

## Nudging in Alpine Tourism | Episode 3 of the speciAlps podcast series

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### Transcript:

*Michael Gams, CIPRA International:* Hello and welcome to our speciAlps podcast series „guide visitors, preserve nature“. In today's episode we talk about Nudging in Alpine Tourism.

My name is Michael Gams and this is the third of four podcast episodes within this series, produced by CIPRA International in cooperation with the community network Alliance in the Alps. All episodes are in English. The current episode is also available in German language. So if you speak German, feel free to choose the German episode.

Now we are ready to dive into the topic of today's podcast episode: Nudging in Alpine tourism. The term “nudge” is used to describe measures that encourage people to act on their own initiative as desired. How can visitors to sensitive natural areas in the Alpine region be persuaded to behave responsibly without bans or financial incentives? How is nudging used to guide visitors? How effective is it for sustainable tourism? Does visitor management need psychologists and is nudging ethical?

In order to be able to find answers to these questions, we organized a webinar, which took place on September 21st and was joined by over 150 persons from all over the Alps. Several experts gave their inputs on nudging in tourism, followed by a discussion round. One of them was Eva Maria Cattoen, a trained ecologist and mediator as well as managing director of LechtAlps, an office situated in the Austrian Lechtal valley. LechtAlps focuses especially on participatory processes and conflict management in alpine regions. Eva Maria Cattoen guided through the webinar and gave a first definition of what a Nudge is:

*Eva Maria Cattoen:* What is a nudge? It is really very broadly discussed and sometimes it's not easy to find the exact definitions. And I share with you the one which is also published by Harvard Edu. They call it a subtle technique or an indirect encouragement designed to steer individuals towards a desired action so that they do what you would like them to do without coercion, without pressure in this sense, and without forbidding any options. So keeping their freedom, individual freedom and yeah, to guide them to choices toward beneficial outcomes.

*Michael Gams:* But Nudging can also be used in visitor management. Concerning this, Eva Maria Cattoen and her team focus on five elements:

*Eva Maria Cattoen:* For example, the information provided beforehand, before you get in the region where you want to be on holiday or even the information and the sensibilisation on site. These are two parts where you get your information, but also the recreational and pathway infrastructure you find in the region itself or all accompanying infrastructure and services like mobility, public mobility and issues like this. And last but not least, also the question about visitor monitoring these five

elements are very important. And in all of these elements, you could find and use nudging as a tool or as an example. In the question of how pathways are structured, there is already this question about convenience and comfort, and this is already something which helps to steer people into a desired way in this sense so that people go and use something which is comfortable for them.

*Michael Gams:* There are a lot of things which influence our decisions when visiting alpine regions: From our personal needs to the social environment as well as social norms and other external factors such as the current weather conditions. Nudging can also play a role in this. But how does nudging actually work and what are the gray areas and challenges of nudging in tourism?

*Jörn Basel:* By definition, nudging means designing a decision environment in such a way that the decision or the behavior person is systematically influenced. That's the important part here. If you change certain aspects of the environment, then we can predict the behavior in a certain way. Another important aspect that this is done without restricting freedom of choice and by avoiding purely monetary incentives. So there are many economic incentives around how we can also change the behavior in tourism and mobility. But a nudge by definition is not making use of pure monetary incentives or just giving people a discount for certain preferences. It's not a nudge by definition.

*Michael Gams:* You just heard Jörn Basel. He works at the Institute of Tourism and Mobility (ITM) at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences in Switzerland. According to Jörn Basel, human emotions and human behavior play an important role in this.

*Jörn Basel:* I think it's important to to broaden the discussion a little bit. Why is this term nudging or why is this psychological founded approach so popular? In my opinion, this relates a little bit to what we now call the emotional economy so that a typical customer or a typical visitor visitor is characterized by three aspects. According to Lobo, that's enthusiasm, impatience and convenience. So if you see visitors from a consumer perspective, those aspects are very important. Usually customers expect some sort of guidance when they attend, for instance, a national park. They are very enthusiastic. That's why they share a lot of pictures on social media, which also can strengthen certain behavior. If people go to a certain place, make a nice picture, a lot of people will follow. And this can also lead to overtourism. So these aspects are very important to keep in mind, when we think about the effectiveness of nudging.

*Michael Gams:* In tourism, typical examples are well placed messages in hotel rooms that nudge guests to use towels more than once. This saves resources. Another important point is the image of a tourist destination which sometimes contradicts the actual visitor experience on site – for example at destinations, that actively advertise mountain biking.

