

## Overview

'The Time-Spaces of Soft Paternalism' is a research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust which runs for 3 years from November 2009.

Soft paternalism describes a type of governing which is said to be aimed at increasing personal freedom at the same time as ensuring the welfare of citizens. It is soft because it doesn't force people to act differently, and is paternalistic because it gently 'nudges' people to make better decisions to improve their health, wealth and happiness.

This research seeks to uncover the different mechanisms that are used to encourage people to change their behaviour through public policies. These might include things like *persuading* people to give up smoking, establishing *social norms* such as recycling, or setting *default positions*, such as automatic enrolment in pension schemes. These so called 'choice architectures' make some decisions more likely than others.

Our project is aimed at understanding how government schemes and other organisations try to change people's behaviour and how people respond to these initiatives. Our findings will inform current debates about the appropriate role of government intervention in the environment, health and personal finance sectors.



The time-spaces of soft paternalism

The research is being conducted at Aberystwyth University by a team of Human Geographers: Dr Rhys Jones, Dr Mark Whitehead (co-investigators), and Dr Jessica Pykett (researcher).

For more information please contact:

Jessica Pykett

Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences  
Aberystwyth University  
Llandinam Building  
Penglais Campus  
Aberystwyth  
SY23 3DB

Email: [jyp@aber.ac.uk](mailto:jyp@aber.ac.uk)

Phone: 01970 622608

Visit our project blog:

<http://governingtemptation.wordpress.com/>



## Changing Behaviour, Changing Spaces



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The research is organised into 3 different sectors in order to allow us to compare different styles and techniques of governing across different kinds of behaviours and spaces. In each sector, we are carrying out *documentary analysis* of relevant policies, *in-depth interviews* with organisations who enable behaviour change, and detailed *case studies*—working with organisations and groups who are affected by soft paternalism.

## Environment



How are our towns and cities designed to encourage pro-environmental behaviours?

How does the action of our neighbours affect our own travel decisions?

How are we helped to decide to recycle and reduce waste?

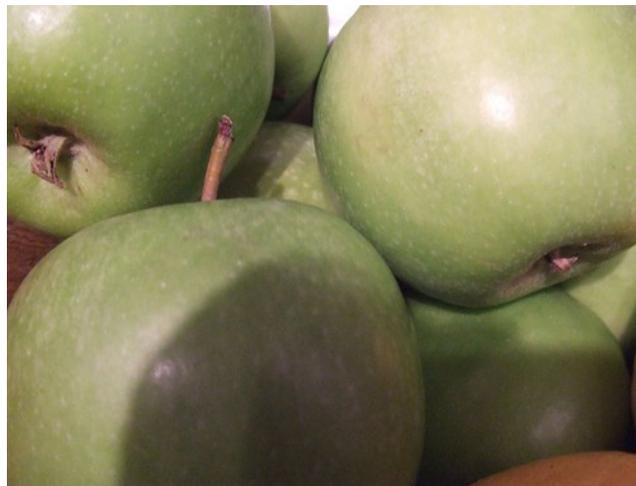
## Health

How does public health advertising work?

How are school and work canteens designed to encourage healthier eating?

How are we made aware of the health risks associated with diet, exercise, smoking?

How can the government and organisations change our food cultures and eating habits?



## Personal Finance

How does the government encourage us to save?

How are we encouraged to resist the temptation to gamble excessively?



How do we make decisions about our pension plans?

How are our towns and cities organised to make us save or encourage us to spend?