FUTURES, ETHICS AND OPPORTUNITIES
FOR PUBLIC ALGORITHMS

# Discussing and enriching these speculative futures

# WHY DISCUSS THESE FUTURES?

Debate is a vital sign of the good health of democracy. Then, it appears to be mandatory to debate about the futures explored through this project.

Debating about a speculative scenario is about to question their plausible and preferable nature. It is also about collectively asking ourselves if we want to head or not towards this horizon, and, if so, to decide how we should head towards this future or, on the contrary, avoid going in this direction.

Dissensus is here the raw material of the experience: points of views and opinions meet and diverge in order to highlight arguments able to inform public policies.

## Three activities to discuss, deconstruct and enrich these futures

**Swaying futures** invites you to debate about the preferability of this future.

**L'E.P.I.** offers to deconstruct the scenario to evaluate its plausibility.

**Retrospeculation** encourages you to enrich and dispute a future scenario.

Designed for an in-person facilitation, these three activities are flexible and can be adapted for remote online sessions. If these activities don't require any prerequisite to take part in them, a previous experience in facilitation is advised to host a discussion workshop.

## DISCOVER THE PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITIES

# SWAYING FUTURES

## Debate

## In a few words

The Swaying Futures are a workshop activity inviting participants to debate about the preferable nature of the future presented by the scenario: what in this scenario is considered desirable, or on the contrary, undesirable?

Didactic and inclusive, this activity allows anyone to take position and express opinions.

## User manual

### Material

- A screen to display the design fiction visuals
- The written scenario
- (Optional) A microphone

### Setup

Duration: from 30 min to 45 min per scenario.
Participants: from 6 to 20 participants.

### Facilitators' roles

A facilitator: presenting the scenario and hosting the debate.

Optional, a scribe: noting participants' arguments.

### Preparation

1. Drawing a dividing line on the floor, with coloured tape, for example.

2. Signalling each 'camp' on either side of the line: '(Rather) Preferable' and '(Rather) Undesirable'. Usually, the 'Preferable' space is placed on the left, and the 'Undesirable' one on the right.

### Facilitation

1. Presenting the scenario, using the design fictions illustrating this future.

2. Letting a few minutes to the participants to ask themselves about the scenario.

3. Asking participants to position themselves on either side of the line, according to the way they see the scenario: rather preferable or rather undesirable.

Warning, it isn't allowed to be neutral during this exercise: Participants can't position themselves on the line and can't place a foot in each camp. If participants want to highlight their indecisiveness, they can place themselves very close to the line, but still positioning themselves in one of the two camps (preferable or undesirable).

4. Giving a few minutes to the participants from each camp to put their arguments together to be able to explain why they have chosen this side of the line.

# SWAYING FUTURES

## Debate

5. Starting the debate by giving the floor to the group in minority (the group having the least partisans). The participants from this camp present the reasons why they have chosen to be on this side of the line.

Any participant has then the possibility to switch camp if an argument from the other group was convincing enough. The debate encourages participants to 'move' as their opinion is changing. It is possible to switch camp at any moment of the discussion and as much as desired.

6. Distributing the floor in an equitable manner, while letting the camps answer each other.

If participants are switching camps, offering them to explain why this change.

7. Making sure to give the floor to the ones not having spoken yet.

(Optional)

8. Reviving discussions by playing the devil's advocate, especially if there is a consensus among the participants leading to a single camp.

9. The scribe-facilitator notes the key-arguments down, particularly the arguments creating movements. Listing these arguments allows to map, during the debate debriefing, the elements of preferability and undesirability of the scenario.