*Jörn Basel:* Like many destinations, there's a problem that especially now the popularity of of mountain biking e-bikes in general, like people are not staying on the path with their e-bikes, and destinations have a little bit of a challenge because on the one hand they want to create a nice positive image of the destination as a place

of relaxation, a place of freedom, a place of leisure. And on the other hand, if you enter the destination in with the ban signs everywhere, you're not allowed here, you're not there. This somehow is in contrast to this goal of creating a nice, a positive image of a destination. And and on the other hand, sometimes it's not even effective. Like you create a negative image and it's not effective. So are there other ways how to keep people on track, like without these big ban signs? So that's one of the research questions. And we were asked by a destination and for instance, you can use smart traces, how to keep people on track to use certain signs. And without having this negative influence of these bans. There are also some gray areas, when we talk about nudging, it's always involved. Like if you use some sort of psychological technique, there's always the risk that people see nudging as a manipulative mind trick. Like as soon as they're aware that, Oh, look here, they're using psychological insights for the destination. Sometimes it's a little bit a stereotype that people think, okay, now, now I get manipulated or someone. But nevertheless, even it's not true. It can change the image. So that's the first important part to keep in mind. And another important aspect is that the effectiveness of nudging is not directly related if you have good intentions or not. So nudges can work in both directions.

*Michael Gams:* Dark Nudges can be default choices, that are not serving the users, but maximize profit for service providers such as booking platforms, that often create artificial scarcity within their offers. Sludges make a process more difficult in order to arrive at an outcome that is not in the best interest of the customers. Examples include product rebates that require difficult procedures, subscription cancellations that can only be done with a phone call or highlighting negative consequences.

*Jörn Basel:* In order to avoid these sludges, one of the main researchers who coined the term nudging, Richard Thaler, emphasizes that we should nudge for good. So like, he recommends a certain nudging for good practice. So he says the first thing is that we should make nudging transparent and avoid misleading and deception. So when people see a certain information, they should really see, okay, that's some sort of information that highlights a certain behavior. And if I want if it's that's in line with my with my values, etcetera, I can behave in a certain way. Um, also it should be easy as possible to decide against the nudge.

*Michael Gams:* So, nudging should rather be transparent and there should be good reasons that it will improve the well-being of the decision taker. As Basel adds, it must always take into account the human nature. Ideally the image of a tourist destination correlates strongly with the effectiveness of measures, that lead to a positive change in guest behaviour.

*Jörn Basel:* Maybe you can boost a little bit the value beliefs of your visitors, like by handing out a certain map, a certain sticker or so on. So that activates. „I ride fair“ or things like this. And if this is on your bike, at least according to psychological theory, and that would be also my hypothesis, people are more likely to follow the rules without seeing too many bans around in the destination. In our institute, we advise various destinations in this topic how to use choice architecture in general. Like for certain destination goals. So we always ask the participants of the workshops Are there two dimensions that are important to evaluate? So one is effectiveness, and that was another one addresses the image of the destination. So sometimes measures are very effective like like a very strict ban or a very high fine. But of course they don't go hand in hand with the image of the destination. And sometimes

it's good for the image, but it's not helping, for instance, keeping the mountain bikers on the right track.

*Michael Gams:* Keeping visitors on the right track and motivating them to behave respectful – but without using bans or restrictions: This is what the Natural Park of Baronnies provençales (*Baronnies Provençales*) in the French Alps tested in a pilot project in 2022. Many visitors come to the Gorges de la Méouge (*Gorsch de la Meusch*) to enjoy the water and to the Plateau de Saint-Laurent (*Platoo de Sän Loron*) to observe birds of prey such as griffon vultures. This has also negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems there, for example through littering or people cutting Lavender. But the Park authorities did not want to ban visitors and stay open for them – in 2022, they looked after new ways of visitor guidance through behavioural changes of visitors. After a study phase with interviews about needs and impacts of visitors in nature, the park organized workshops to identify what kind of behavior changes they would like to see.

*Quentin Martinez:* I keep my waste with me. I respect the rivers ecosystem, I respect the natural sites to avoid degradation and I respect those who work and other site users. So these different. These different messages where. Yes. Were identified to be applied on the on the nudges that are going to be implemented on site.

*Michael Gams:* Quentin Martinez (*Könto Martines*) works for the Natural Regional Park of Baronnies provençales.

*Quentin Martinez:* So we created a banner at the parking lot. And with three different messages. And actually only the third one was for the leave. No trace, actually, not to not to, to to leave any, any waste on the site. So the three messages where was where Sorry, the three messages where think about water because there is no water on site. Take good shoes because the site is kind of rocky and also take a litter with you because you can't leave anything on site and. These messages were. Yes, it was convened messages of mindfulness and care so that the visitor in response show some care for for nature that was actually talking to them and make making them thinking about all these all these three things.

