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**PROMOTING GREEN LIVING AREAS**



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**NUDGES policy blueprints**

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# Blueprint at a Glance

## Integrating Behavioural and Cultural Nudges into Climate Policy

### What was tested

Six Mediterranean pilot interventions applied behavioural and cultural nudges through sensory engagement embedded in everyday routines — school commutes, heritage visits, artistic workshops, food experiences, and mission-based learning.

Across diverse contexts, **the pilots showed:**

- ✓ Reduced psychological distance to climate change
- ✓ Stronger emotional and identity-based engagement
- ✓ Increased readiness to adopt sustainable behaviours
- ✓ Intergenerational spillover effects

### Why this matters for cities

Behavioural and cultural nudges **complement regulation and financial incentives** by:

- ✓ Making sustainable choices easier and more attractive
- ✓ Strengthening citizen ownership and policy acceptance
- ✓ Enabling low-cost experimentation before large investments
- ✓ Connecting infrastructure with lived experience

Nudges reinforce climate policy by shaping how choices are experienced — not just regulated.

### What this Blueprint provides

This document offers **a practical framework to help authorities:**

- ✓ Identify entry points for behavioural integration within existing strategies
- ✓ Design modular, scalable interventions
- ✓ Align nudges with infrastructure and governance tools
- ✓ Institutionalise behavioural approaches through policy and funding mechanisms

### How to use this Blueprint

**Authorities can use it to:**

- ✓ Diagnose behavioural barriers in current climate measures
- ✓ Pilot modular interventions in mobility, education, food systems, and public space
- ✓ Embed behavioural tools in SECAPs, adaptation plans, and cultural strategies
- ✓ Establish pathways for scaling and long-term governance integration

### Implementation progression

**Experiment → Embed → Align → Institutionalise → Scale**

From small-scale pilots to mainstreamed behavioural climate governance.



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## 1. Executive summary

The NUDGES project<sup>1</sup> explored how **behavioural and cultural nudges can strengthen climate action** across Mediterranean territories. Through six pilot interventions engaging different senses, the project tested how small, well-designed changes in everyday environments can **reduce the psychological distance of climate change** and **encourage more sustainable behaviour**.

Three **key insights** emerged. Sensory and culturally grounded experiences make climate change more tangible and personally relevant. Identity-based and positive engagement generates stronger behavioural shifts than information alone. Participatory and multi-sensory formats increase uptake and transferability across contexts.

This policy blueprint translates these findings into **practical design principles** and **NUDGES policy recommendations** for cities and policymakers. The results show that behavioural and cultural nudges work best when embedded in daily routines and supported by local networks and enabling infrastructure.

Moving forward, NUDGES calls for a shift from experimentation to institutionalisation. **Behavioural approaches should complement regulation** and incentives, reinforcing climate policies by making sustainable choices more intuitive, socially supported, and meaningful.

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<sup>1</sup> The NUDGES project was co-financed by the European Union through the Interreg Euro-MED Programme 2021-2027. More information is available at <https://nudges.interreg-euro-med.eu/>



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## 2. Introduction

**Climate change policies often rely on regulation, incentives, and information campaigns, assuming that awareness automatically leads to action.** However, evidence from behavioural science — and from the NUDGES pilots — shows that decisions are shaped by habits, emotions, identity, social norms, and the environments in which choices are made. A **nudge** is a subtle change in how choices are presented, designed to gently guide behaviour **without restricting freedom of choice**. In the NUDGES approach, this behavioural logic is combined with cultural and sensory elements, embedding climate action into **lived experience rather than abstract instruction**.

The NUDGES project tested this approach through **six pilot interventions across the Euro-Mediterranean region**, each engaging different sensory pathway. From musical walking routes and olfactory heritage experiences to artistic workshops, food-based interventions, visual campaigns, and mission-based programmes, the pilots explored how culturally grounded design can influence climate perception and everyday behaviour. Despite varied contexts and target groups, all pilots showed positive directional shifts in engagement and readiness to adopt sustainable practices.

This policy brief builds on these experiences, translating **pilot evidence into concrete guidance** for public authorities seeking to integrate behavioural and cultural nudges into climate policy and local development strategies.



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### 3. Key insights from the NUDGES pilots

Across six countries and diverse local contexts, the NUDGES pilots tested how behavioural and cultural nudges can reduce the psychological distance of climate change and support more sustainable everyday practices. Despite differences in setting and target groups, **three consistent insights** emerged.

