

Decision-making for the freshwater system, post 2043

Reimagining water governance through speculative futures



Why this matters

This case matters because water governance faces long-term uncertainty. It shows how design-led policy experimentation can open up possibilities that conventional processes may not surface.

The urban pressure

Water management affects everyone, but decision-making systems can struggle to consider long-term ecological, social and intergenerational questions. Without experimental methods, policymakers and stakeholders may not have space to explore transformed governance models together.



The partnership response

Partners developed speculations that invited policymakers and stakeholders to ask “what if?” questions and imagine alternative institutions and decision-making systems.

What the project did

The project brought transformative speculations to life. It allowed policymakers to encounter future possibilities through tangible artefacts, exhibitions and discussion formats, then invited stakeholders outside government to carry the ideas into their own organisations.

Interventions and outcomes

- Used speculative design and moral imagination to create tangible future scenarios.
- Convened policymakers and external stakeholders around experimental possibilities for freshwater decision-making.
- Used collective intelligence to surface ideas, attitudes and alternative governance models.

What made it work

Bringing together artists and designers worked well because it gave policy professionals concrete experiences of otherwise abstract governance ideas.

Challenges and lessons

The project was exploratory rather than delivery-focused. Its value lies in shifting imagination, language and possibility space rather than immediate measurable service outcomes.

Relevance to other cities

Relevant to cities and governments facing complex environmental systems where existing governance models are under strain.

Follow-up opportunity

This case could support further exchange on water governance, speculative design, collective intelligence, policy futures and environmental decision-making.

For more information visit: openpolicy.blog.gov.uk



Partnerships to deliver

prosperous urban futures

Part of the UK's contribution to the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum, this case study highlights how cities are responding to challenges through practical, place-based collaboration. It reflects a shared commitment to learning, collaboration and building partnerships for the future of cities.