*Michael Gams:* It was also important to make visitors aware that they are “Guests” in the natural park - a private space, that is open to the public – but with certain rules needed to preserve it.

*Quentin Martinez:* We created a totem at the entrance of the side of the site to. To show that a totem. So as you can see on the left, with a message, a small message. Welcome to the inhabitants. Welcome. Welcome to the plateau. Welcome to the inhabitants. House of the Plateau. Saint Laurent, you are our guests. Well, actually to show that the natural environment are inhabited both by humans and non-humans. We had the reminder of the concept of guests and the totem show. The transition from one threshold, from one space, the public space to to another space, a kind of private space with its own rule that you have to respect. But the rules were not given to to the to the visitors. So on site, it was this kind of a thing. It's it was a prototype and it was not supposed to stay longer than maybe 3 or 4 months. Only for the summer season.

*Michael Gams:* Another measure was personalization, as Quentin explains.

*Quentin Martinez:* And we also settled personification of a kind of panel for a personification of agricultural plots. To to remain that to to remind to remind that these wide landscapes are actually feels providing the space and resources for farming activities. They were not abandoned land to thanks to the use of the pictures of the farmers. It created personification and sharing and the message was here is working Sebastian, for instance, a happy farmer and his cattle. And so it creates attachment. And thanks to the face, you, you, you create something familiar to the visitors and it creates also respect. Well, that's what we feel. And on site it was these very discreet panel to to to to to tell the visitors that here there is a farmer working. But you that there was no there was no interdiction or or anything coercive.

*Michael Gams:* Examples like these show that nudging can actually help changing behaviour of visitors and raise their awareness for sustainability issues. But how can other actors in tourism make use of this knowledge? This is what the French cooperation agency AVITEM based in Marseille is working on in the two projects „Nudge my Tour“ and „Behaviour Smart Community for Tourism“, as project manager Guilia David explains.

*Guilia David:* For the knowledge sharing part with the project called Best, we have been working with Behavioural Insights team and Behavior Smart, which are again really high level experts on the topic and they have held four webinars that are accessible online. These are webinars aimed to really allow you to get familiar with the topic. So we really try to have a step by step approach. We start with some overall knowledge about behavioural science and human brain and decision making, and then we dive into specific challenges related to tourism and how this can be relevant. So there we have also tried to have a visual approach to in all these projects and we, we share the information in several formats. So when you will visit the webpage of the webinars, you will also have access to the visual summaries of, these webinars.

*Michael Gams:* These Toolkits and trainings about behavioural science are intended to share knowledge and raise awareness about behaviour change and tourism sustainability. AVITEM's current project „First Mile“ takes the next step and makes the topic of nudging understandable for tourism practitioners of SMEs - small and middle sized enterprises - in France, Italy, Slovenia and Norway.

*Guilia David:* We have just launched it this year. It's called The First Mile, and it's a project that allows us to go more into the practical implementation, let's say, of behavior, smart tactics. So it's a project funded by the Cosme program, which is a European program that funds SMEs. And so with the first mile, we will develop tools and a program to accompany 80 SMEs across Europe in four countries to test small behavioural, smart tactics or nudges - we could call them like that as well - to really have them run the first mile of their sustainability journey. So the idea will be that we will select SMEs that would like to engage in a certain way a sustainability transition of their operation and we give them this support to really make the first steps – knowing, that nudges or behaviour interventions do not come alone, they need to have the right environment, the right people to follow up and they need to have enough funding to then integrate the change in the long term.

*Michael Gams:* Changing the behaviour of visitors in through nudging can be one important step forward in sustainable tourism. It should never be done by tricking or manipulating people. Good practice examples never work with coercion. They rather work with personalisation and positive messages, for example by telling us the story about a sensitive natural landscape as well as about people, plants and animals living there. Nudges address our needs and personal values instead of offering financial incentives. In this sense let us nudge for good: We all love to discover the natural beauties of the Alps and we love doing so in a fair way – preserving them as a thriving space for plants, animals, humans living there – and for our visits in future.

This was the fourth episode of our speciAlps podcast series „guide visitors, preserve nature“. Thank you for listening, my Name is Michael Gams.

How many visitors are too many? Where exactly is the limit of nature's carrying capacity reached? This is the subject of the fourth and final podcast episode in December 2023.

This project is supported by CIPRA International and the community network Alliance in the Alps. It is made possible by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection.