placing an apple at eye level to encourage healthy eating, instead of banning junk food.

Sille Krukow, a behavioural design expert, said in her talk at TEDx Copenhagen, "*I believe we all intend to do the right thing. But our instinct and flaws get in the way.*" Design experts

have understood this and now work towards integrating nudges in design.

For example, to encourage people to use the stairs instead of the escalator in Stockholm, 'The Fun Theory', an initiative of Volkswagen, turned the stairs into piano keys. The result was that people jumped on the 'keys' with curiosity and amusement. The Fun Theory proved to be true. The stairs, which were right next to an escalator, were used 66 percent more than normal as people took their time playing a tune.

Road safety has entered a third dimension

Too many pedestrians are seriously injured and killed in traffic. Besides many other causes, unsafe road crossings and bad urban design are also reasons for this. Many cities and countries implement different solutions for road safety, but Iceland probably has the most creative one.

In the small fishing village of Ísafjörður, an exciting development in the safety of pedestrian crossings has 'popped up' – almost in the true sense of the word. A new kind of 3D speed bump was painted. The innovative design not only **gives pedestrians the feeling of flying in the air**, but the painting also **attracts the attention of the drivers**, who slow down as soon as they discover the seemingly floating zebra stripes.

Photocredit: Linda Björk Pétursdóttir

Tricking commuters into behaving in a desired manner

How to slow down speeding vehicles without penalties? How to tackle conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists in a city? When you walk or drive in the UK, you're being nudged by dozens of **hidden messages embedded in the roads and pavements**.

Streets are strategically **sprinkled with patterned tiles**, such as bumps and dimples that subtly tell road users what to do. In certain areas, where the pedestrian and cyclist footpaths run side by side, vertical stripes indicate the pedestrian side and the parallel stripes the cyclist side. Another example is to plant trees on either side of the road which get gradually closer together. It creates the **illusion that motorists were going faster than they really were** as they approached the villages – even if they kept their speed constant. In initial findings, accidents were cut by 20 percent.

Photocredit: Alamy

From Denmark with ♥

The city of Copenhagen is repeatedly referred to as one of the most liveable cities in the world. This would not have been possible without **planned nudges that direct collective behaviour** in a positive direction.

For example, to address the issue of increased waste, the city has set up litter prevention programmes that put rubbish bins in strategic places, especially where people were expected to dispose of waste. But the real impetus was to paint green footprints that led to the bins. The footprints pushed people to take these steps to dispose of their rubbish. The nudge proved to be very effective, leading to people being more conscious about their environment.

*Source: cleaneuropenetwork.eu*

The smart city creates a platform for better decision making

Most discussions about smart cities are focused on infrastructure. Big data and information technology are used to better manage urban assets such as public transport, sewage systems, roads, and so on. The term 'smart' usually refers to physical assets that connect to the Internet of Things through sensor technology and generate data streams.

However, it is not easy to create framework conditions that take the individual's wishes into account. One way to do so is exemplified by Jane Jacobs' story about children, who spontaneously and together created 'desire paths' in the snow. The **wise planners base their decision on the emerging order that results from the accumulated knowledge and preferences of the crowd**. Using behavioural insights creatively is a powerful way of employing people-centric design to make cities smarter.

Photocredit: Alamy
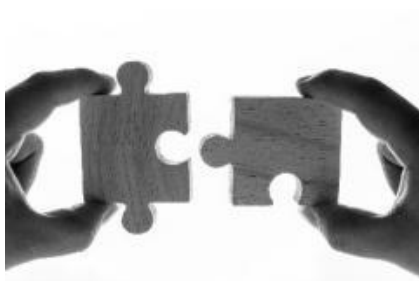
Ethical concerns on the use of nudges for policy-making

In fact, **some feel uncomfortable when a government plays around with people's decisions**, albeit subtly. While paternalism has been condemned for restricting people's freedom, nudging and libertarian paternalism are being criticised for their creeping influence on people's decisions.

On the other hand, nudging advocates claim that **there is no neutral architecture**, and individuals' choices will always be influenced by the decision maker's decisions.

It is precisely these concerns that are controversial, because **no action is often not the best option for policy-makers**. Some convincing evidence on how behavioural considerations helped to shape policy initiatives can be found in the publication Behavioural Insights Applied to Policy: Overview across 32 European Countries, a Science for Policy report by the JRC Science Hub, the European Commission's in-house science service, published in 2016 (see Section 2.2).

Source: ec.europa.eu/jrc

Conclusion: Can a simple, effective design serve as a behaviour nudge?

Despite the relatively uncertain outcomes in specific local contexts, the use of inductive approaches to behavioural economics, such as nudging, is increasing. These **approaches are seen as complementary** to traditional policy instruments and not as a substitute laws, regulations and economic instruments.

Nudging is a **useful strategy for inducing changes** in context-specific behaviour. It can improve initiative design as well as mprove the acceptance, effectiveness and efficiency of policy instruments and the speed of their implementation.

Source: Freepik.com

Nudging is a **cost-effective tool that targets behaviours** that are not taken into account by other policy instruments, i.e. behaviours based on automatic, intuitive and non-deliberative thinking.

Finally, one of the substantial elements of nudging is that it works by **influencing individuals' intuitive and unintentional processes and does not actively engage the public in debating patterns**. This also implies that perhaps this is a possible strategy for people with low engagement in public discourse. There is a growing consensus that the best interventions will certainly be those that seek to change minds alongside changing contexts.

Or, as Jane Jacobs states in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* "**Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody**."

Upcoming events

- **Oslo Urban Arena 2019**
  12-13 September 2019 | Oslo, Norway
  oslourbanarena.com

- **EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK**
  16-22 September 2019 | Europewide
  mobilityweek.eu

- **Smart City Solutions 2019**
  17-19 September 2019 | Stuttgart, Germany
  smartcitysolutions.eu

- **CIVITAS Forum Conference 2019**
  02-04 October 2019 | Graz, Austria
  civitas.eu

For more events, please visit the EPOMM calendar.