Four Futures, One Choice

Four scenarios of what Britain could look like in 2040, presented in a range of formats for different audiences.

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Deciding today for tomorrow

This was a unique project that seemed to capture the spirit of the moment. It was a description of four potential futures for the UK, depending on the choices we make now.

In 2020 Didem Gurdur Broo and Andrew Smith of CDBB brought together researchers from different disciplines, from economics to cyber-physical systems, to explore the future of the built environment through the process of scenario mapping. It was a brilliant opportunity to take people out of their specialist areas and collaborate.

The scenarios showed how we could develop a built environment in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and reduce our negative impact on the planet.

The experience and the results were important beyond academia, so we decided to write a book for a broader audience. We even created an interactive e-book aimed at children. After all, everyone thinks about the kind of future they want to live in.

Through this work, we discovered that we're not fully on the path to any one of the four outcomes, but the decisions we make now will commit us more towards one than another. This isn't about predicting the future but describing what might happen – and how best to find the right direction.

We highlighted the need for thoughtful investment in digital technology, which aligns with the Gemini Principles. We prioritised decarbonisation and biodiversity, and focused on governance today for a better tomorrow. We tried to encourage people away from short-term decision-making and toward making the decisions future generations need us to make right now.

These aren't things you would typically hear from a built environment sector organisation, but they are crucial for the sector to consider. That's what made this such an exciting project. Beyond another expert report, it's something with real purpose that can help us prepare for a better tomorrow.

Since the book was published, we've started hearing more people talking about the huge responsibility the built environment sector has towards people and nature. This wouldn't have happened even two or three years ago.

Kirsten Lamb,
Communications Manager, NDTp and Construction Innovation Hub

Kirsten joined CDBB in 2017 as an embedded librarian and information specialist. In their time with the programme they have worked to communicate the Centre's research, the importance of information management and the role of digital technology in enabling better decisions for people and the planet.