## Setup for a Swaying Futures session

SCENARIO

**Preferable**        **Undesirable**
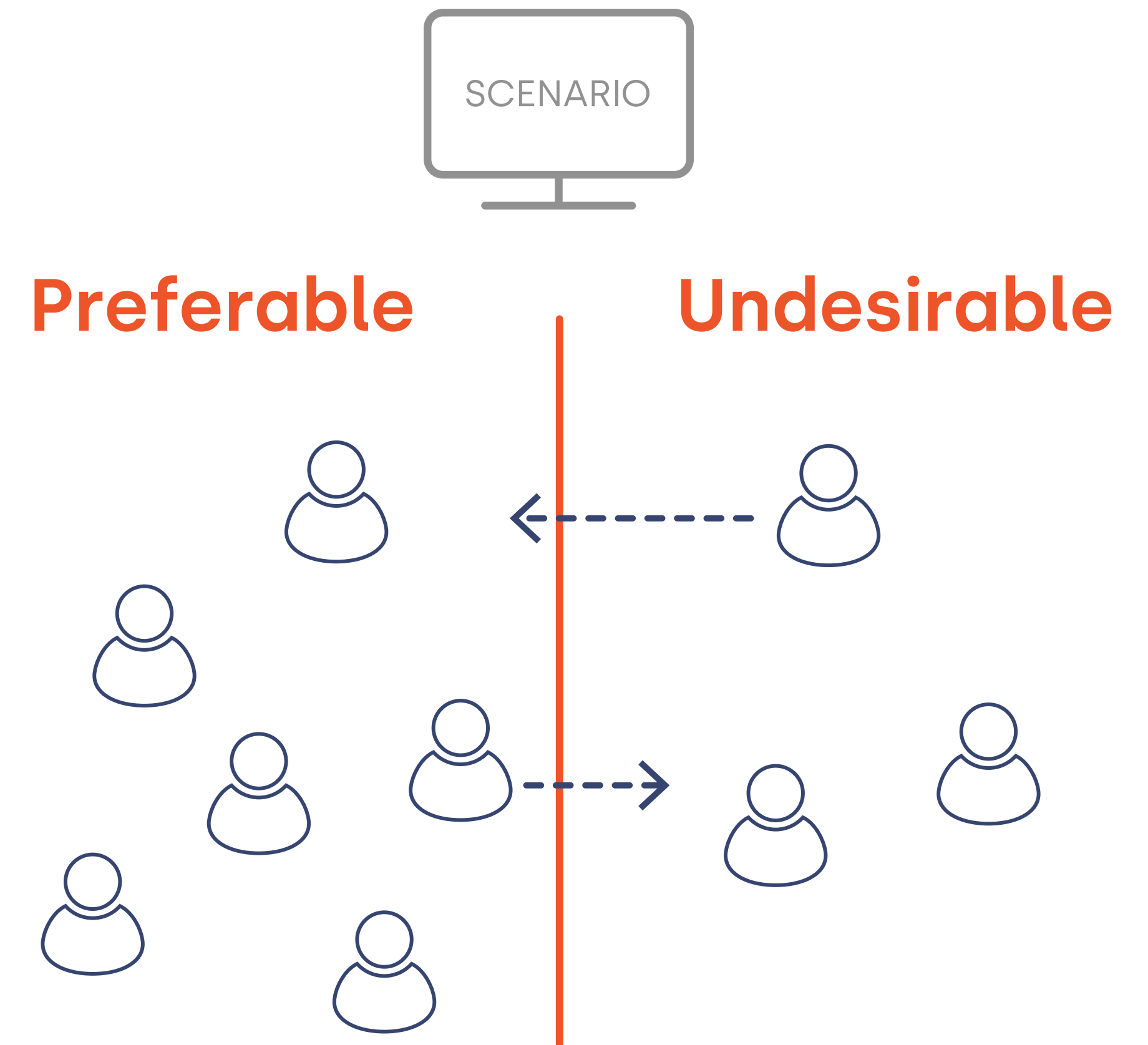
# O.P.I.
## Deconstruct

## In a few words

The O.P.I. (Ongoing, Probable, Impossible) is a tool to co-operatively deconstruct the future outlined by a scenario. Participants are invited to identify which elements from this future are either ongoing, probable or impossible. As a critical rereading exercise, the O.P.I. activity invites participants to evaluate in which measure this future could occur.

## User manual

### Material
- The speculative scenario and its visual(s)
- An O.P.I. template (template following at the available page)

### Setup

Duration: from 20 min to 45 min per scenario.

Participants: from 2 to 6 participants.

### Instructions for facilitation

1. Discovering the scenario, supported by the design fictions (visuals) illustrating this future.

2. Discovering the O.P.I. map.
Each branch from the O.P.I. corresponds to an axis of the scenario analysis:
- **Ongoing:** what is already happening today.
- **Probable:** what could happen at the temporal horizon of the scenario.
- **Impossible:** what could never happen.
Don't hesitate to redraw the map at a larger scale!

3. By confronting points of view and thoughts, completing the different branches to map what – according to the participants – is already happening, probable or impossible within this scenario.

4. When placing an element on a branch, participants are invited to explain why they think this is ongoing, probable or impossible.

