Behavioural Public Policy for Sustainability

MPhil Paper Guide 2022 (lent)
Dr. Lucia Reisch, POLIS

When: Fridays 13-15, starts 21st January 2022
as of July 20, 2021

Course Description

Policy tools and approaches to help reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) span a wide range, from hard to soft policies. This course focuses on Behavioural Public Policy as a recent policy approach increasingly employed by governments and supranational organizations complementing their classical instruments. We will investigate how evidence-based behavioural insights and tools ("nudges") and BPP-specific policy processes ("nudging") can (and already do) supplement the existing policy toolbox for sustainable development. We will have a few high-level guest speakers from academia and the science-policy interface for short inputs and in-class debate (in a hybrid model).

We begin by examining the theoretical and conceptual basics of behavioural economics and behavioural public policy. These theoretical foundations are then applied to selected sustainable development goals, focusing on specific contemporary examples. The examples studied range from adopting electric vehicles to COVID vaccine hesitancy and switching to a planetary diet and renewable energy. Next, we examine practical strategies and approaches, successes, and limits of behavioural insights-based policies. In the final part, we explore debates around the ethics and good governance of nudging and future developments of the field.

The course will consist of 7 seminars of 2 hours in length. This includes introducing key concepts (by me), a short (10 min) presentation prepared by a volunteer student, and/or input by a leading expert in the respective topic, followed by an in-class debate.

The readings are divided into core and further reading. Moreover, I suggest some popular science books that may serve as accessible introductory readings. Students will have read all of the core readings before each seminar; access will be prepared. The books and reports are available in the library or online. The "further reading" is an offer for students conducting presentations or writing essays on specific topics. Volunteers will present in class and will receive feedback on their presentations. Presentations will not be formally assessed. Formal assessment will be in the form of a 3000 words essay submitted at the end of term. Students can choose 1 out of 7 questions.

Contributing experts (dates t.b.c.)
Mark Andor, RIW Essen (D)
Mary MacLennan (UN Innovation Network, New York), UN
Faisal Naru (UK), Rockefeller Foundation, former Head of the OECD Behavioural Team
Cass R. Sunstein, Harvard University and Biden Administration (USA)
Suggested introductory reading

The icon and *must-read* of Behavioural Public Policy (BPP), the second "final" edition:

An edutaining book on the origins of Behavioural Economics by one of its founders (and Nobel Laureate):

Popular science books that helped to make the field accessible (and famous):

The tale about how the first governmental nudge unit (in the UK) began:

A founding classic of Behavioural Economics (and Policy):

Session (1) Behavioural Public Policy: Foundations and Concepts

**Concepts:** libertarian paternalism; choice architecture; behavioural insights; dual-process theories; biases and heuristics; nudges, shoves, budges and snudges; "sludge" (audits);

**Expert:** Cass Sunstein. Harvard University, former Head of the White House OIRA, now Senior Counselor and Regulatory Policy Officer in the Department of Homeland Security, US.

**Core reading:**

**Further reading:**


**Session (2) Sustainable Development: The Science and Practice of Behavioural Change**

**Concepts:** Sustainable Development Goals; behavioural science; behaviour change models; behaviour change interventions; impact

**Expert:** Mary MacLennan (UN Innovation Network, UN New York)

**Core reading:**


**Further reading:**


Session (3) Evaluation of BPP: Cost-effectiveness and Acceptability

**Concepts:** evidence-based policy; policy cycle; policy evaluation; cost-benefit analysis; nudges that fail; acceptability; unintended side-effects; impact

**Core reading:**

**Further reading:**

Session (4) Case study: The Power of the Plate

**Concepts:** ecological foodprint; behavioural food policy; planetary diet; food waste reduction; UN Food Systems Summit;

**Core reading:**

**Further reading:**

Session (5) Case study: Energy Conservation and Energy Transition

Concepts: non-price interventions; green nudges and green defaults; behavioural contagion; energy transition; ethics of defaults

Expert: Mark Andor, RWI Essen

Core reading:

Further reading

Session (6) Limits and Pitfalls: Ethics and Good Governance of BPP

Concepts: autonomy, paternalism, manipulation, legitimacy, ethics, good governance; participatory co-creation; Nudge Plus

Core reading:
Further reading:

Session (7) The Future of BI: Scope, Scale, and Institutionalization

Concepts: the institutionalization of BPP; nudge units; BASIC toolbox; nudging in organizations;

Expert: Faisal Naru, Rockefeller Foundation, former Head of OECD Behavioural Unit

Core reading:

Further reading: