PROPOSAL LINE OF EXPERIMENTS:
INSIGHTS FROM PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS TO REDUCE NIGHTLIFE-RELATED NUISANCES

SUMMARY

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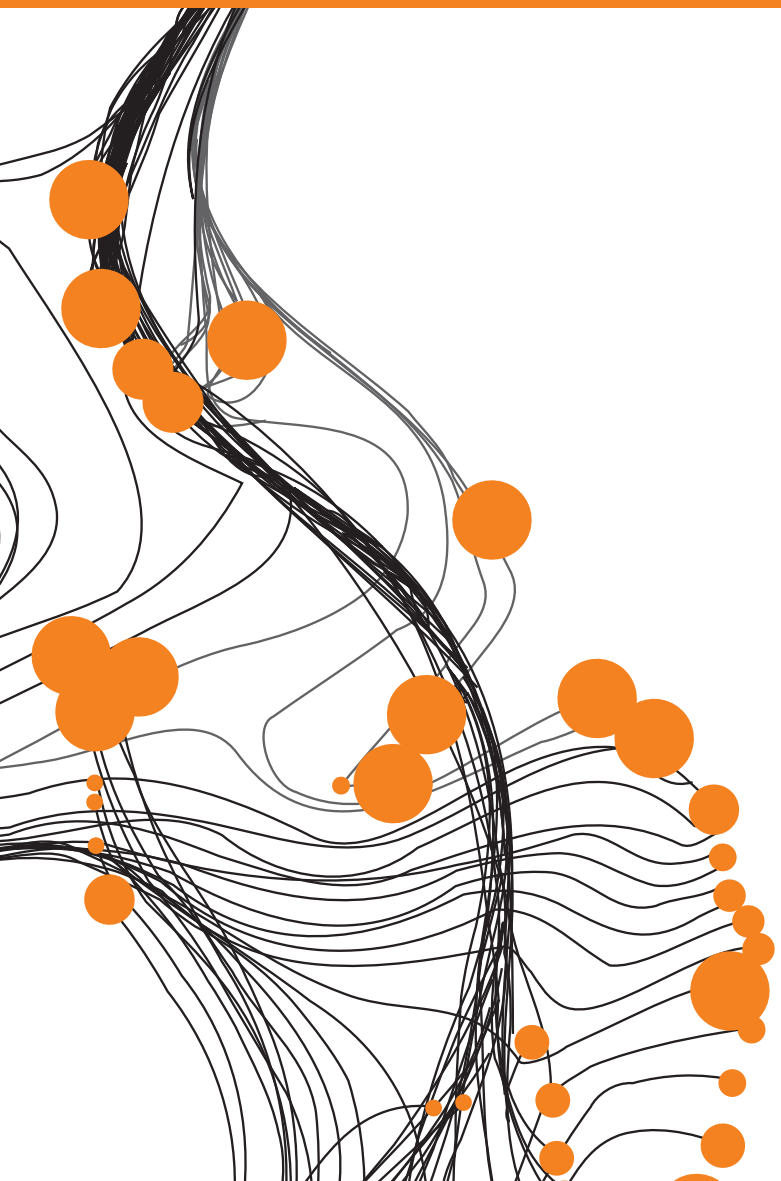

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Summary

Nightlife areas in towns and cities are regularly the scene of vandalism, aggression and public order violations (Van Hest, Faes, & Sannen, 2011). Recent research by the Dutch Centre for Crime Prevention and Security (Centrum voor Criminaliteitspreventie en Veiligheid, CVV) among 73 municipalities shows that a large majority (83%) of the Dutch municipalities suffer from nightlife-related violence (Van Hest, 2009). Such nightlife-related nuisances exact a toll in terms of decreased social safety perceptions and damage to property, and understanding of the causes and suitable possibilities for reduction and prevention are therefore considered essential.

Behavioral economists and psychologists acknowledge that decisions are often irrational or only partly rational. Behavior can be the result of (a combination of) two different kinds of processes. The *spontaneous system* consists of unconscious (implicit) processes that we have little control over, whereas the controlled, more *reflective system* is based on conscious (explicit) processes underlying decision making. Based on these ideas, the Council for Societal Development (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, RMO) recently argued for nudging as a means to influence citizens' behavior through spontaneous and unconscious processes (RMO, 2014).