#### Insight 1 – Sensory and cultural approaches reduce climate abstraction



Climate change is often perceived as distant and abstract. The pilots showed that **engaging the senses** — through visual cues, sound, smell, touch, taste, and multisensory experiences — makes sustainability more tangible and personally relevant. When environmental messages were embedded in embodied, place-based and culturally meaningful activities, participants connected more easily with the topic and demonstrated stronger emotional engagement. Moving **from abstract information to lived experience** proved essential in bridging the gap between knowledge and action.

#### Insight 2 – Positive, identity-based engagement outperforms instruction

Interventions relying only on information or traditional educational formats generated more limited motivation than those structured around **identity, storytelling, and shared missions**. Across pilots, participants responded more strongly when sustainable behaviour was framed as **part of who they are** — as eco-heroes, creators, guardians, or responsible community members — rather than as a rule to follow. Positive reinforcement, recognition, and **co-creation fostered ownership and pride**, supporting **more durable behavioural shifts** than guilt- or fear-based messaging.



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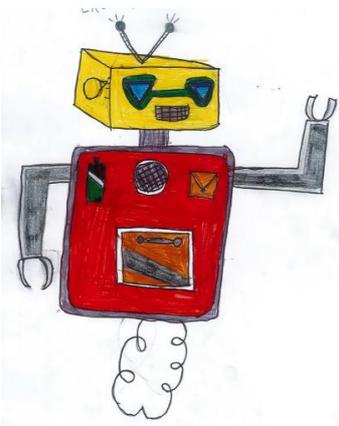


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### Insight 3 – Multi-sensory and participatory formats strengthen uptake and transferability



Pilots combining multiple sensory cues with **participatory design** achieved higher engagement and clearer spillover effects. Involving schools, cultural institutions, artists, families, and local stakeholders increased ownership and facilitated replication. Several interventions demonstrated modularity, allowing individual elements to be adapted and reused in different contexts. This confirms that behavioural and cultural nudges are not isolated experiments, but **scalable tools** that can be embedded within local policy and community frameworks.



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## 4. Easy-to-Use Design Principles for Cities

The NUDGES pilots not only tested behavioural and cultural nudges — they also **generated practical design principles that local authorities can reuse and adapt**. The following elements consistently strengthened engagement, behavioural uptake, and transferability across contexts.

### 1. Embed nudges in cultural narratives and creative processes

Interventions were more effective when sustainable behaviours were framed within stories, roles, missions, or creative tasks (e.g., eco-hero characters and mission maps, co-created visual campaigns, artistic workshops). **Storytelling, symbolic recognition, and identity-based progression** helped participants internalise climate action as meaningful and achievable. Rather than presenting sustainability as an obligation, successful pilots integrated it into local culture and shared experience.

### 2. Design modular interventions that can stand alone

Well-structured components — such as sensory walks, thematic workshops, public-space installations, or gamified learning formats — functioned both as independent activities and as part of a broader framework (e.g., smell walks in heritage sites, musical walking routes to school, recycling workshops using collected materials). This modularity allows **adaptation to different municipalities, target groups, and budgets, supporting gradual scaling** rather than one-off projects.

### 3. Integrate nudges into existing routines and spaces

**Embedding interventions within daily practices** increased repetition and habit formation (e.g., school commutes, gardening sessions, heritage visits, cinema screenings). When nudges operate within familiar environments, **sustainable choices become easier to repeat** and maintain over time.



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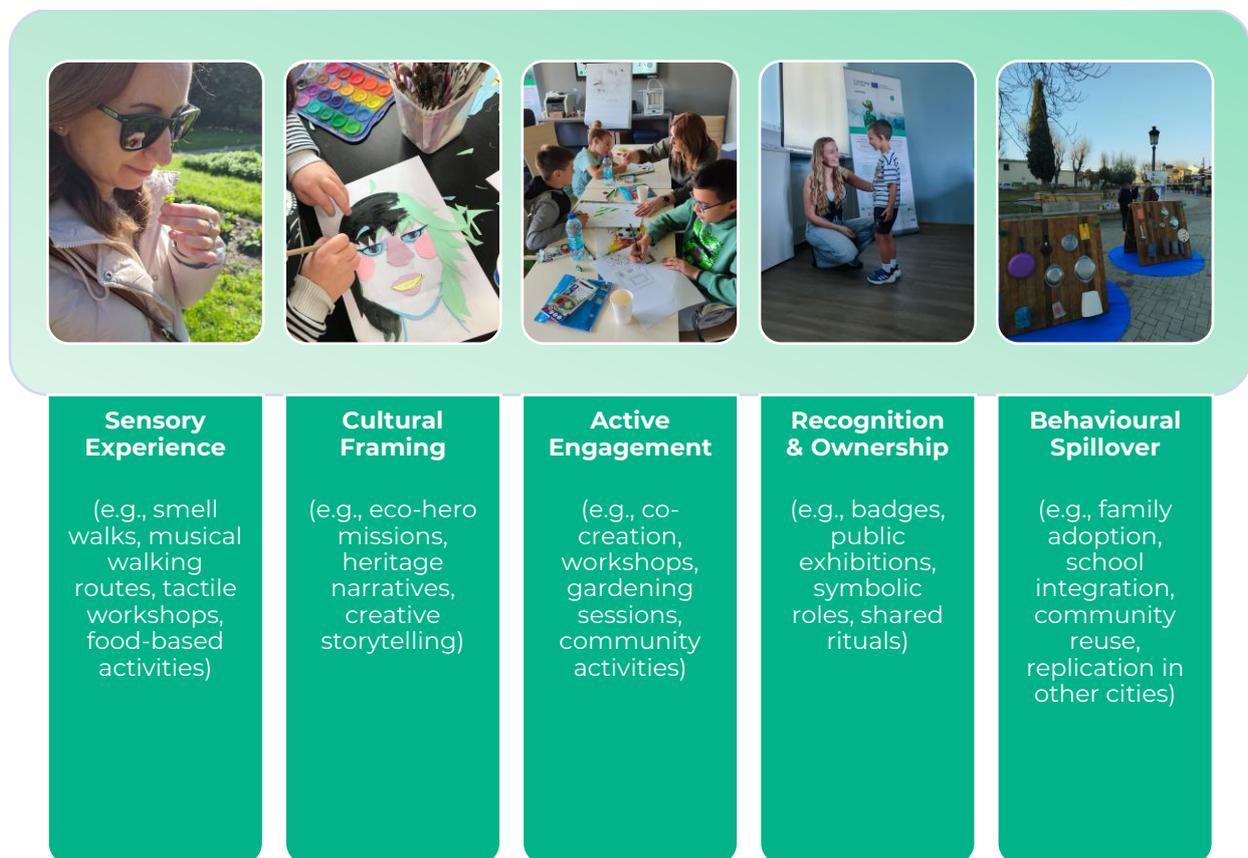
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#### 4. Involve trusted local actors and intergenerational networks

Collaboration with schools, cultural institutions, artists, families, and community organisations **strengthened credibility and ownership**. Parental involvement and teacher engagement amplified behavioural spillover beyond the pilot setting, supporting continuity after project completion.

#### 5. Combine sensory engagement with supportive environments

Sensory nudges proved most effective when **complemented by enabling conditions** — such as safe walking routes, accessible public space, visible recognition mechanisms, or practical tools for recycling and planting. Behavioural design works best when **aligned with infrastructure and local policy priorities**.



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## 5. NUDGES Policy Recommendations for Cities and Policymakers

### *Actionable directions for scaling behavioural climate action*

The NUDGES pilots show that behavioural and cultural nudges work best when embedded in real-life routines, cultural narratives, and intergenerational networks. Translating these insights into policy requires both operational changes at local level and strategic adjustments at regional and national level. **To support practical uptake, the recommendations are grouped** by target audience — cities and local authorities, cultural and educational institutions, community actors, and national/regional policymakers — outlining **concrete actions to scale** and sustain this approach.

For local authorities	
1	<p><b>Integrate behavioural nudges into local climate and sustainability action plans</b></p> <p>Embed small-scale sensory and cultural interventions—musical walking routes, smell walks, tactile/visual installations, taste-based programmes, Eco Hero missions—into existing strategies (mobility, waste, food systems, green spaces). These interventions <b>create intuitive entry points for behaviour change</b>, making sustainable choices easier, more attractive, and more repeated in daily life.</p>
2	<p><b>Create space for modular experimentation before scaling</b></p> <p><b>Support quick, low-cost pilots</b> in schools, parks, cultural sites, neighbourhoods, and cultural venues. The pilots show that <b>modular components</b> (creative workshops, mission-based tools, community rituals, sensory walks) can be tested independently and <b>scaled gradually based on evidence</b>, reducing risk for cities.</p>
3	<p><b>Align sensory nudges with enabling infrastructure</b></p> <p>Behavioural design is most effective when supported by infrastructure: safe routes for walking, accessible green areas, waste-sorting points, community kitchens, or spaces for artistic co-creation. Local governments should treat nudges as <b>complements to physical planning</b>, not add-ons.</p>
For cultural and educational institutions	
4	<p><b>Embed climate action into identity-building and creative learning</b></p> <p>Move beyond informational campaigns toward mission-driven, narrative-rich, creative formats. Pilots illustrate that <b>identity-based engagement</b>—roles, stories, badges, co-</p>



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	created works—creates stronger emotional connection and more durable behavioural shifts than instruction alone.
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Use multisensory and culturally grounded experiences as learning pathways</b></p> <p>Integrate sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch to make climate issues tangible. Workshops, exhibitions, food experiences, festivals, and public art can <b>translate abstract climate risks into lived experience</b>, increasing comprehension and motivation.</p>
<b>For community and civil society actors</b>	
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Act as behavioural multipliers within local networks</b></p> <p>Use participatory formats (e.g., family involvement, peer-to-peer campaigns, community workshops) to reinforce sustainable habits beyond formal settings. NGOs, youth groups, families, neighbourhood associations, and cultural initiatives can reinforce and extend nudges beyond institutional settings. Pilot evidence shows significant <b>spillover effects</b> when trusted community actors participate, especially where parents, teachers, and children interact.</p>
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Facilitate participatory and co-creative formats that deepen ownership</b></p> <p>Community workshops, citizen science activities, intergenerational campaigns, and cultural rituals help translate nudges into <b>collective norms</b>, not just individual behaviour changes. Such formats increase legitimacy, continuity, and cultural resonance.</p>
<b>For national and regional policymakers</b>	
<b>8</b>	<p><b>Institutionalise behavioural and cultural approaches within funding and policy frameworks</b></p> <p>Recognise behavioural and cultural nudges <b>as complementary tools to regulation</b> by enabling experimentation, follow-up evaluation, and cross-regional knowledge transfer. Include them in national adaptation plans, SECAP guidelines, school curricula, and cultural funding programmes. Scaling requires <b>long-term, cross-sectoral support</b>, not isolated project cycles.</p>
<b>9</b>	<p><b>Strengthen mechanisms for cultural boosts and capability-building</b></p> <p>Future policy directions should move beyond nudging alone. <b>Cultural boosts</b>—approaches that build skills, agency, and long-term decision-making capacity—<b>are critical for durable climate transitions</b>. This aligns with the evolving EU agenda on empowerment, participation, and culture-based sustainability.</p>



## 6. From NUDGES pilots to scaling and continuation

The NUDGES pilots demonstrated that behavioural and cultural nudges can reduce climate abstraction, activate emotional engagement, and generate early behavioural change across diverse Mediterranean contexts. The next step is to **move from experimentation to institutionalisation**, ensuring that these approaches become integral components of climate policy rather than isolated project activities. The [Action Research Agenda](#) highlights the need for cities to embed nudges into local climate strategies and expand evidence-based piloting, while deepening research on culture–environment dynamics and intergenerational transmission.

The transition to the next phase requires **structured pathways for replication, adaptation, and scaling**, as outlined in the [Transferability Plan](#). To achieve long-term uptake, behavioural and cultural nudges must be integrated within existing governance mechanisms, supported by national and regional policy frameworks, and sustained through cross-MED knowledge exchange. This includes developing shared indicators, creating spaces for modular experimentation, and embedding nudges into mobility, food, education, and public-space policies.

At the same time, the [NUDGES Manifesto](#) establishes a community-driven foundation for continuation. It commits partners and supporters to maintain an open, collaborative ecosystem that shares knowledge, tools, and evidence across borders. It recognises the central role of **sensation, emotion, and intergenerational influence, affirming that climate action must be felt as well as understood**. The Manifesto's emphasis on shared learning and cultural grounding positions the Mediterranean as a long-term living lab for behavioural and cultural climate innovation.

Moving ahead, NUDGES should evolve from a pilot-driven initiative to a **mainstreamed behavioural policy framework**. Cultural nudging must complement—rather than replace—traditional regulation and incentives, offering



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low-cost, citizen-friendly approaches that reinforce existing climate strategies. By institutionalising behavioural design, investing in cultural boosts, and strengthening multi-level governance support, Mediterranean cities and regions can scale climate engagement in ways that are socially meaningful, inclusive, and durable.



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