

# Applying experimental policy methods

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24th Oct 2023



# We will cover

- Introduction to Policy Lab
- Experimental methods cards
- The Water Post 2043 project
- Moral Imaginings
- Art in Policy & Speculative Design
- Questions and Discussion

# Speakers



**Sanjan Sabherwal**  
Head of Policy Innovation



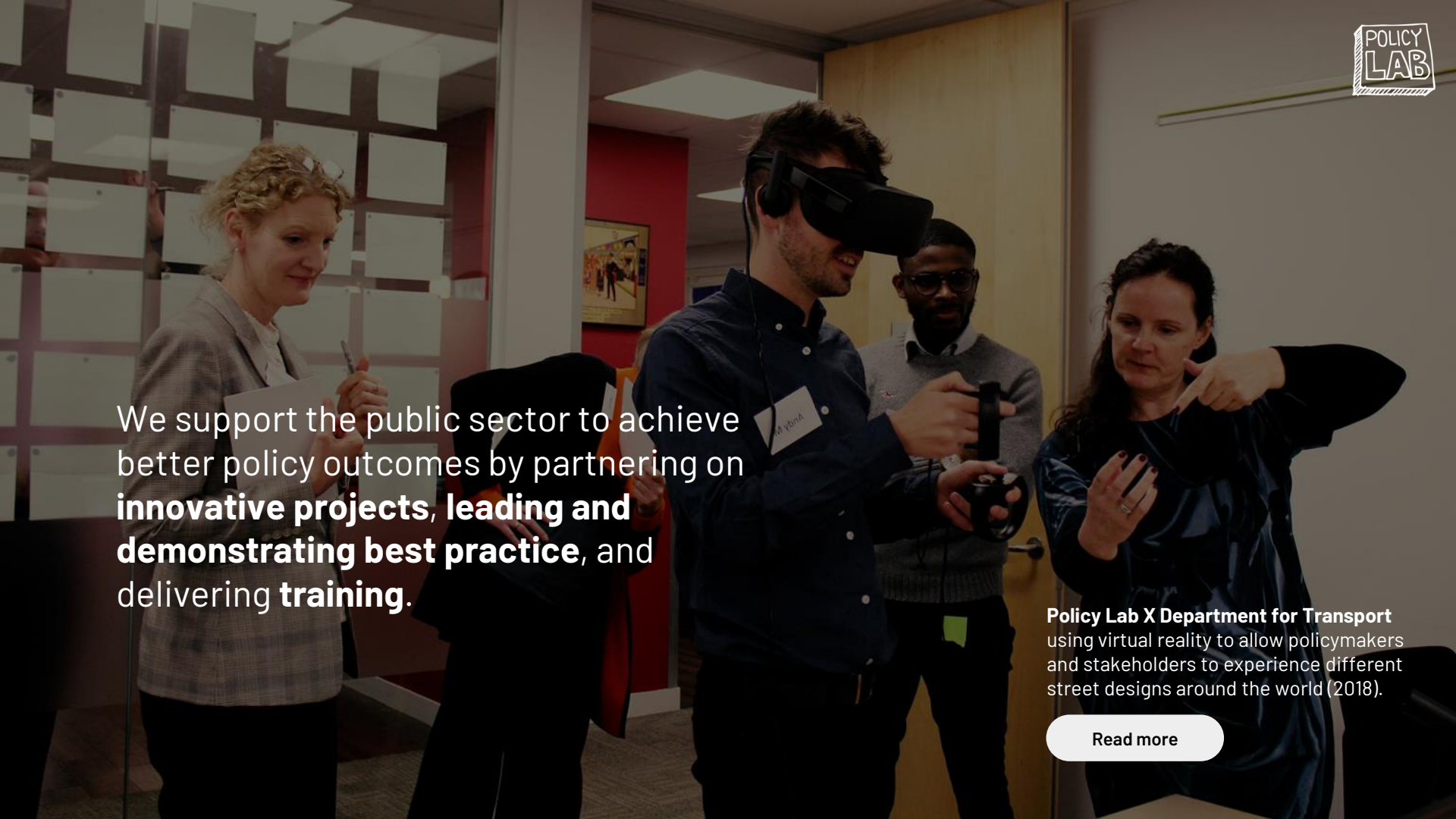
**Neha Sharma**  
Senior Policy  
Designer & Project  
Lead

# What is Policy Lab?



Our mission is to radically improve  
policymaking through design,  
innovation and people-centred  
approaches

**Policy Lab X Disability Unit (Cabinet Office)** ethnographic fieldwork to explore the lived experiences of disabled people (2019-20).



We support the public sector to achieve better policy outcomes by partnering on **innovative projects, leading and demonstrating best practice**, and delivering **training**.

**Policy Lab X Department for Transport** using virtual reality to allow policymakers and stakeholders to experience different street designs around the world (2018).

[Read more](#)

