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The Sustainability Walk – Combining Nudging and Pragmatism to Facilitate Collective Action and Reflection

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Abstract

Nudging is increasingly used in the design and planning of houses, neighbourhoods and districts with the intention to promote sustainable behaviour. Nudging, when used well, can serve as a tool for changing individuals' behaviour, but it cannot, nor has it been designed to, facilitate the critical thinking and collective action needed to address urgent sustainability challenges.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how pragmatism's interest in social interactions can complement nudging's focus on individual behaviour. To test these ideas in practice, we develop an approach for planning that combines the two modes of thinking – *The Sustainability Walk* – to be used in the planning of places that are to promote sustainable everyday practices. We draw lessons from developing *The Sustainability Walk* by using the learning history method and participant observation.

We find that pragmatism offers possibilities to amend nudging's focus on individual behaviour by providing tools for forming a community of inquiry consisting of experts as well as citizens. However, we also learn that planning cultures of conflict avoidance, hinder the practical application of the idea of such pragmatist inquiry across different ways of knowing.

Keywords:
nudging;
pragmatism;
planning;
sustainability;
place making;

Practical Relevance

- Nudging is a policy tool for changing individual behaviour
- Nudging can be used to promote sustainable lifestyles
- But nudging cannot facilitate critical thinking and collective action
- We have developed The Sustainability Walk, a planning approach that facilitates development of places that encourage sustainable behaviour
- The Sustainability Walk facilitates joint inquiry between local residents and experts
- Thereby this planning approach combines nudging's focus on individual behaviour with prompts for collective thinking and action

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Introduction

"We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us." (Winston Churchill)

This paper makes a theoretical contribution to nudge thinking by addressing the longstanding critique towards its inability to foster durable behavioural change and collective action. We identify lessons gained during the development of an approach for sustainability planning that combines nudging and pragmatism. We take as our starting point the insights of nudging but amend it to strengthen the strategy's ability to facilitate collective action and reflection. By using ideas from pragmatism, we unbox the "*we"* in the Churchill quote above. In conventional nudging, the *we* consists of planners and experts in behavioural insights. In our approach, by contrast, the *we* comes to consist of local inhabitants, planners, experts and politicians who engage in joint inquiry. Our approach is based on the idea that professional experts ought not to, by themselves, define problems and solutions for citizens, as citizens are capable experts in their own everyday life.

Nudging is increasingly used by planners and behavioural insights experts as a strategy to promote sustainable behaviour (Bandsma et al. 2021; Ranchordás 2020). The basic idea is to gently push people to make new and better choices aimed at promoting "health, wealth and happiness" (Thaler & Sunstein 2008). Drawing on psychology and behavioural economics, the strategy targets individuals' habitual, unreflective behaviour by making purposeful changes in the physical and virtual environment – the choice architecture – to prompt changes in behaviour viewed as desirable by the designer of the nudge. In mainstream nudging, people's reflective thinking processes are left unengaged and people often do not even notice the choice architecture; nudging seems to work "best in the dark" (Ivanković & Engelen 2019).

This lack of attention to self-reflection and conscious choices is central to the critique of nudging. To the critics, nudging's targeting of unreflective, swift thinking is seen as insufficient to bring about durable behavioural change (Kuyer & Gordijn 2023 & Banerjee & John 2021). For such change to take place, they argue, it is necessary that individuals also reflect on the way in which they would like to alter their behaviour and on the reasons for doing so. Moreover, nudging's neglect of reflective processes has been criticized for being unethical since it does not invite citizens to have a say about the decision furtively embedded in the nudge, which may bear on issues of significant concern to many people (Kuyer & Gordijn 2023; Schubert 2017). Recent contributions to the nudging literature have responded to this critique by linking habitual thinking processes with reflective thinking. Banerjee & John (2021:1) introduce the "nudge plus" and argue that such nudges are more effective and legitimate as they include "an element of self-awareness and internal deliberation, which could generate long-term, persistent, and sustainable behaviour change".

This burgeoning interest in nudges with reflection is highly relevant for our focus on nudging for sustainability. As sustainability transformations require new and radically different lifestyles, regular nudging is insufficient, as self-reflection and questioning of ingrained norms are crucial (Pedwell 2017; Schubert 2017). This is not to say that nudging, in its traditional form, cannot play an important role together with other tools for sustainability transformations. But in view of the urgency of the planetary challenges we are facing, it is essential to pursue new and more effective policy measures, leaving no stone unturned. Nudge plus offers new possibilities for designing sustainability nudges by emphasising that nudging's theoretical grounding in dual processing models provides the policy tools for not only targeting individuals' habitual thinking, but also for linking this automatic thinking with reflective thinking.

Even so, because sustainability transformations inevitably involve social processes, nudging, with its traditional focus on individuals' behaviour, might come to play a more prominent role for sustainability if it incorporated a social dimension as well. Exploring how that can be done is one of the key tasks we set ourselves in this study. We turn to pragmatist philosophy, a field that has been a major influence on developments across disciplines in the social sciences and in planning practice (Bridge 2020; Pedwell 2017).

> *Central to pragmatist philosophy is the idea that habits are formed and re-formed through the ongoing interactions of bodies and 'the environment, natural and social' (Dewey 2012 [1922]: 9). Habits, from this perspective, are not simply individual capacities or modes of behaviour but rather the product of evolving transactions between organisms and the milieus they inhabit.* (Pedwell 2017: 65)

Pragmatism offers resources to bridge nudging's gap between individual behaviour and collective action and reflection. The idea of pragmatist inquiry brings actors together across differences, to promote mutual understanding and to collectively address common concerns (Healey 2009).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how pragmatism's interest in social interactions can complement nudging's focus on individual behaviour. The research question we pursue is: *How can pragmatism and nudging be combined to improve sustainability planning?* To test the idea of combining nudging and pragmatism in planning practice, we – a team of academics and an architect – together with urban planners and citizens in two Swedish municipalities, developed *The Sustainability Walk.* The Sustainability Walk is an approach for the design and planning of places that are to promote sustainable everyday practices, using ideas from both nudging and pragmatism. We investigate this combination of nudging and pragmatism in *The Sustainability Walk* by using both the method of learning history (Gearty et al. 2015; Westin et al. 2014) and also participant observation (see Section 3). While learning history helps us to highlight and analyse the learning and experiences during the development of the approach, participant observation helps to experience and observe the interaction among participants, and between participants and the local environment.

In Section 2, we detail the problem we address: nudging's shortcomings in facilitating collective action and reflection. We also explain the rationale for drawing on pragmatism to amend conventional nudging's focus on individual thinking. In Section 3, we elaborate on our methods, learning history and participant observation. Section 4 presents the results in the form of a learning history in which we describe and analyse the development of *The Sustainability Walk*. In Section 5, we discuss our insights about possibilities and constraints in combining nudging with pragmatism, in relation to the nudging literature. Section 6 closes the paper by concluding that our study reveals the potential of using pragmatism to add understanding of collective reflection and action to nudge thinking.

Problem and Key Concepts

Nudging, sustainability and the problem of collective action and reflection

Thaler and Sunstein popularised nudging through their 2008 book *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. They showed how insights from behavioural economy and psychology could be used to influence people's behaviour without limiting their freedom of choice by forbidding certain behaviours. A nudge, as they define it, is "any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives" (Thaler & Sunstein 2008:6). Nudge thinking holds that human rationality is bounded: i.e., people act based on habits and desires rather than rational analysis. Nudging seeks to correct the suboptimal choices that follow from such cognitive limitations, by subtly changing a physical or virtual environment—the "choice architecture"— and thus inviting individuals to choose "the better" option (Thaler & Sunstein 2008). Nudges are designed interventions with the aim to steer an agent's behaviour by means of targeting their "shallow cognitive processes, rather than preventing or hindering certain choice alternatives to be chosen." (Kuyer & Gordijn 2023: 2).

Nudging is increasingly used in the field of sustainability, as so-called green nudges (Carlsson et al. 2021; Schubert 2017). Here, nudging is used to encourage people to save energy, reduce garbage and waste, and increase their use of public transport. The strategy is also employed in many countries in the planning and design of houses, neighbourhoods and districts; for example, the British, Dutch and German governments have included it in design standards for public space (Bandsma et al. 2021). Nevertheless, there is a crucial limitation in nudging's conceptual underpinnings when the strategy is employed in the name of sustainability.

> *[…] the solutions resulting from the behavioural analysis fail to embrace the structural aspects of the ecological crisis. The behavioural approach is not appropriate for changing institutions, challenging relations of power and amending macroeconomic policies. Instead, it is the individuals who must adapt. (Bornemann & Burger 2019: 210)*

Even if behavioural economy and psychology provide possibilities for understanding aspects of individual behaviour, nudging's conceptual grounding in these disciplines is insufficient for explaining and facilitating collective action and reflection (see also Jones & Whitehead 2018; Pedwell 2017). Spurred by the urgency of the planetary crisis (IPCC 2023) we argue that it is of importance to see whether nudging can be made more capable of initiating collective reflection and action. While local planning is merely one measure, and a multitude of systemic changes is needed to meet the challenges of environmental degradation and social inequalities, we argue that it is still important to make local planning more attuned to sustainability.

Addressing the problem of collective action: combining nudging with pragmatist inquiry

To address nudging's limitations we draw on, and add to, the recent development of nudge plus (e.g. Banerjee & John 2021; John & Stoker 2019). Nudge plus supplements conventional nudging's one-sided emphasis on habitual thinking by highlighting the links between unreflective thinking and more reflective thinking. Nudge plus draws renewed attention to the dual-process models that are at the heart of the nudging literature (Kahneman 2011; Stanovich et al. 2000; Thaler & Sunstein 2008). These models posit that fast habitual thinking (called type 1) interacts with reflective thinking (called type 2). Hence, the basic distinction in dual-processing is between two cognitive processes: one that works through intuition and heuristics, and one that is analytical and reflective. These two processes interact in different ways depending on the characteristics of the task at hand (Banerjee & John 2021).

Several studies have found that nudging works better if the nudge targets habitual processes of type 1, combined with prompts for reflection, that is, processes of type 2 (Bradt 2022; Engelen et al. 2018; Visintin et al. 2021).

> *Nudge plus, as a modification of a classic nudge, must involve an active trigger of reflection as the plus, as the potential for reflection is not sufficient to prompt deliberation and cause lasting behavior change. (Banerjee & John 2021: 3)*

Nudge plus paves the way for collective action and reflection through nudging, but only focuses on cognitive processes, and has little to offer for understanding the social and material processes at play. We turn to the tradition of pragmatism for help.

> *Habits, from this [pragmatist] perspective, are not simply individual capacities or modes of behaviour but rather the product of evolving transactions between organisms and the milieus they inhabit. It follows that approaches to transformation that target the individual subject in isolation, or appeal exclusively to cognitive reason, are not likely to be effective. (Pedwell 2017: 63)*

Pragmatism provides useful lenses for understanding the links between habit, politics and social transformation (Dewey 1938, 1954). While in nudging experts and policymakers create a choice architecture to prompt behaviour based on expert definitions of sustainable behaviour, pragmatist scholars are interested in the collective development of habituation that can facilitate durable social transformation (Bridge 2020; Pedwell 2017). The approaches are similar in that they both focus on automated or habitual behaviour and favour "environmentally oriented interventions" (Pedwell 2017: 65). There are also fundamental differences, which makes pragmatism an interesting complement to nudging. Pragmatism carries the potential to complement conventional nudging's reliance on behavioural insights expertise with its emphasis on individual cognitive processes. While nudging presumes expert authority, pragmatism, too, acknowledges its importance. But the pragmatist tradition also holds that other forms of knowledge – experiential, practical and local – are valuable. For this reason, citizens ought to be included in the design, planning and management of the issues and places they care about, alongside interest groups and various kinds of experts. For proponents of pragmatist inquiry, it is by means of local ownership and improved action competence among citizens that social transformation is enabled (Healey 2009).

To investigate the possibility of adding a collective dimension to nudging, we draw on three core ideas in the pragmatist tradition (Bridge 2020; Healey 2009; Pedwell 2017). First, we draw on *joint inquiry*, which entails forming a group of people concerned with a particular issue to foster a shared understanding and decision-making on how to address the problem collectively. Second, we draw on *dissonance*, and seek to highlight differences in understanding and values in the joint inquiry, to facilitate the understanding and negotiation of these differences. Third, we use *joint experience*, and encourage the group to experience the place, by moving around in it, using it, and drawing on all senses to feel what the place is and does.

Method: Learning History and Participant Observation

We use the learning history method to help us collectively analyse our experience of combining pragmatist and nudging ideas in *The Sustainability Walk*. This method consists of documenting and reflecting on experiences and learning in a project. The idea is that you write your (collective) story about the process and explicitly include the difficulties and failures, as well as successes, to strengthen the potential for learning (Roth & Kleiner 1998). Learning histories invite readers behind the scenes, providing experiences and insights rarely featured in conventional research reports (Westin et al. 2014). In this way we can go beyond best-practice guides, in which the story typically unfolds in a linear and successful sequence leading to the desired objective. This is important because, as research into learning processes demonstrates (Steinnes 2004:270), all learning involves moments of being uncertain, struggling and not knowing. During a learning process, it can be difficult to "find firm grounds, to find legitimation for our actions and our practices". We use learning history to discern and grasp the significance of the unpredictable elements of the learning entailed in developing *The Sustainability Walk*. Learning histories also include the researchers' reflections and comments on the narrative, notation of themes and links to theory (Bartunek & Louis 1996). We intend our learning history to be both an accessible, engaging account of our experiences with *The Sustainability Walk*, and an empirical basis for our theorisation of how nudge thinking can be combined with pragmatism. When crafting the learning history, we pay attention to how the pragmatist ideas of joint inquiry, dissonance and joint experience play out during the development of the walk.

As with all methods, there are traps. Learning histories run the risk of retrospective coherence (as if all actions purposefully lead to the desired end) and of storytelling in which people behave in idealised ways (Snowden 2001). It is attractive to make the story a bit more successful or coherent. When this happens, chance, luck and serendipity are not acknowledged and change seems the result of well-planned and controllable steps (Snowden 2004, in Gearty 2008:86). This kind of storytelling runs counter to the purpose of learning histories, which is to capture the messiness of human endeavour for learning.

Alongside the learning history method, we use participant observation during the development trials for *The Sustainability Walk*. Participant observation is an ethnographic research method (Kawulich 2005), in which the researcher *participates* as a member in a group or community to experience interactions and events first-hand, but also occasionally assumes distance to *observe* and reflect on the processes and interaction from the position of a researcher. The purpose is to gain an understanding of the implicit and explicit aspects and relationships of the participants' lives in a specific context (Mackellar 2013). Being a participating observer allows the researcher to see how social actors interact and experience the context in question (Kawulich 2005). This is particularly beneficial for our purpose of analysing how the idea of combining nudging and pragmatism plays out in practice. More specifically, we focused our observations on how the ideas of joint inquiry, dissonance and joint experience influenced the participants' interactions.

In order to develop the learning history, we engaged in cycles of action and reflection (Reason & Bradbury 2007). Throughout the research process, we kept field diaries in which we noted down our personal observations, thoughts and reflections. We also analysed our documentation of meetings and other forms of communication, such as e-mails and text messages, within the project team. In addition, we examined the written documentation from the observations we made during the trials. We used the pragmatist ideas of joint inquiry,

dissonance and joint experiences as lenses to focus our analysis. The first, second and fifth authors drafted the learning history, after which the project team provided feedback and we collectively discussed the draft. After four iterations of this process, we finalised the learning history.

Developing *The Sustainability Walk* – A Learning History

Trial 1, Municipality A

The development of *The Sustainability Walk* grew out of previous work, in which members of the research team analysed handbooks of nudging and citizen participation from the point of view of whose knowledge counts in these strategies (Westin & Joosse 2022). A central finding was that neither strategy alone could handle the tension in planning between expertise and local citizen knowledge. Therefore, we wanted to explore whether nudging and participation could be combined by developing *The Sustainability Walk*, drawing on the strengths of each approach to overcome the tension between expert and citizen knowledge (in a later stage, we turned to pragmatism as a conceptual resource, as described in Section 2.2). We formed a research team consisting of an architect, two researchers, a research assistant and a student. We had high ambitions, but limited resources and time: we wanted not only to draw on a set of theoretical ideas and adopt them in the development of a practically applicable approach, but also envisaged future regular use of the approach in Swedish municipal planning processes.

We identified the tradition of deliberative walks (Lindell & Ehrström 2020) – where citizens together with planners and various kinds of experts deliberate on how to design public spaces by walking around in them – as particularly pertinent for our purposes. Moreover, since members of the team had positive previous experiences of related approaches to planning – of how moving around and physically experiencing a place can stimulate dialogue and create joint understanding among a group of people – we believed the approach would serve our work well.

> *A concrete example could be to develop a nudge walk, where participants can reflect over how they are nudged and how the nudge can become more socially accepted. It could be conversations about why I think that I act in a certain way […] Such a walk could also influence something larger, for example by letting residents join a planning process for building something and suggest how to make it easier to borrow bikes as an example (Minutes, 26/08/2021)*

We probed our networks to identify a few municipalities where trials to develop the approach could potentially be held. In selecting a municipality, we wanted to engage with municipalities willing to try out the approach we were developing and where, ideally, it could be applied in existing planning processes. After discussions with three different municipalities, we selected Municipality A, a small commuting municipality located in proximity to Greater Stockholm. Municipality A has an ambitious policy for both sustainable development and citizen participation and is home to a large-scale urban development project based on a progressive sustainability strategy. Our idea was to embed our trials within that planning process. We discussed the idea of *The Sustainability Walk* with planners in the municipality, who took an interest in it.

Informed by pragmatist inquiry, our vision was to facilitate sustainability planning through a deliberative walk. More specifically, we wanted to explore the potential of the pragmatist ideas of joint inquiry, dissonance and joint experience. We drafted a set of questions to be at the core of the walk. We came to think of nudging as a lens to understand choice architecture, rather than an expert intervention strategy, that could enable different actors to come together and discuss how a particular physical setting invites certain kinds of behaviour. This evaluative use of nudging opened an avenue for thinking not only about everyday practices, such as biking or recycling, but also for engaging with larger and more contested, value-laden issues, by widening the use of nudging to critically examine what forms of behaviour a particular place fosters from the point of view of sustainability. The preliminary inquiry we developed when preparing for the trial walk was: what is the logic of the place? With this question, we were interested in identifying and exploring what kinds of behaviour a particular place with its physical makeup,

its infrastructure, its embedded behavioural prompts encourages and what behaviour it does not encourage with respect to sustainability.

Having prepared a first design of *The Sustainability Walk*, the team gathered at the city hall in Municipality A to test it. We delineated an area in the close vicinity where many developments had taken place during recent years and new development projects were underway. During our walk we looked at the finalised, ongoing and planned buildings and constructions in the area. We lingered in places, trying to 'read the place' and act according to what we felt was the logic of the place. For example: we walked along a designated path traversing a construction site; we used the objects we met; we sat down on benches in a park area; and strolled through a public herbal garden. We also responded to confusing cues that the place gave us: we sat on a misplaced bench; we tried out footpaths leading to nowhere etc. This was how we made use of the idea of joint experience in the first trial. We walked for an hour and a half before returning to the city hall to share and document our observations and reflections.

> *Nudging usefully conceptualizes how the choice architecture makes people act in the right way. The walk is a way to make it possible for people to think through if what they do by habit is what they would do if they were to act reflectively (Minutes, 23/11/2021).*

We felt good about the outcome when it came to applying the idea of nudging as an evaluative concept. It helped us see which kinds of behaviour the place encouraged and discouraged. Our experience of walking reminded us that there is not only (and cannot only be) one logic of a place. Different team members made different assessments of the logic of the place. This strengthened our idea to use *The Sustainability Walk* to highlight different interpretations. Moreover, we started to use the phrase "hacking the place" (Minutes, 23/11/2021) as a goal for *The Sustainability Walk*, *i*.e. to creatively reconsider the use of a place. Beyond understanding the logic of a place from the point of view of sustainability, we were interested in how understanding this logic could also help people to think of improvements to the place.

Sharing our reflections of the walk, one thing stood out: we realised that we were all rather critical of the logic of this place. Notably, we found that the place was mainly geared towards accommodating cars. While we agreed that taking a critical approach to place-making is essential for sustainability purposes, we also realised that we needed to find a way to discuss how the place could be changed to better promote sustainable everyday practices. We decided to adjust the inquiry so that the approach would be designed according to a two-stage model, where participants would first focus on this evaluative dimension of place and then turn towards envisioning how the same place can be changed.

One problem that we encountered was that the broad and vague concept of sustainability, which may encompass different dimensions and issues, did not help much to focus attention during the walk. The team not only brought different ways of understanding what sustainability means but, more importantly, also had different ideas about how the concept of sustainability could best be applied in the approach. We realised that we had to grapple with a tension: while sustainability will necessarily be open for contestation, it must at the same time contain a normative core that bears on the need for the systems change (Connelly 2007; IPCC 2022; Savaget et al. 2019; Thompson 2011). In pragmatism's terms, we were struggling to identify the appropriate level of dissonance. Moreover, we found that the discussions tended to become abstract and couched in academic and expert jargon, which defied a vital aspect our work, namely, to facilitate the negotiation of non-expert, everyday knowledge and planning expertise. We concluded that we needed to operationalise the sustainability concept and make its meaning clearer, using everyday language.

Table 1. Conclusions of trial 1

Lesson	Implication for continued development of the approach
While it is promising to apply nudging as an evaluative concept, the evaluative use is not sufficient for guiding planning.	Include a two-stage model of evaluation and development in the approach.
To focus on joint inquiry opens up possibilities for sense-making across differences.	Base the approach on questions formulated in everyday language.
The application of sustainability as a concept was too vague to focus attention.	Explore how to apply sustainability as a contested concept and yet emphasise the need for systemic change, in view of finding an appropriate level of dissonance.

To sum up, with respect to the core ideas of the pragmatist tradition drawn on in this paper, the first trial walk demonstrated the utility of adopting the approach of a joint *inquiry* to explore a place. The walk reaffirmed that there will always be different understandings of the logic of a particular place, of what sustainability means, and of how it can best be promoted. It was also clear that having the tools at one's disposal with which such differences can be negotiated – which allows one to be attentive to moments of *dissonance* materializing in the inquiry – is vital. Finally, we felt that the idea of a *joint experience* of a place to enable the participants, as a group, to come into physical contact with and tangibly feel the shapes and textures of the place, allowed us to perceive dimensions that a disembodied, more abstract approach might not have. After the first trial, we continued to develop the approach for additional trials in Municipality A. However, because the municipal administration was worried about the timing of the walks in relation to the policy work in sustainability and participating, we had to postpone trials. In addition, a local conflict emerged about the number of housing units to be built in the area. We realised that it would be difficult, if not impossible to carry out additional trials in Municipality A. Since our project funding was limited, we did not continue *The Sustainability Walk* in Municipality A.

Trial 2, Municipality B, District 1

We then turned to another municipality that we had identified, Municipality B, where we had previously established contacts with municipal planners through other projects. Together with these planners, we identified District 1 in the municipality as suitable for exploring The Sustainability Walk. This district was currently undergoing major developments, underwritten by ambitious municipal goals for sustainability and citizen participation. District 1 is a suburb and characterised by high-rise buildings built during Sweden's economic boom in the 1960s and 70s. It has a large immigrant population and the Swedish authorities have designated it as a vulnerable area, with low socioeconomic status, high unemployment and relatively high crime rates. The municipality has initiated a series of development activities and social projects in the district, with the aim of stimulating the growth of a dynamic, creative and prosperous district.

Together with the municipal planners, we started to explore potential sites where *The Sustainability Walk* could be conducted, and to engage local participants through housing companies in the district. While the district seemed suitable for our purposes, we were also concerned that there were many other initiatives going on, leaving little room for the locals to take in a new one. We also suspected that the residents might be more concerned about crime and unemployment than sustainable everyday practices.

We invited a nudging expert at a consultancy firm to join our initiative, to contribute towards creating a more distinct focal point for the nudging expertise, so that we ourselves could better identify instances of tensions between local knowledge and nudging expertise; focusing on realising the pragmatist idea of dissonance as a vehicle for constructive communication.

We decided that we would proceed with the development of the approach in two steps: first, a role play at the site with members of the team; and second, doing the walk with local participants and planners. In preparing the role play, we did a new iteration of the design of the walk. Based on the lessons learned from the previous trial, we phrased the organising inquiry in everyday language. We felt that it was necessary for the walk to not only contain an evaluative component but to also include a forward-looking, visionary component about place development from the point of view of sustainability. Finally, we also made the application of the concept of sustainability more specific, and clarified that sustainability includes both smaller, less controversial changes and more far-reaching systemic changes that require a certain level of dissonance between different perspectives.

We reformulated the approach's key questions as follows: i) What would I like to do in this place? and ii) What does the place like me to do here? We re-emphasized the idea of joint experience by adding a component that encourages the participants to place small flags at sites they viewed as important and to write evaluative and visionary statements on the flags, translating their emotional and tactile experiences. In this vein, we also included a sequence encouraging the participants to document their answers to the two questions through filming on their mobile phones.

On a cold spring day, we gathered in District 1 and conducted our second trial in the form of a role-play. We divided the roles of facilitator, planner and local residents among the team members. The basic idea was to form a diverse group in which different, if not opposing perspectives on, and values about, sustainability would be represented. We sought to actively stimulate tensions and oppositions so that the role-play could serve as a useful test bed for pragmatist inquiry. The role-play turned out to be an enriching, but also troubling experience. On the one hand, the trial reaffirmed that the design could fruitfully facilitate both evaluation and a development-oriented exploration of place. On the other hand, we felt as if we had parachuted ourselves into an environment in which we were strangers.

> *We felt misplaced and were worried that we acted as a 'colonial power'. […] Do we need to identify more difficult questions than merely benches and bike stands? How can we move between the large issues and the smaller issues? (Minutes, 28/03/2022)*

This experience made us realise even more, how important it is to include the people living in the area. The risk of reproducing social inequalities and exclusion through physical planning, when you do not know the area nor the inhabitants well, felt very real. But also, we wondered: was it necessary to take up the residents' time and involve them in the development of an approach that they had not asked for? We also found it awkward to discuss bike stands and benches when the problems in the area were of a different, more serious kind. In pragmatist terms, we were struggling to find the right level of dissonance.

Moreover, we realized that we had to deal with the recurrent problem we had with applying the concept of sustainability. We had not resolved the vagueness issue identified in the previous trial and had yet to find a fruitful way to negotiate the low-hanging fruits of sustainability and the larger, systemic issues.

Following the role-play, we proceeded to prepare for real-world trials in District 1 in cooperation with a group of planners, behavioural insights experts and residents. However, a week before the next walk, one of the municipal planners informed us that there was a conflict between the municipality and one of the housing companies. The company owned most of the housing stock in District 1 and was crucial to have on board to increase the possibility that our development of the approach could be beneficial to the development of the area. The municipal planner advised us to cancel the walk due to this conflict. We decided to end the trials in District 1. The level of dissonance was too high for allowing us to engage constructively with the area.

Table 2. Conclusions of trial 2

Lesson	Implication for continued development of the approach
Using nudge thinking in a two-stage process for evaluation and place development worked well.	Keep the idea of the two-stage model.
A conflict stood in the way of realising the idea of joint inquiry across differences.	Need to develop a practical model of pragmatist inquiry capable of accommodating an appropriate level of dissonance.

Trial 3, Municipality B, District 2

Now we needed to make haste. We only had a few months of funding left for the project. We moved quickly to find a new location for a trial, but despite being in a hurry, we sought to carefully use the lessons learned in designing the trial. Since one of the main challenges had been a lack of local participation, we decided to contact a local, grassroots transition group first. We were familiar with this group from previous work. The initial conversation with the leader of the group was promising: she was interested in our work and willing to help to prepare the walk. Hence, we settled for District 2, a small community with a couple of thousand residents located some 20 kilometres from the main city.

We prioritized recruiting participants and identifying a suitable site in District 2. We wanted to engage local residents, planners and nudging experts. To reach planners we used our contacts in the municipality and initiated new contacts. A rural development officer joined the group, as the idea was in line with her responsibility to support development in the communities outside the main city. We also enlisted a local collaborative group working with community development.

It was more difficult to involve the municipal planners. There was an ongoing planning process for establishing a new housing area in District 2. The municipality had developed a draft plan and held a consultation meeting to discuss the plan with the residents in District 2. The consultation had been difficult and the locals skeptical. We thought that the responsible planners might want to participate in our work and also join the walk in the area in question. But after having discussed the idea with representatives of the municipality, it turned out that the municipality was unwilling to include the development of the approach at the site, since the consultation meeting had been conflictual. In pragmatist language, they seemed unwilling to allow for dissonance.

Instead, we turned to mapping organizations and individuals in District 2 and came to engage a group representing different associations in the district. We asked the group for suggestions about where to walk and received a list of potential sites. We opted for an area in the Centre, which was an important hub in the residents' daily lives.

Again, we revised the design of the walk based on the lessons from our work in District 1. We refined the joint inquiry in the following way: i) What does this place encourage us to do? ii) How would we like the place to change in order to encourage us to act in a more sustainable way? We retained the idea of using flags as a means of making the joint experience of sensing, taking in and acting in a particular place more tangible. And, we added a brief introduction on sustainability, to facilitate discussions and reflections about the issue, and make it easier for the participants to relate to it during the walk. A couple of days before the trial date, we were told that the nudging expert could not come, due to sickness in the family. This was a blow to the process and we had to quickly make a new plan. As we had nudging expertise in our team as well, two team members took on the task of participating in the walk in order to contribute with a nudging perspective. Fifteen people - local residents, the rural development officer and our team – participated in the walk. We started *The Sustainability Walk* with an introduction of the rationale for the walk, including our definition of sustainability, and the steps it involved. Then, the participants introduced themselves and we discussed our expectations for the walk. We divided the participants into two groups, with one facilitator each. During the first, evaluative,

step of the walk, participants made sense of the place by reflecting on how they would use it in everyday life. It is worth noting that it was difficult in all groups to stick to the evaluative step. Instead, participants moved quickly towards the second step of the process, focusing on how the place could be developed, bringing up such things as the need for improved parking and revamping the bus stop to shield passengers from the traffic. The facilitators intervened to bring the groups back to the initial evaluative question, but the participants continued to gravitate towards the second step. Interestingly, this dynamic was the reverse of what we had seen in the first trials, in which the participants were mainly concerned with evaluating the place.

During the second step, the participants discussed how they would like to alter the place to stimulate sustainable everyday practices. They documented their suggestions on flags, which they fixed in the ground. The discussions were shaped by the locals' perspectives and input to a significant extent, and the municipal officer listened and added her knowledge with a view to explaining how the locals' ideas fitted into the municipal planning system. This willingness on the part of the planner to listen was evident when one of the facilitators asked the municipal officer how *she* would like to use this place. The officer forwarded the question to one of the locals instead, inviting that person to respond.

Of particular importance from the point of view of pragmatist inquiry was the fact that the participants did not discuss differences and tensions in depth; the level of explicit dissonance was low. Communication between the participants did not continue to the point where different understandings of the place and sustainability challenges were identified, elaborated upon and negotiated. For example, during the reflection session after the walk, one participant pointed out that some of the participants advocated what she identified as "radical changes" to the place, while others mainly wanted to make what she saw as minor improvements. Her statement was met with silence by the other participants. This demonstrated the importance of having at one's disposal the conceptual and practical tools to facilitate the negotiation of dissonance emerging in joint inquiry. Not only does the existence of different values and understandings of sustainability need to be properly recognized, but there must also be a practical mechanism enabling the accommodation of the breadth of issues and concerns inherent in the field of sustainability, ranging from the nitty-gritty of everyday life (such as bike lanes or recycling facilities) to the systemic. After the walk, we discussed how to go about honing the approach to realise the pragmatist idea of dissonance.

In the trial we saw how pragmatist inquiry could contribute to nudging by adding a dimension about collective action and reflection. Collectively, the walkers developed novel ideas and suggestions for the development of the place, and new connections between the participating civil society organizations and individuals were established. Several participants stated that they had never paid attention to how this area invited or discouraged behaviours. It was also evident that the participants identified opportunities to realize ideas with the help of the organizations that participated. The walk also enabled new contacts and bonds to be formed between the transition group, the community development group, and the municipality.

> *The concept of sustainability remained difficult also in this walk. Is this approach really helping in bringing about a sustainable transition? It felt like the suggestions brought forward were relatively small and/or shallow. Plus, as noted by one of the participants, the brevity of the discussions meant that friction and conflicts between different groups/needs weren't discussed. (E-mail from team member, 04/10/2022)*

The trial demonstrated that nudge thinking can help people to understand the influence of their direct surrounding in their everyday practices. Combining this approach to nudging with the idea of pragmatist inquiry, as two active triggers of joint reflection, stimulated the participants, as a group, to critically examine how the built environment encouraged certain behaviours while discouraging others. The joint inquiry provided a platform for articulating local knowledge and for negotiating that knowledge with planning expertise (represented by the rural development officer), facilitating the development of a shared understanding.

