

Encouraging environment-friendly behaviours

Nudges, the new of public policies tool

Most opinion surveys are positive: French people's awareness regarding the impact of their consumption on natural resources and environment is growing. And yet, they do not adapt their behaviour consequently. Based on this fact, La Fabrique Ecologique and Futuribles international launched a workgroup on nudges, an innovating tool that remains little known in France. The present note constitutes an original analysis of the issue.

SYNTHESIS OF THE WORKING PAPER

To change their practices, public authorities generally rely on four different tools: information and awareness, financial incentives, law (prohibition or mandatory), and exemplary nature. But these four aspects have shown their limits in terms of responsible consumption. However, a fifth category of public actions exists: a concept invented by Cass Sunstein (jurist) and Richard Thaler (economist) in 2008. They imply for instance incentives¹. Behind this word is encompassed a wide range of actions and channels, for some already well-known, seeking to change the architecture of choice and thus orientating decision-making in a simple and pragmatic way.

Nudges generate a growing interest of public authorities abroad, for they have two main advantages: they do not restrict individual freedom and have a limited cost, while their impact can be significant. Nudges can thus represent a complementary tool, carried out within the framework of public policies aiming at making individual behaviours more "responsible" for health, environment, etc.

However, this concept is generally poorly studied in France, although a note published in 2011 by the *Centre d'analyse stratégique* emphasized its interest². Like any other tools made available for public authorities, nudge is neither magical nor totally new, but it may be really useful to change some behaviours. Its main interest relies in taking into account the psychological dimension of behaviours in the conception of public policies. However, the use of nudges by public authorities implies taking into account the risks and limits of this tool.

This note presents two recommendations aimed at public authorities:

- The first offers to **make nudges become the new tool of public policies**, particularly in order to use it to orientate individuals towards more responsible behaviours for them, for others and for the environment. This approach could be involved at the intergovernmental level, but also in each Ministry, local authority, NGO, company...
- The second proposal consists in **implementing nudges of public interest**, that meet predefined collective objectives, especially in the context of the ecological transition, in addition to other public policies tools.

¹ *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, Paris:Vuibert, 2010

²<http://archives.strategie.gouv.fr/cas/content/note-d%E2%80%99analyse-216-nudges-verts-de-nouvelles-incitations-pour-des-comportements-ecologiques-.html>