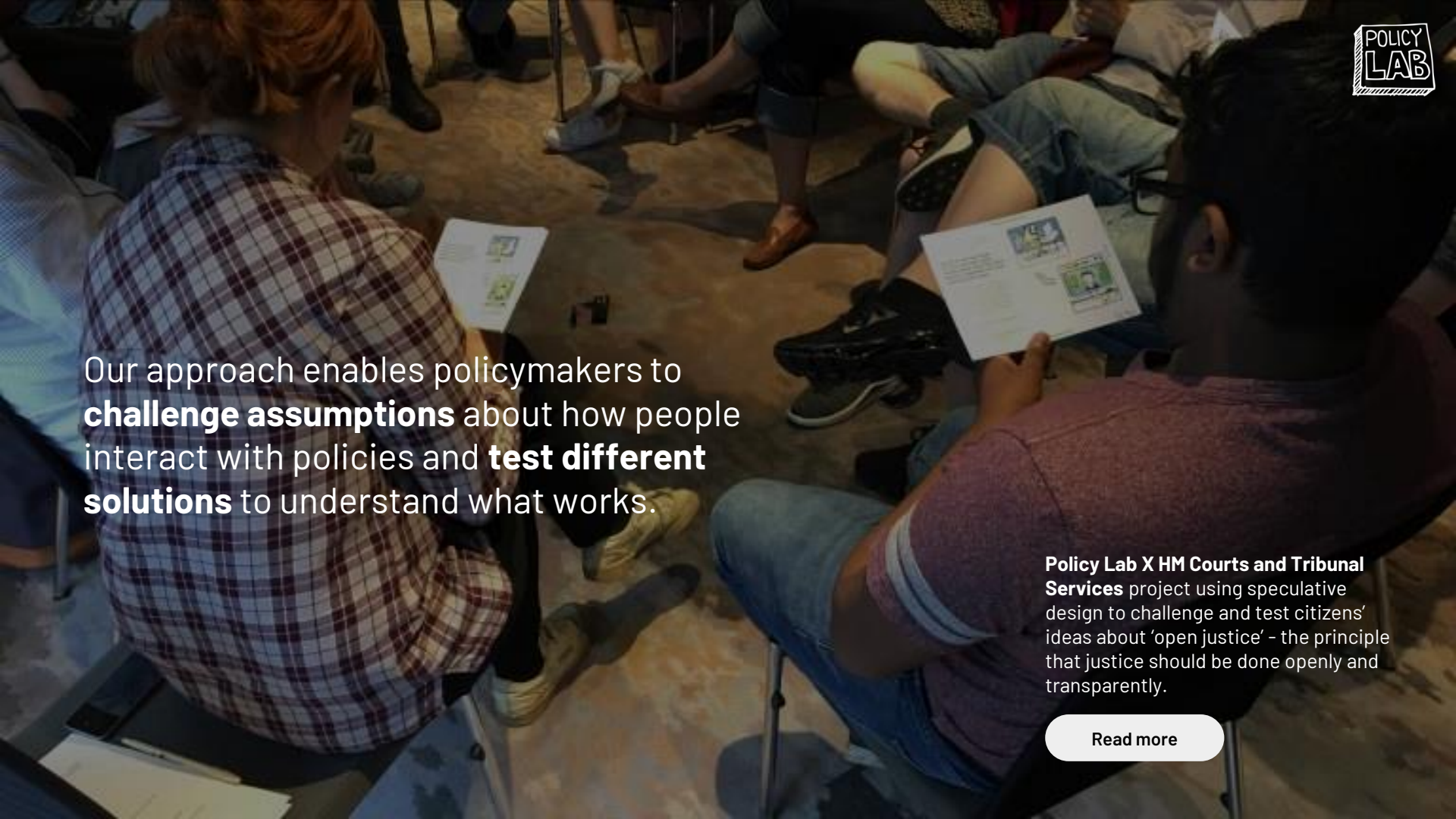
# We are a **multi- disciplinary government innovation team**

Anthropologist  
Artist  
Behavioural insights researcher  
Communication designer  
Curator  
Design leader  
Design researcher  
Ethnographer  
Film maker  
Finance guru  
Policy maker  
Music ethnologist  
Scientist  
Service designer  
Strategy designer  
Social designer  
Social researcher  
Speculative designer  
Visual anthropologist

- + Graduates
- + PhDs

Our methods help policymakers understand and untangle complexity.

[Read more](#)

A group of people are sitting on the floor in a circle, looking at documents. The person in the foreground on the left is wearing a red and white plaid shirt. The person on the right is wearing a purple t-shirt and blue jeans. They are both looking at a document that has a small image of a person on it. The background shows other people sitting on the floor, some looking at documents and others looking towards the center. The floor is a light-colored, textured surface.

Our approach enables policymakers to **challenge assumptions** about how people interact with policies and **test different solutions** to understand what works.

**Policy Lab X HM Courts and Tribunal Services** project using speculative design to challenge and test citizens' ideas about 'open justice' – the principle that justice should be done openly and transparently.

[Read more](#)

Since 2014, we have partnered with policy teams on over 190 projects, working with 9,000 public servants across central and local government departments and agencies, as well as internationally.

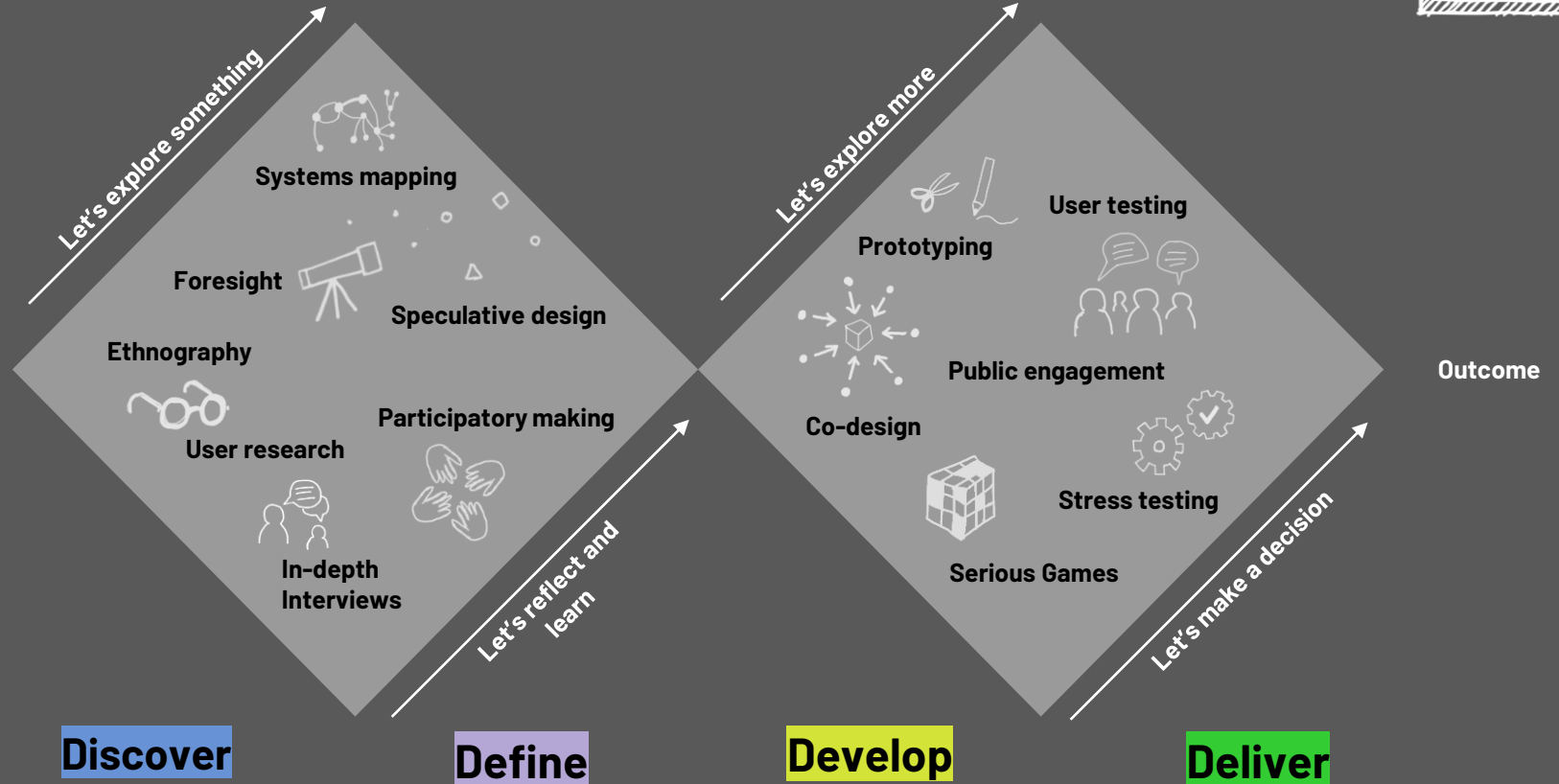
We are a multi-award winning team, and one of the world's longest-standing government Labs dedicated to policy innovation.



# Our approach and methods



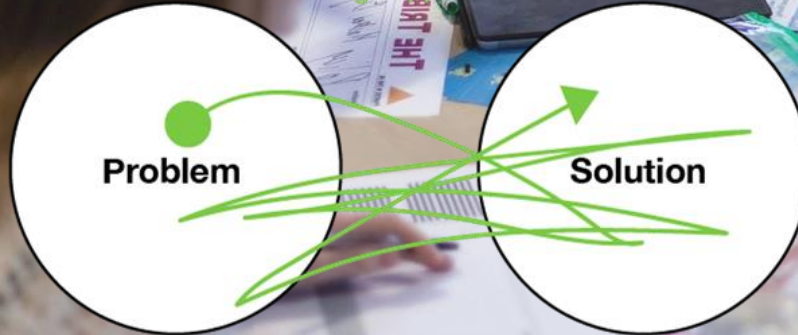
**Challenge  
setting**



analytical approach



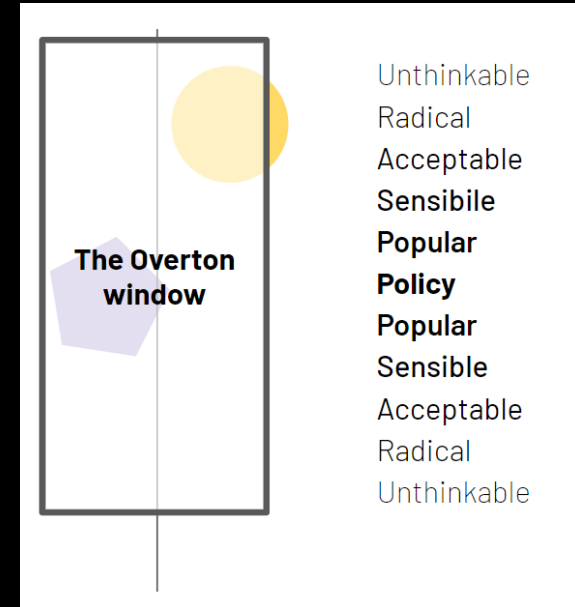
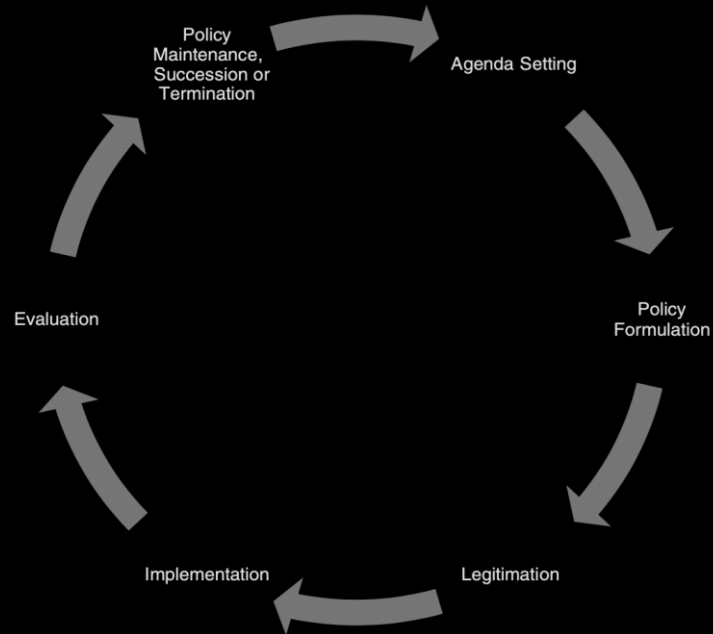
Design approach



**Iterative, 'fail fast' design approach** to de-risk decision making and invite new ideas

# What's next practice?

We have identified the emerging methods and approaches that can improve and disrupt policymaking



## Agenda Setting

Identifying problems that require government attention, deciding which issues deserve the most attention and defining the nature of the problem.

## Policy Formulation

Setting objectives, identifying the cost and estimating the effect of solutions, choosing from a list of solutions and selecting policy instruments.

## Legitimation

Ensuring that the chosen policy instruments have support. It can involve one or a combination of: legislative approval, executive approval, seeking consent through consultation with interest groups, and referenda.

## Implementation

Establishing or employing an organization to take responsibility for implementation, ensuring that the organization has the resources (such as staffing, money and legal authority) to do so, and making sure that policy decisions are carried out as planned.

## Evaluation

Assessing the extent to which the policy was successful or the policy decision was the correct one; if it was implemented correctly and, if so, had the desired effect.

## Policy maintenance, succession and termination

Considering if the policy should be continued, modified or discontinued.

PREDICTIVE MODELLING  
CONSULTING MINISTERS  
ANALYSING PARTY MANIFESTOS  
DESK BASED RESEARCH  
WRITING SUBMISSIONS  
POLICY PAPER

CHALLENGE SETTING WORKSHOPS  
HORIZON SCANNING MAJOR TRENDS  
FORESIGHT FUNCTIONS  
OPEN DATA

PREDICTIVE MODELLING  
FUTURE SCENARIOS

SPECULATIVE DESIGN  
SYSTEMS MAPPING

DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS  
INFORMATION INTERACTION DISRUPTION  
MORAL IMAGINING  
ART IN POLICY

DANCE  
AI LED POLICY FOCUS  
DEGROWTH

SUPERFORECASTING  
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE DIGITAL TOOLS  
REGENERATIVE DESIGN  
THINKING THREE GENERATIONS AHEAD

ROUND TABLES  
WRITING SUBMISSION  
ECONOMIC ANALYSIS  
PREDICTIVE MODELLING  
ENGAGING ACADEMIA

OPEN POLICY MAKING  
BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE  
HUMAN LED  
DATA ANALYSIS  
USER CENTRED DESIGN  
AGILE

ETHNOGRAPHY  
DESIGN THINKING  
GOVERNMENT AS A  
SYSTEM TOOLKIT

PREDICTIVE MODELLING  
FUTURE SCENARIOS  
POLICY DESIGN SPRINTS  
OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY  
SYSTEMS MAPPING  
DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY  
MACHINE LEARNING

CITIZEN ASSEMBLIES  
POLICY DESIGN SPRINTS  
OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY  
PORTFOLIO APPROACH  
TO INNOVATION  
CO-DESIGN

ART IN POLICY  
INFORMATION INTERACTION DISRUPTION  
BODY STORMING  
CITIZEN SCIENCE  
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE DIGITAL TOOLS  
SYNTHETIC ENVIRONMENTS  
REGENERATIVE DESIGN  
AR/VR IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES  
DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS  
PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

PUBLIC CONSULTATION  
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT  
X GOV WRITE-ROUNDS  
ROUND TABLES  
OPINION POLLING  
CABINET COMMITTEE

BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE  
USER TESTING  
PROTOTYPING

SYSTEMS MAPPING WORKSHOPS  
CITIZEN ASSEMBLIES

POLICY DESIGN SPRINTS  
CITIZEN ASSEMBLIES  
BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE  
REGULATORY SANDBOX

INFORMATION INTERACTION DISRUPTION  
CO-DESIGN  
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE DIGITAL TOOLS  
ART IN POLICY  
SERIOUS GAMES  
PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

DICTATORSHIP

PROCUREMENT  
ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN  
AND DEVELOPMENT  
COMMAND AND CONTROL  
DDAT  
PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

CHALLENGE PRIZE  
INNOVATION FUNDS  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS  
CAPABILITY BUILDING  
USER CENTRED DESIGN TEAMS

PORTFOLIO APPROACH  
TO INNOVATION  
CO-DESIGN  
APPLYING DECISION MAKING THEORY  
BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

AUTOMATION OF POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT  
THE METAVERSE  
DECENTRALISED AUTONOMOUS ORGANISATIONS (DAOs)

ELECTIONS  
CASE STUDIES  
SURVEY'S  
INDEPENDENT REVIEWS  
THE POLICY CYCLE

LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH ON  
KEY METRICS  
EXTERNAL SCRUTY, MEDIA, THINK TANK,  
POLITICAL OPPOSITION

PORTFOLIO APPROACH  
TO INNOVATION  
CONTINUAL DATA COLLECTION  
AND EVALUATION  
APPLYING DECISION MAKING THEORY  
SENTIMENT ANALYSIS USING NLP

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT  
SPENDING REVIEWS  
PREDICTIVE MODELLING

PORTFOLIO APPROACH  
TO INNOVATION  
APPLYING DECISION MAKING THEORY  
BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Policy

Popular

Sensible

Acceptable

Radical

Unthinkable

"Business as usual"

Policy Profession Standards

CMVR

PI today

PI tomorrow

Existing & Emerging policy making approaches were mapped against the policy cycle and their assumed acceptability within the civil service.

# 11+1 experimental methods



# What's next practice?

We have identified the emerging methods and approaches that can improve and disrupt policymaking



## ART IN POLICY

Art is used to engage people in policy issues in a multisensory way, drawing out the emotions affected by policy, and providing visions for better future worlds.



## DIGITAL TWINS

A digital mirror of a system or object, informed by real-time data. They can be used to monitor activity and simulate changes, helping policymakers to draw on robust data in their decision-making.



## REGENERATIVE DESIGN

Designing the built environment, systems and social structures to mimic and regenerate nature, creating a more adaptive and sustainable style of governance.



## ENGAGING THROUGH THE METAVERSE

A new digital environment that will blend with the physical world, creating opportunities for novel types of interaction between government and its stakeholders.



### CITIZEN ASSEMBLIES

A representative group of people, randomly selected, brought together to discuss a specific topic and provide recommendations for policy.



### BODYSTORMING

Policymakers physically act out scenarios together to explore how new policy and service ideas could be experienced, bringing creativity, energy and empathy to policy development.



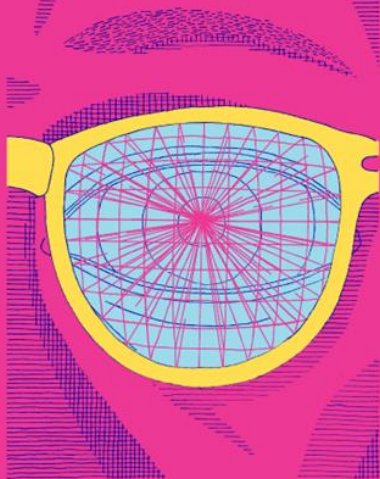
### MORAL IMAGININGS

Considering the perspectives of unborn generations, the more-than human world and deep time when developing policies and services; especially their physical materiality.



### DECENTRALISED AUTONOMOUS ORGANISATIONS

DAO's fund projects using cryptocurrencies. Transactions are voted upon and fully transparent, there is no external authority or hierarchy.



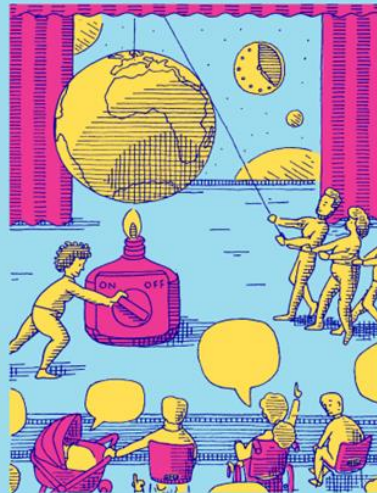
## SUPERFORECASTING

Techniques that show policymakers how knowledge of data, probability and cognitive biases can turn the art of prediction into more of a science, leading to better decision-making.



## SERIOUS GAMES

Games can be used to model complex policy-making processes by bringing together varied stakeholders and diverse objectives in a safe environment.



## LEGISLATIVE THEATRE

Citizens use the stage as a space to act out experiences and re-think policies together with policymakers, which results in new narratives and outcomes.

## DRAW YOUR OWN

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# Water System Decision Making Post 2043

**Applying speculative design to  
show aspects of a radically  
transformed system**



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



# CONTEXT

# Why decision making?

Following the development of the 2045 Environmental Target Scenarios, Water colleagues from across Defra Group examined a [transformed](#) England and identified **decision-making** as a 'critical node' that could bring about significant change.

# Why take an experimental and artistic approach?

Transformations, in their truest form, are hard to imagine. The current system suppresses our ability to conceive of something we haven't seen before being materially realised.

To counter this challenge, Policy Lab and Defra Futures partnered together to create a set of futures by trialling new, experimental methods. These provocations aimed to demonstrate alternative possibilities.

# CHANGING COURSE

Speculations for transforming water system decision making post 2043

# Changing Course Forum

The Changing Course Forum held at Somerset House in June 2023, introduced a series of possible transformations in future water system decision making, including:

- Future Soundings, by Uninvited Guests
- The Roding Interspecies Council, with Moral Imaginations
- The Ecological Intelligence Agency, by Superflux
- Natural Resilience Civic Service, by Policy Lab
- Riparian Citizens Festival, by Policy Lab

# The Roding Interspecies Council

In April 2023, we worked with [Moral Imaginations](#) to run an Interspecies Council alongside the River Roding, the first ever Interspecies Council to be commissioned by a central Government department.

24 participants formed the Interspecies Council, including a local EA catchment coordinator, local council representatives, community action groups, artists and residents as well as the project team.

*Moral Imaginations is founded and directed by [Phoebe Tickell](#)*





# Future Soundings of Rivers, 2043



Anab Jain of Superflux “hopes that through the lens of the future” people can “reflect better on the present, on the decisions and the actions we take today; on where we want to be”.

[Home // Uninvited Guests \(uninvited-guests.net\)](http://uninvited-guests.net)



Aligning with Ecological Intelligence  
for a Flourishing Planet

# THE ECOLOGICAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY:

## Aligning With Ecological Intelligence For A Flourishing Planet

Created by Superflux



Ecological  
Intelligence  
Agency

11.16

Willow Bush Open Space

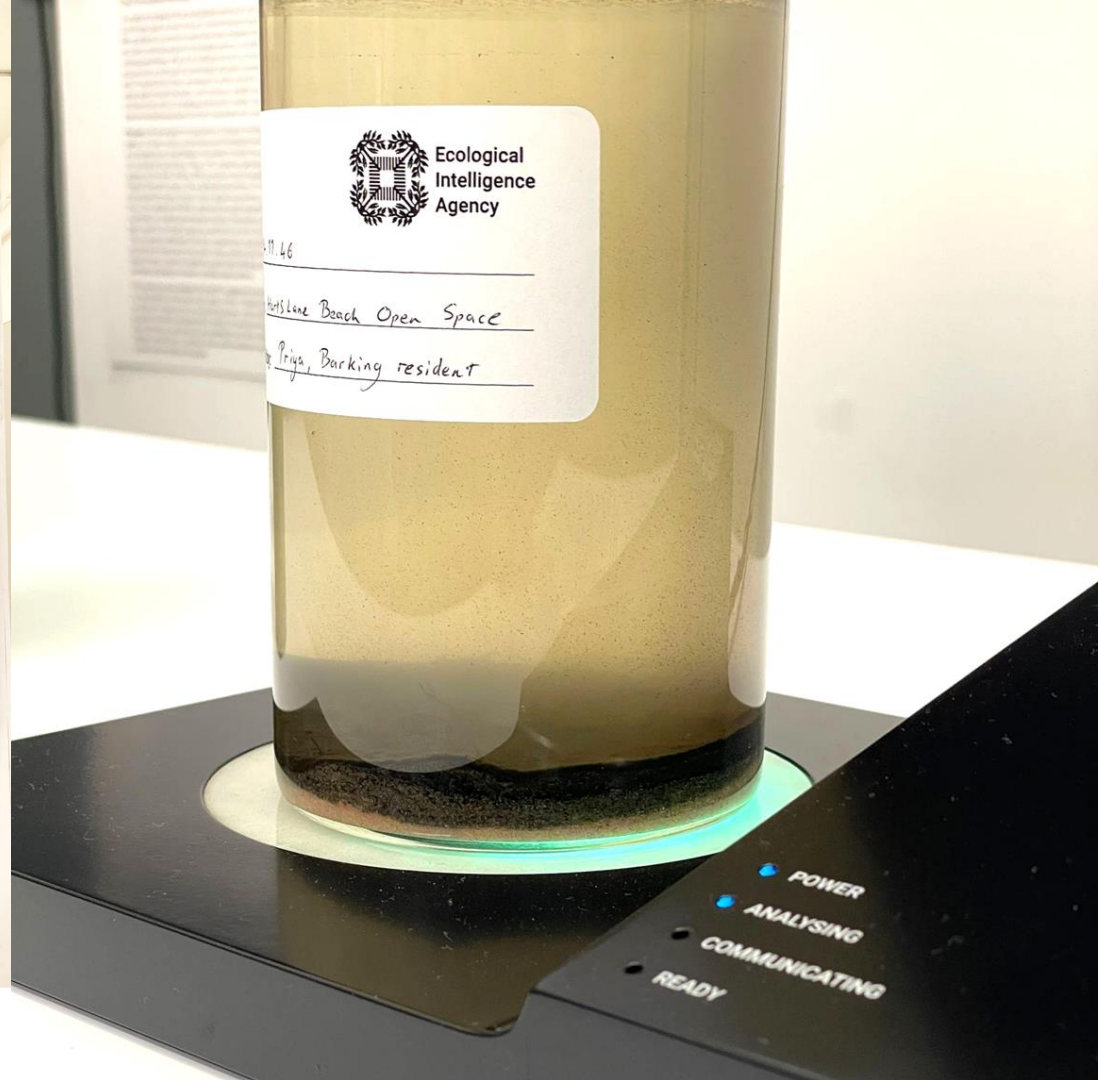
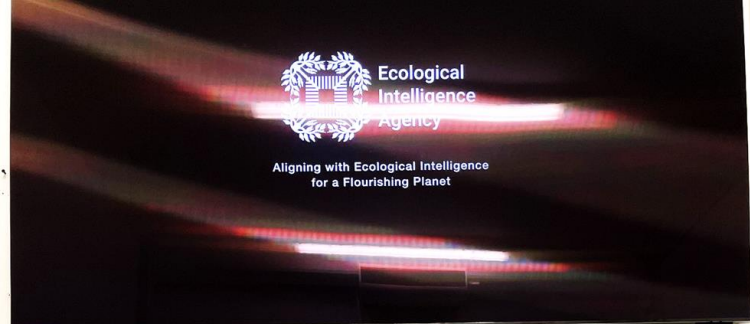
1000 Park Road, Berkeley, CA 94702

POWER

ANALYSING

COMMUNICATING

READY

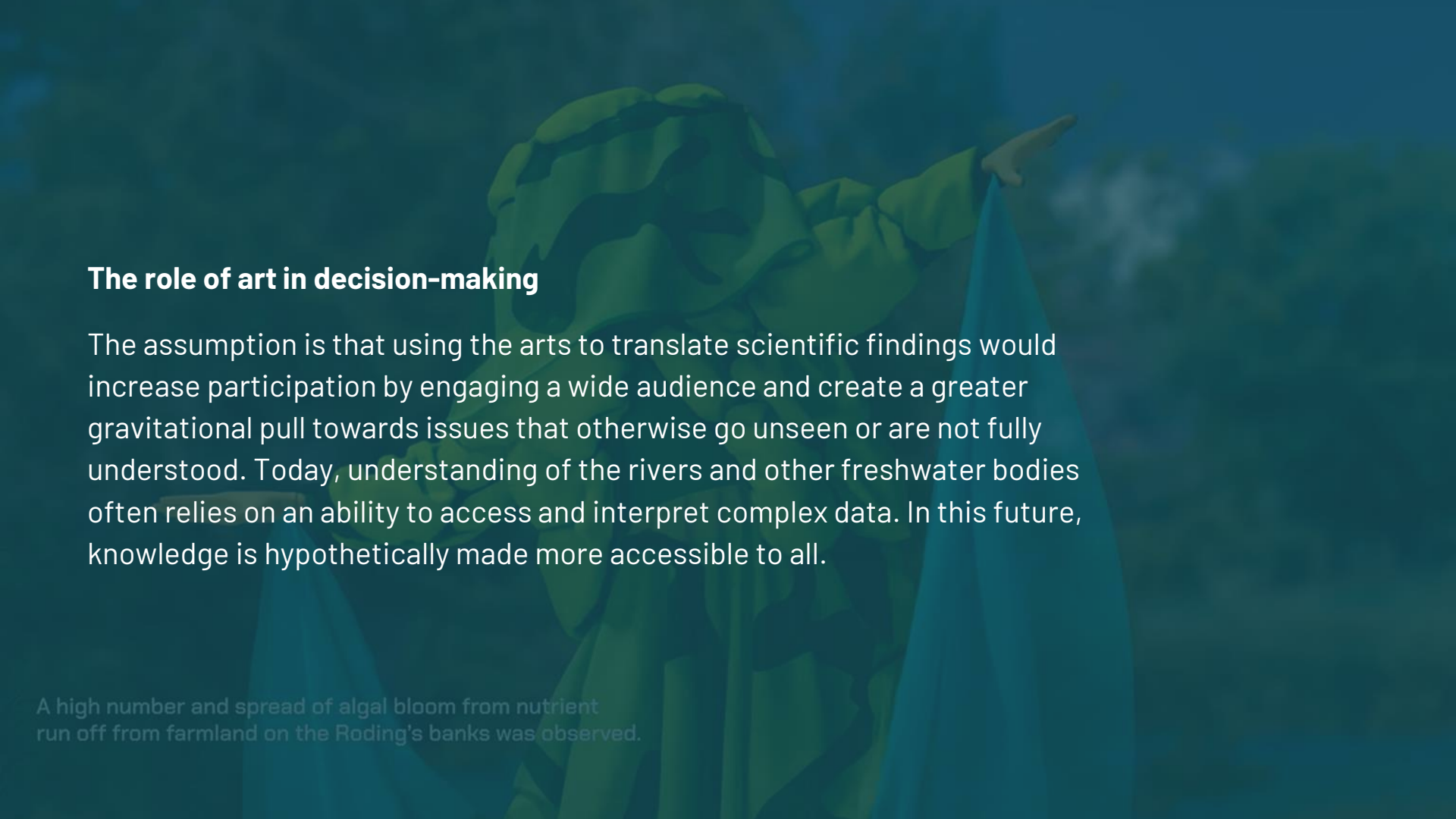


A person wearing a green camouflage costume is standing outdoors, holding two long, flowing blue fabric strips. The background shows a river and lush green trees under a clear blue sky. The person's arms are extended, and the fabric is held taut, creating a dynamic pose. The overall scene suggests a performance or a protest in a natural setting.

# The Riparian Citizen's Festival

A high number and spread of algal bloom from nutrient run off from farmland on the Roding's banks was observed.

Created by [Nina Cutler](#),  
Policy Lab

A person wearing a green hooded raincoat and holding a blue umbrella is standing in the rain. The background is a blurred view of trees and a street with a car, all under a grey, overcast sky. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

## **The role of art in decision-making**

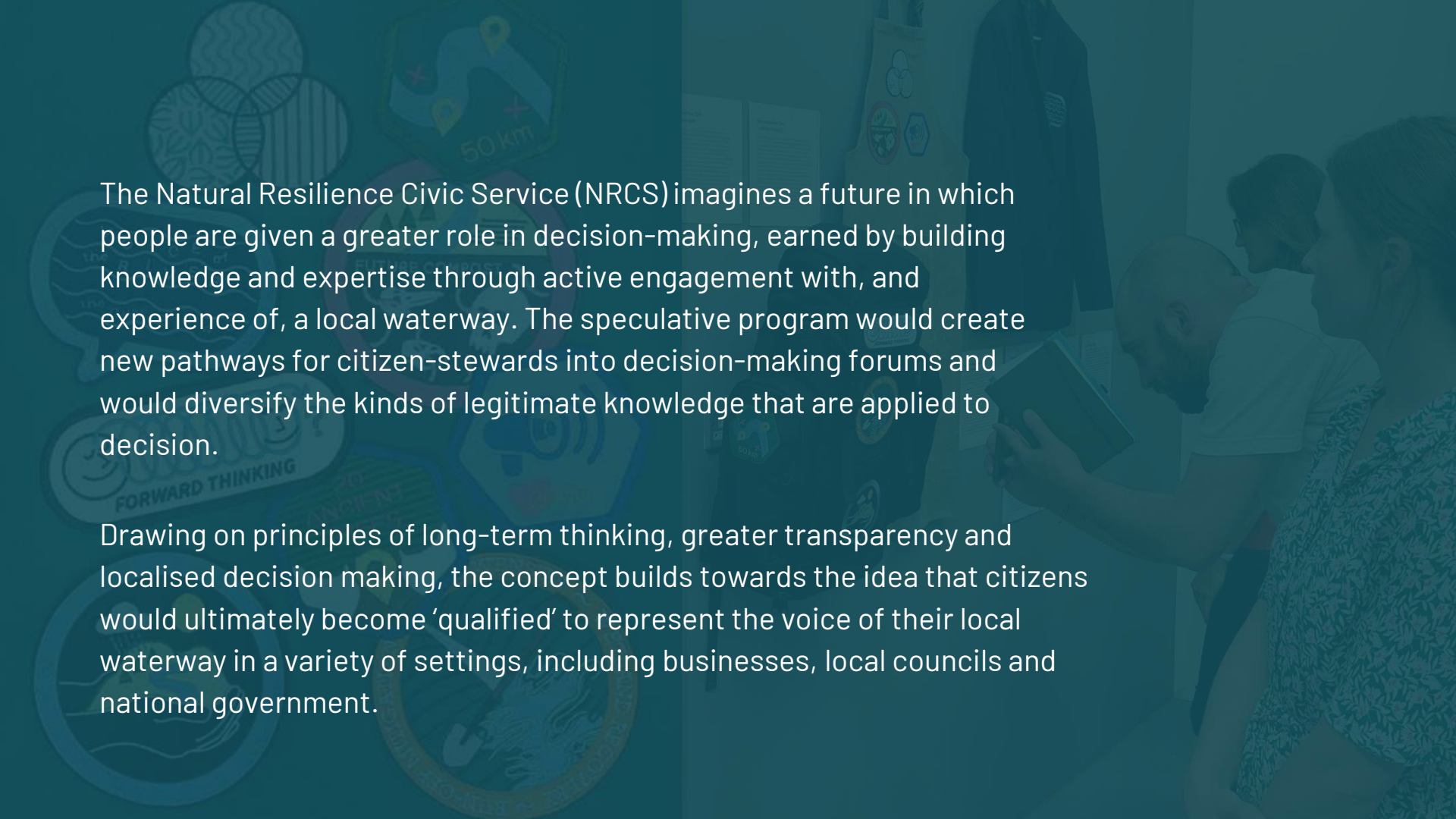
The assumption is that using the arts to translate scientific findings would increase participation by engaging a wide audience and create a greater gravitational pull towards issues that otherwise go unseen or are not fully understood. Today, understanding of the rivers and other freshwater bodies often relies on an ability to access and interpret complex data. In this future, knowledge is hypothetically made more accessible to all.