> *The reason why I like nudging is that I think it is a useful concept that we can all use to look at our practices in a different way. While we normally are used to thinking that we are individual actors and that our everyday life is based on our own free will and ideas, much of our practices are shaped by the architecture. For me the term nudge can help to think about this. (E-mail from team member, 26/10/2022)*

Table 3. Conclusions of trial 3

Lesson	Implication for continued development of the approach
Participants acknowledged the value of the approach for enabling a critical examination of place from the point of view of sustainability.	Keep the two-stage model.
Joint inquiry provided a platform for negotiating local knowledge and expertise.	Consider adopting a more structured mechanism for this negotiation to accommodate dissonance.
New connections and bonds between participants were established.	Keep to the idea of forming diverse groups for joint inquiry.
Facilitating the negotiation of different understandings and conflicting values remained challenging.	Implement a practical mechanism capable of such negotiation, but also accept that working through conflicts will require more than just one walk.

Summary of the findings

The idea to develop nudging by drawing on the resources of the pragmatist tradition was shown to be promising but difficult to incorporate in planning processes, because our municipal contacts were afraid that *The Sustainability Walk* would feed already existing tensions. The three trial walks suggest that by forming a group for joint inquiry, by recognizing the existence of dissonance and seeking to actively negotiate instances of dissonance in the group, by framing discussions in everyday language, and by stimulating joint experience of place, shared experiences and constructive communication around sustainable place development can be fostered. This creative exploration of nudging, where we stretched its use and meaning to facilitate reflective thinking and collective action, shows that it can be a meaningful lens for people to understand their everyday, as shaped by their surroundings. As such, it can serve as a vehicle for evaluating and critically reflecting on the sustainability of a particular place and on what forms of behaviour the place stimulates. Our trial walks also demonstrated the usefulness of joint experience, moving around and getting a feel for the place as a group, allowing the participants to come in close contact with the place and draw on a broad range of their day-to-day experiences of it. Moreover, we witnessed how the walk helped people connect with other groups in a locality, the municipality and other organisations.

Even so, the walks also revealed several pitfalls when it comes to combining nudging and pragmatism. The municipalities were sometimes hesitant about a sustainability walk being arranged in their "conflictual area", afraid of increasing tensions. We also noted that the walk served to engage different people with different perspectives and to give voice to them. At the same time, the walk (in its current configuration) is not fit for a deeper discussion about conflicting visions. However, one might also think that the walk might just be a good start for such a local collective process. Sustainability remained difficult to grasp in the walk. We sought to balance applying it in an open way to accommodate for different perspectives, on the one hand, and to acknowledge its normative core pertaining to the need for systemic transformation, on the other hand. This balancing act proved to be difficult, but this is, in all likelihood, to be expected when one deals with a wicked problem such as sustainability. The critical aspect, for any practice geared toward promoting sustainability, is to be conscious of the tension and to design appropriate mechanisms for dealing with dissonance in a constructive fashion.

Discussion: Lessons From Developing *The Sustainability Walk*

By developing an approach for sustainability planning we have sought to test how pragmatism can enhance nudge thinking's understanding of collective action and reflection. While nudging (over)relies on expert knowledge, *The Sustainability Walk* is designed to bring together a diverse group of actors in which local knowledge as well as planning and nudging expertise are represented, with the aim to collectively explore place and place development. At the heart of the approach lies the application of nudging with an unorthodox purpose: to open up an evaluative perspective on what kind of behaviour a particular place encourages, coupled with a prescriptive perspective that generates suggestions for how the same place can be remade to stimulate more sustainable behaviour.

At a theoretical level, our findings point to the value of complementing nudging's conceptual grounding in dual-processing models (Kahneman 2011; Stanovich et al. 2000; Thaler & Sunstein 2008) with pragmatism's tools for understanding social interactions (Bridge 2020; Pedwell 2017). In developing *The Sustainability Walk* we made use of three central ideas drawn from the field of pragmatist inquiry: i) the value of *joint inquiry* across differences; ii) the importance of *utilising dissonance* between perspectives; and iii) the benefits of creating a joint experience by *sensing, moving around in and feeling* a place together. The learning history showed that these ideas carry the potential for adding a missing link to the field of nudging, the link between individual behaviour and collective action and reflection. Where nudging's underpinnings in dual-processing theory help to understand what happens *between the ears* of individuals, pragmatism helps to understand what happens *between the noses*, in the interaction between individuals. Pragmatism can thereby serve as a useful conceptual supplement to nudge thinking by showing that the prompting of cognitive reflective processes of type 2 might require, besides a manipulation of the choice architecture, a process of social and material interactions as well. Joint inquiry – sharing ideas and perspectives, experiencing and feeling together – stimulates interaction and creates the social friction that may lead to a questioning of, and change in, habitual ways of acting (Bridge 2020; Healey 2009; Pedwell 2017).

Our findings confirm the value of the recent reflective turn in the nudging literature, something that is referred to as nudge plus (Banerjee & John 2021; John & Stoker 2019), and enhance the understanding of collective action and reflection in this literature. As previous research shows (Bradt 2022; Engelen et al. 2018; Visintin et al. 2021), including a reflective component in a nudge increases the likelihood of sustained change, as those who have been nudged make a conscious choice, which increases feelings of ownership and investment in change. From *The Sustainability Walk*, we bring a novel conceptualisation of nudging, based on pragmatism to enhance the understanding of social interactions and improve the facilitation of collective action and reflection, to the debate about reflective nudges. More specifically, our study shows how nudge thinking can be used by a diverse group to critically and collectively examine how the built environment, in tangible ways, influences everyday practices. Based on this criticality, groups can translate the often abstract concept of sustainability into a more concrete discussion about a place that they all care about. In a time of increased tensions between sub communities, our study shows the potential of joint inquiry to serve the vital purpose of stimulating new conversations.

