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What roles can thinks play in the behavioural toolkit?

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What are 'thinks'?

- Broad definition - set of policy tools that encourage citizen engagement
- Given the right evidence, enough time, and an appropriate context
- Citizens can work out what is good for them and their fellow citizens, and then act
- Big 'family', different traditions and approaches
- Not necessarily primarily aimed at behaviour change

Who is in the family?

Deliberative approaches

- Currently popular
- Citizens' Assemblies, Citizen's Juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polling, Participatory Budgeting, referenda
- Different processes, common focus on structured forms of multi-way dialogue – collective, in public
- 'thinking slow, together'
- Promotes cognitive engagement, against standards, distinguishing from other public debate

Who else is in the family?

Participation & co-production



How distinct are thinks from nudges?

- Addressing limits of human rationality is the shared starting point, despite different strategies
- Think strategies – overcome limits of our thinking by bringing in more ideas
- More heads better than one in generating policy solutions, and criteria for evaluating decisions
- Create conditions for citizen-led strategies; or collaborative approaches with other policy actors e.g. companies or public agencies

What roles can thinks play in the behavioural toolkit?

- Some thinks are also nudges
- Addressing the ethics of nudges
- Expanding the toolkit beyond citizens
- Direct tool for citizen behaviour change

Overlaps between think & nudge

- Shared start points, also some shared strategies
- Nudge Plus intentionally infuses elements of both
- Can also see traces of nudge in community-based participatory strategies for behaviour change

Some thinks are also nudges

#GMCancerChampion

Citizen-led social movement
for cancer prevention

Seven calls to action;
volunteers make pledges

e.g. learn more and talk to
friends; promote healthy
lifestyles & screening

Nudge elements in
community-based activities

- messenger/authority
- social norms/social proof
- liking/affect
- salience
- commitment

Use thinks to address contested ethics of nudge

- Nudges are a way to deliver agreed policies
- Thinks could help decide if and how to nudge
- Especially where ethical & legitimacy questions
- Decisions of deliberative mini-publics may be seen by non-participants as legitimate (trusted proxies/honest brokers)
- Resource to stimulate further public discussion

Changing behaviours of other actors

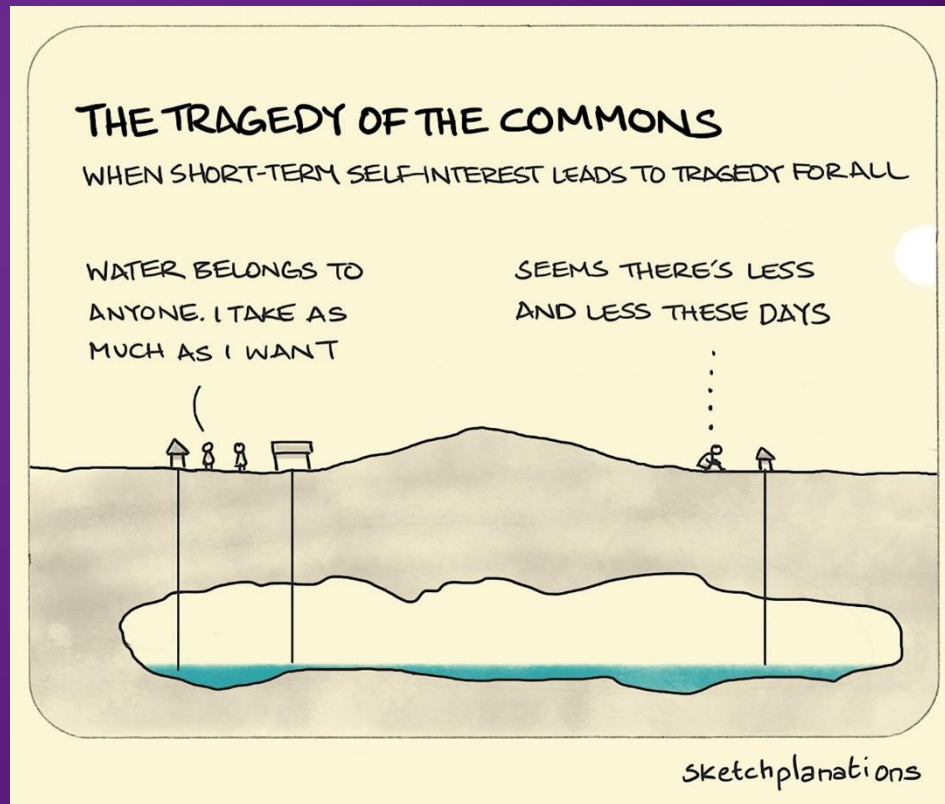
- Without right institutional infrastructure, easy for decision-makers to ‘cherry-pick’ citizen recommendations
- Growing interest in whole system designs for thinks e.g. two-stage processes linking deliberation to a referendum

Thinks change citizen behaviours?

- Thinks used for citizen behaviour change
- E.g. for civic behaviours, quasi-experimental studies have shown increased civic engagement after participating in deliberation exercises
- Thinks being used where self-interested individual decisions produce negative consequences at the aggregate level

Destructive behaviours

- Mutually destructive behaviour, where individuals pursue short-term benefits, and perceived self-interest
- Not taking account of the overall consequences
- Classic nudge-type problem



Thinks modifying behaviours

- Think strategies based on creating institutions for collective management of resources
- Protects sustainability of resources from negative effects of individual behaviours
- Part of broader wave of democratic innovations in the 'think' family

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TL/DNR

- Thinks and nudges have shared start points addressing limits of human rationality, and some shared strategies
- Thinks are also a specific tool with distinct features: collective, public dialogue, citizen engagement & action
- Thinks have under-used potential to:
 - Generate public discussion about if and how to nudge
 - Expand the behaviour toolkit beyond citizens
 - Protect resources from negative individual behaviours