A high number and spread of algal bloom from nutrient run off from farmland on the Roding's banks was observed.

# Natural Resilience Civic Service

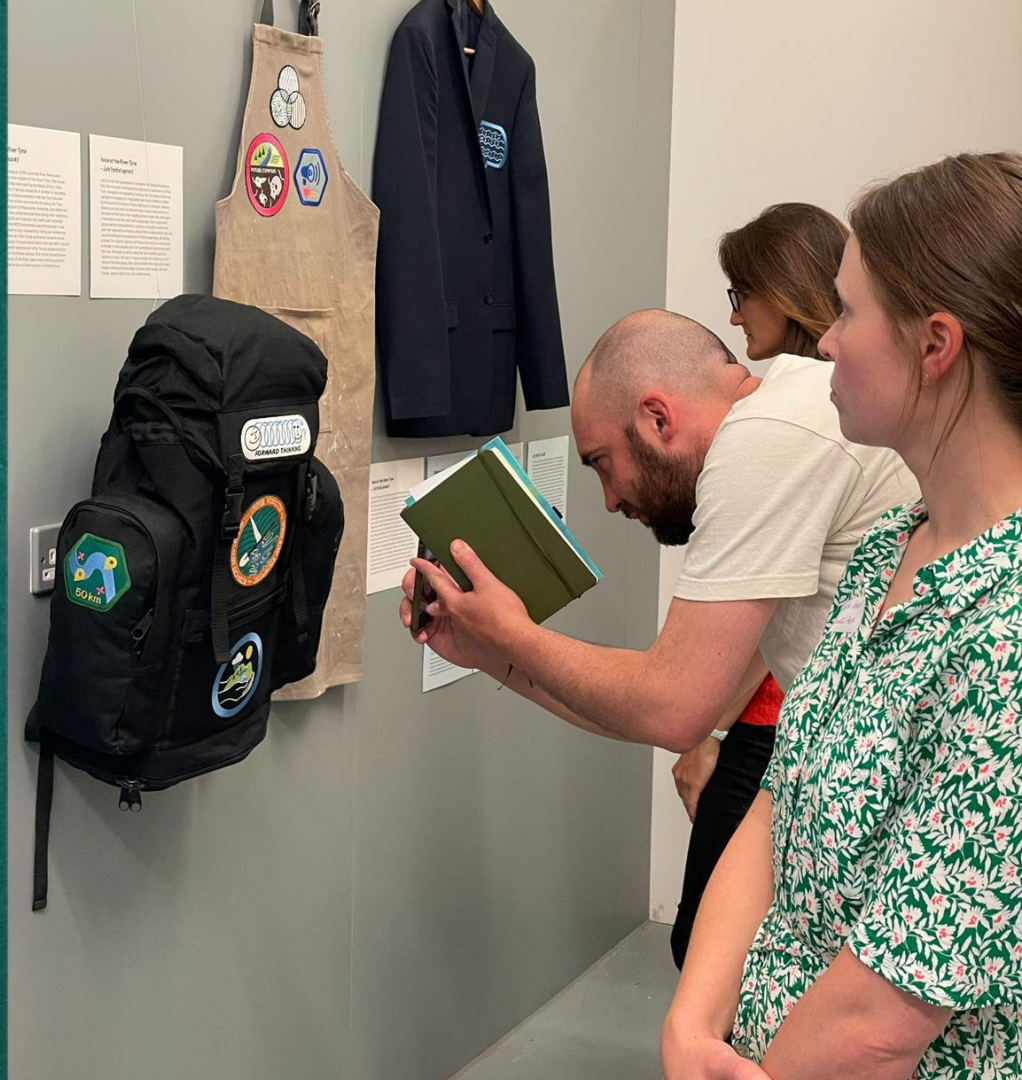


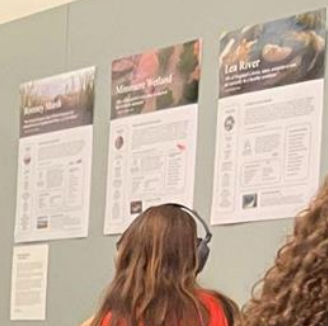
Created by [Ben Peppiatt](#), Policy Lab



The Natural Resilience Civic Service (NRCS) imagines a future in which people are given a greater role in decision-making, earned by building knowledge and expertise through active engagement with, and experience of, a local waterway. The speculative program would create new pathways for citizen-stewards into decision-making forums and would diversify the kinds of legitimate knowledge that are applied to decision.

Drawing on principles of long-term thinking, greater transparency and localised decision making, the concept builds towards the idea that citizens would ultimately become 'qualified' to represent the voice of their local waterway in a variety of settings, including businesses, local councils and national government.





# Impact so far

The aim of the project was to help stretch thinking and imagine what possible transformations could look like.

Since the Changing Course forum:

- proposals are being developed to explore and develop the National Resilience Civic Service speculation further
- Policy Lab participated in the Drinkable Waters panel, hosted by University Arts London, to discuss the methods used
- The speculations have been presented to senior leadership in the civil service.



# Experimental policy design methods



# Thank you!

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[gov.uk/guidance/open-policy-making-toolkit](https://gov.uk/guidance/open-policy-making-toolkit)