What’s so complex about a sugary drink tax?

@harryrutter | London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
The US had no soda taxes in 2013. Now nearly 9 million Americans live with them.

Seattle just became the eighth municipality to enact a soda tax aimed at curbing consumption.
Schools to receive £415m from sugar tax to encourage healthier lifestyles

Will Hazell
28th February 2017 at 00:02

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Sugar tax sets a dangerous precedent

24 Aug 2016 | Gavin Partington

Soft drinks manufacturers and retailers have been taking action for several years to reduce sugar and calorie intake from soft drinks. Reformulation, increased availability of smaller pack sizes, investment in promoting low and no-calorie products - all these actions have helped reduce consumers’ sugar intake from soft drinks by over 16% since 2012.

In 2015 the soft drinks industry also agreed to a collective calorie reduction goal of 20% by 2020. So for soft drinks to be singled out for a tax on sugar content, in a childhood obesity plan that otherwise sets voluntary targets for sugar reduction by 2020 for other categories - which in soft drinks we are already well on the way to achieving - is very odd.

There is no evidence worldwide that tax has an impact on levels of obesity. An Oxford Economics report commissioned by BSDA shows the tax will lead to over 4,000 job losses across
Drinks companies cut sugar content as tax looms

Coca-Cola and Lucozade Ribena react to draft legislation aimed at fighting obesity
Sugar

Soft drinks tax raises less money than forecast as firms cut sugar content

Chancellor says yield will be about £385m a year, with Irn-Bru maker among those 'reformulating sugar out of their drinks'.

A sugar tax on soft drinks will raise less money than expected because companies have started making their products less sweet to avoid extra costs, the chancellor.

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Coca-Cola cancel €40m Portugal investment due to ‘Soda Tax’

BY BRENDAN DE BEER, IN NEWS • 17-11-2016 14:32:00 • 2 COMMENTS

Soft drink brand Coca-Cola has reportedly cancelled plans to invest an additional 40 million euros at its production unit in Portugal due to a sugar tax which will be levied on fizzy drinks from the beginning of 2017.
Sugar tax → Increased price → Reduced sales → Reduced consumption → Reduced obesity
Political lobbying
PR offensive
Media

Price restructuring

Advertising
Marketing Promotions

Divert attention

Question the evidence

Minimise magnitude

Minimise changes

Minimise likelihood

Obfuscate

Manipulate the discourse

? tax

? price

? sales

? consumption

? obesity
WE’re LISTENING TO CONSUMERS AND TAKING ACTION TO REDUCE SUGAR - A TAX WON'T HELP

26 May 2016

Jon Woods, General Manager of Coca-Cola Great Britain and Ireland, with a can of new and improved Coca-Cola Zero Sugar.
While we agree with the Government that obesity rates are too high and need to be reduced, we do not believe additional taxes are the solution. There is no reliable evidence from anywhere in the world that shows taxing food and drink – let alone just some soft drinks - has changed people’s behaviour and made them thinner.

Jon Woods, General Manager of Coca-Cola Great Britain and Ireland
26 May 2016
http://www.coca-cola.co.uk/blog/were-listening-to-consumers-and-taking-action-to-reduce-sugar-a-tax-wont-help
Diagram of geopolitical relationships in the Middle East

Note: Palestine and Israel were discounted for the sake of simplicity

Institute of Internet Diagrams - karlremarks.com 2015
Sugar tax → Increased price → Reduced sales → Reduced consumption → Reduced obesity
Study team: Jean Adams, Adam Briggs, Steven Cummins, Oliver Mytton, Tarra Penney, Mike Rayner, Harry Rutter, Peter Scarborough, Richard Smith, Martin White
Conclusions

• Whole systems approach requires a shift from linear, single perspective thinking to holistic, non-linear systems thinking
• This has implications for planning, implementing, and evaluating interventions
• The obesity epidemic is an emergent property of the complex adaptive food and physical activity systems within which we all live
• Interventions such as sugary drinks taxes create perturbations within these systems; they are not like hammers hitting nails
• Be careful treating complex systems as simple: of course most things will appear not to 'work' if we judge them on the wrong criteria
• Move from ‘does it work?’ to ’does it contribute?’