Through the learning history, we have identified a pitfall for applying our theoretical idea of combining nudging and pragmatism. In our attempts to develop the walk, we came across planning cultures geared toward avoiding the tensions between different perspectives and opinions, which the pragmatist tradition, by contrast, views as an essential source of reflection and learning. The tendency in municipal planning cultures to avoid conflicts made it difficult to utilise the full potential of the idea of pragmatist inquiry in our trials to develop *The Sustainability Walk*. This confirms previous research that points to how smoothing over conflicts, rather than activating and making dissonance into a constructive part of planning, is common (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010; Hillier 2003; Kühn 2020).

In this study, we had to settle with doing trials of the approach outside of the more formalised processes of planning. Hence, even if our study shows that the idea to combine nudging with pragmatist inquiry holds potential, we have yet to see how it can be implemented in planning practice.

Conclusion

This study details an attempt to develop a nudging approach that facilitates collective reflection and action. Our findings point to the potential of complementing nudge thinking with the pragmatist tradition. We found that nudging's traditional (over)reliance on expertise in behavioural science can be tempered by forming a community of inquiry that brings together residents and experts, schematically representing two forms of knowledge in planning: local everyday knowledge and expertise. As such, our study demonstrates how nudge thinking can be amended in view of the longstanding critique that it lacks legitimacy and is ineffective when it comes to facilitating long-term behavioural change and collective reflection and action, elements of vital importance to sustainability transitions.

Our findings suggest that it is useful to continue exploring ways of combining dual-processing theory with pragmatism, in theory and practice. While the two approaches have different conceptual foundations and focus on different aspects of human behaviour, they can serve complementary purposes. Blending nudging and pragmatism thus holds promise for renewing intervention design, which is crucial considering the urgency of a systemic sustainability transformation. In a time of increased polarization and conflict in environmental politics, interventions for collective reflection and action can also serve a significant political purpose. As one prominent proponent of the pragmatist tradition in planning, Richard Bernstein, has argued: the broad task for policymaking – whether in the field of planning or elsewhere – is to establish "[a] polity with a culture that recognizes deep plurality and conflict but can yet find some common ground in which disabling conflicts can be ameliorated" (Healey 2009: 284). Such a culture will only arise, he goes on to argue, "if people work hard for it". With the development of *The Sustainability Walk*, we have sought to design a practical approach geared toward bringing together citizens, planners, policymakers and experts around the hard, necessarily collective work, of making places that promote sustainable everyday practices.

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Appendix: The Sustainability Walk: A Step-By-Step-Guide

This appendix includes a step-by-step-guide for those who wish to use *The Sustainability Walk* as an approach to sustainability planning. As all approaches, *The Sustainability Walk* must be adopted to work well in different contexts. This guide shows the generic steps in the approach in view of allowing the users to tailor it to their context.

Step 1: Preparations

a) Define the purpose for doing *The Sustainability Walk*. There are alternative purposes. It could for example be to develop concrete ideas for an ongoing urban planning project, to engage the local community in sustainability transformation or to evaluate a pilot project.

b) Select an area for doing the walk. This step involves identifying a district, village or neighbourhood and also delineating a smaller part of it where the walk will take place. Do not choose a place that is too big; a street or a square might for example be a good size.

c) Identify relevant sustainability goals to focus on. But remember that there might be participants with different views that should be allowed to be expressed, even if they might not be aligned with the goals. If there are specific goals for the planning or place development these are especially relevant.

d) Invite participants. The participants should include people who live and/or work at the chosen place and experts, for example in planning, behaviour or participation. In addition, two facilitators are needed to enable constructive communication between participants. The group should include 10-15 participants. If you want to involve more people, it is a good idea to divide them into several groups.

e) Work out the logistics.

- Decide date and time for the walk. Keep in mind that ideally the walk should be conducted in daylight, at the same time as there are advantages in doing the walk after office hours (to make it easier for people to join).
- Book an inside venue nearby. This venue is needed for a gathering before and after the walk. Organise food and drinks (if you want).
- Prepare the material. Perhaps you need a power point presentation to introduce the idea of the walk? You will need pennants that the participants use to mark and describe important spots in the area. You also need to get hold of pens and post-its.
- Distribute the invitation for the walk. Describe what the participants can expect from the walk. Note the time and place.

Step 2: Implementation

At the day of the walk it is good to have done proper preparations. To the right you find an example schedule with times and agenda items. Here are some things that are important to keep in mind when you are conducting the walk.

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE

16:00 The organizers prepare the venue
17:15 Participants arrive, food and mingle
17:30 Introduction: purpose, agenda and round of presentations
18:00 Presentation of The Sustainability Walk
18:25 First step in the walk: What is this place encouraging you to do?
18:40 Second step in the walk: how would we like to change the place to encourage sustainable everyday practices?
19:20 Going back to the venue. Organizers take photos of pennants and collect them.
19:30 Participants present their observations and suggestions
19:45 Joint reflection about the walk
20:00 END

- People can be unused in exploring a place. It might be that they mainly stand still, point and talk. Encourage the participants to try out to use the place; explore it physically.
- The facilitator should mainly ask questions, rather than participate actively in the discussions.
- There needs to be a balance between following the steps in the walk and allowing the participants to improvise.
- It can be good to use pennants for writing answers to the questions and also to stick these into the ground to mark interesting places. Taking photos of the pennants is a nice way of documenting the findings of the walk.
- It is a good idea to clarify that the walk is not intended to generate a wishing list to the planners. Instead, emphasis should be on joint inquiry between locals, planners and experts.
- If there are conflicts, it is probably good to discuss with the participants how to deal with these before conducting the walk. It might, for example, be good to agree on a code of conduct.

Step 3: Documentation and follow up

Collect the material and document the findings from the walk. This includes: pennants, post-its and notes. Distribute the documentation to the participants. If appropriate, book a time to follow up on progress on implementing the suggested changes.