This report concerns a proposal for a line of policy experiments aimed at preventing nightlife-related nuisances using nudging strategies, based on available knowledge from science and practice.

Research question

The research question is: *How can insights from social psychology and behavioral economics contribute to reduce nightlife-related nuisances?*

Nightlife-related nuisances is taken to include vandalism, aggression and public order violations, including noise pollution and urinating in public, insofar that these can be linked to visiting nightlife areas.

Based on a literature exploration the following questions will be addressed:

1. What forms of behavioral influence strategies to prevent nightlife-related nuisances have already been applied (nationally and internationally) and how successful were these?
2. What are indicators of an increase and decrease in nightlife-related nuisance?
3. What new measures may municipalities and other parties take to enhance safety for those visiting nightlife areas and events?
4. Is it possible to conduct a policy experiment to examine the effectiveness of such a measure (question 3)?
5. How can such an experiment be designed?

Antecedents of nightlife-related nuisances

Behavioral psychology focusing on the social and physical environment provides insights that could enable the use of nudges, primes and prompts to trigger desired behavior. These can be used to develop (field) experiments intended to reduce or prevent nightlife-related nuisances.

For the context of nightlife-related nuisances norms are important. It is easy to imagine that people are more likely to perform certain behavior, such as urinating in public, when they see that many

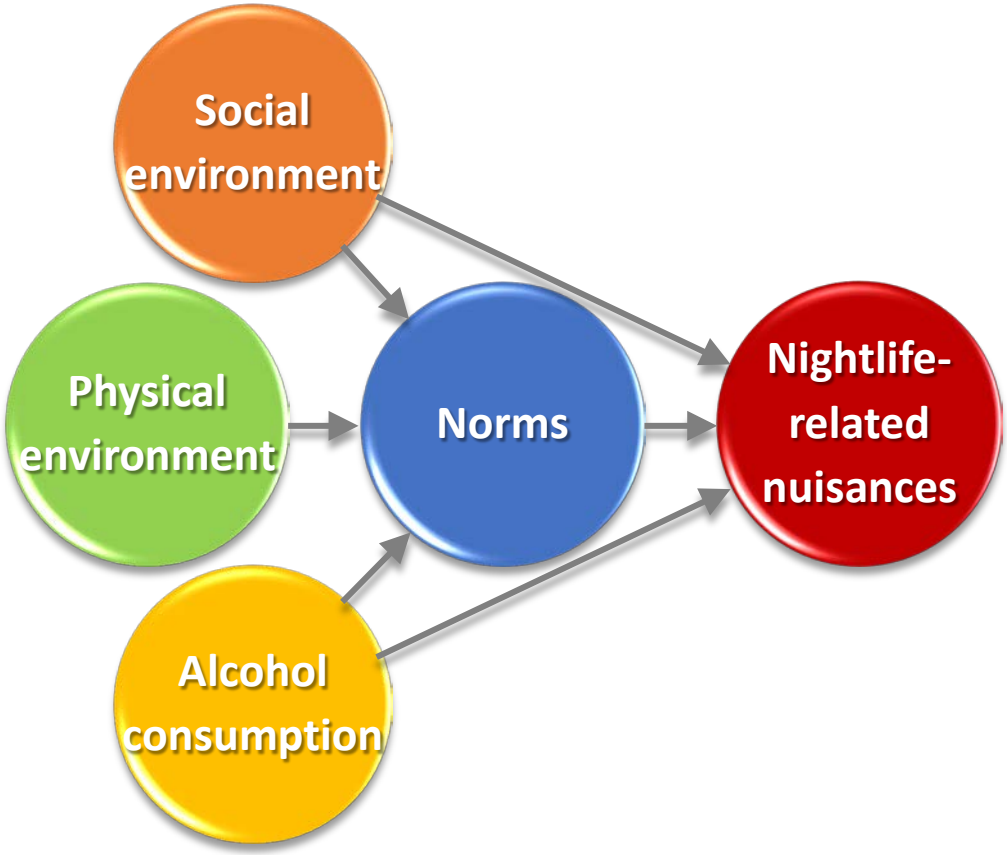
others have gone before them. In such cases, the behavior of others creates a descriptive norm, which may cause norm transgressions to become contagious.

In addition, alcohol intake makes individuals more susceptible to influences of the social environment. Additionally, incidents often take place in a group context. The social identity of the group one belongs to determines what is seen as acceptable behavior, and may explain why even law-abiding citizens sometimes engage in norm-violating behavior.

The physical environment can also have a direct effect on nightlife-related nuisances. When nightlife areas are crowded and disorderly ('broken windows theory', Wilson & Kelling, 1982) the likelihood of vandalism or other norm-violating behaviors is higher.

Finally, sensory influences such as high temperatures, noise, bad light and crowding may play a moderating role on the relationship between the variables above and nightlife-related nuisances.

Nightlife-related nuisances are, therefore, primarily influenced by norms, alcohol consumption, and the social and physical environment, as expressed in the model below.



Possible policy experiments

The experiments that will be covered in this report can all be related to one or more of the factors in the model above. For instance, a number of experiments use light (respectively street lighting, fun lighting and interactive lighting) to increase visibility of the area, but also the attractiveness or appeal, legibility (clarity) of the area, accessibility, as well as the self-awareness of the visitors to the nightlife area. Other experiments are focused on norm activation by exposing participants to their

own behavior by means of camera recordings, on giving advice by means of an ‘breathalyzer-column', or by intervening in the social environment with promotion team aiming to increase ‘coolness’ of alcohol-free beverages.

On the basis of evaluations of each of these experiments (based on, for instance, estimated effectiveness, financial costs, and scientific relevance) a choice can be made for one or more of the interventions.

Ethical considerations

Furthermore, the ethical considerations that need to be taken into account in the proposed policy experiments are discussed. To this end the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) and of the Faculty of Behavioral, Management, and Social Sciences (BMS) at the University of Twente (UT), the "Wet Bescherming Persoonsgegevens", the Dutch Code of Conduct Scholarly Activities (Nederlandse Gedragscode Wetenschapsbeoefening) and the National Code for the Ethical Review of Research (Landelijke Code Ethische Toetsing Onderzoek) were consulted. Performing a nudging experiment as described in this report requires video registration of behavior of citizens in nightlife areas, without their prior knowledge. However, relevant laws and regulations allow for deviating from the above ethical guidelines, because of the studies’ scientific nature, in which the focal behavior is natural behavior taking place in a public area, the impossibility of informing participants beforehand, and the fact that recorded behaviors cannot be traced back to specific individuals. In addition, some would regard nudging as belittling for its targets. Following the Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid; WRR, 2014) we see no principal objections to the use of nudges, provided that effectiveness studies take due account of the ethical considerations, sufficient transparency towards citizens and other stakeholders in society is maintained, controversial issues are avoided, and fundamental rights are respected.

Method

A successful intervention will hinge on many factors. It is therefore essential to adopt a phased approach in selecting and designing a suitable policy experiment:

- Context analysis: which issues are experienced in the nightlife area, who are the visitors, at what times are nightlife-related nuisances experienced and of what type are they?
- Selection and development of interventions: which interventions address the indicators for nightlife-related nuisances most efficiently? Whom should be cooperated with, what expertise is needed to develop the interventions? Which stakeholders should be involved (entrepreneurs, designers, creatives, producers)?
- Baseline assessment: what behaviors can be observed, how do visitors experience the surroundings and the behavior of others? What elements in the physical and social environment are observable (amount of waste on the street, noise level)?
- Interventions: which interventions are deployed in what particular order?
- Effect measurement: which changes in behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, and physical and social environment can be measured? What is the control location which measurements are to be compared?

To establish the (possible) effects as objective and systematic as possible, different methods of data collection can be used, such as questionnaires (useful in determining what participants noticed or perceived regarding the interventions), observations of behavior (e.g., urinating in public and brawling), sensory data (e.g. noise levels) and data from other sources (such as admission data from hospitals in the area).

The degree of effectiveness of the experiment and related measurements is contingent upon a number of pre-conditions:

- the expected effectiveness on short and longer term;
- the feasibility of both the experiments and the measurements;
- sufficient financial resources;
- support among visitors to nightlife areas, local residents and local nightlife entrepreneurs;
- the ethical implications of experiments;
- appeal; and
- scientific relevance.

It can be concluded that a phased approach is worthwhile to develop and test interventions. Doing so allows for the successful implementation of nudging as a strategy to reduce nightlife-related nuisances and, thus, contribute to safe and appealing environments.

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