**Variation**

This variation is a completing the above-mentioned instructions in order to bring nuances to the deconstruction:

*'More or less'*
It is possible to class the elements placed on the branches depending on whether they are considered more or less ongoing, probable or impossible.
For example, the bisections placed on the elements placed on the bottom of the 'probable' branch are considered 'not that probable', when the ones placed on the top of the branch are seen as 'very probable'.
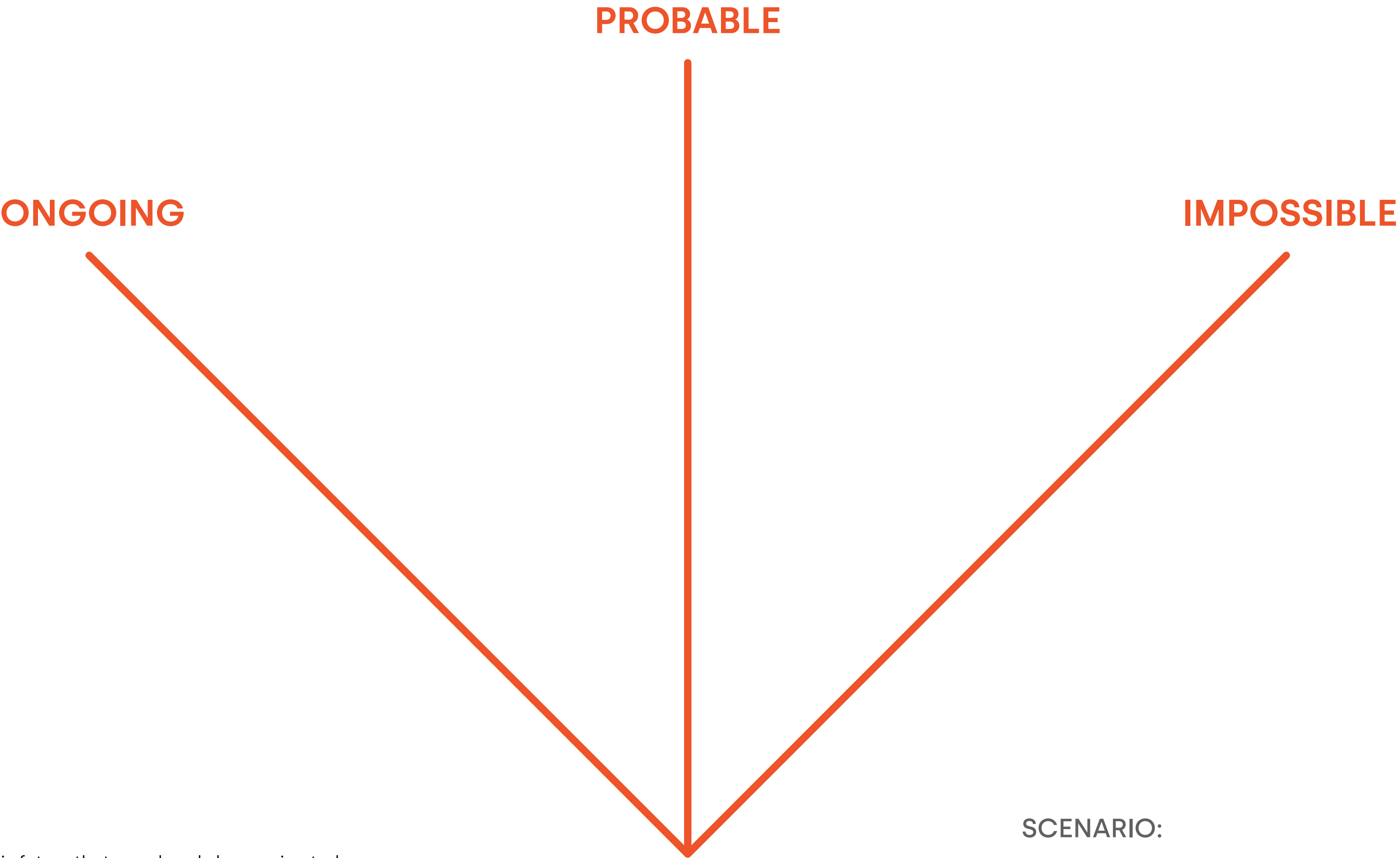
**PROBABLE**

**ONGOING**

**IMPOSSIBLE**

**THE O.P.I. MAP**

**O**ngoing: elements from this future that are already happening today.
**P**robable : elements from this future that could appear.
**I**mpossible : elements from this future that won't occur.

SCENARIO:

**PROBABLE**

looking for more
humanity

rise of encoded inequalities
and discrimination

**ONGOING**

**IMPOSSIBLE**

defiance
(towards AIs)

no refill =
broken access to PS

a personalised
online experience

dematerialised
administration

**THE O.P.I. MAP**

**O**ngoing: elements from this future that are already happening today.
**P**robable : elements from this future that could appear.
**I**mpossible : elements from this future that won't occur.

SCENARIO:

Humanity tokens
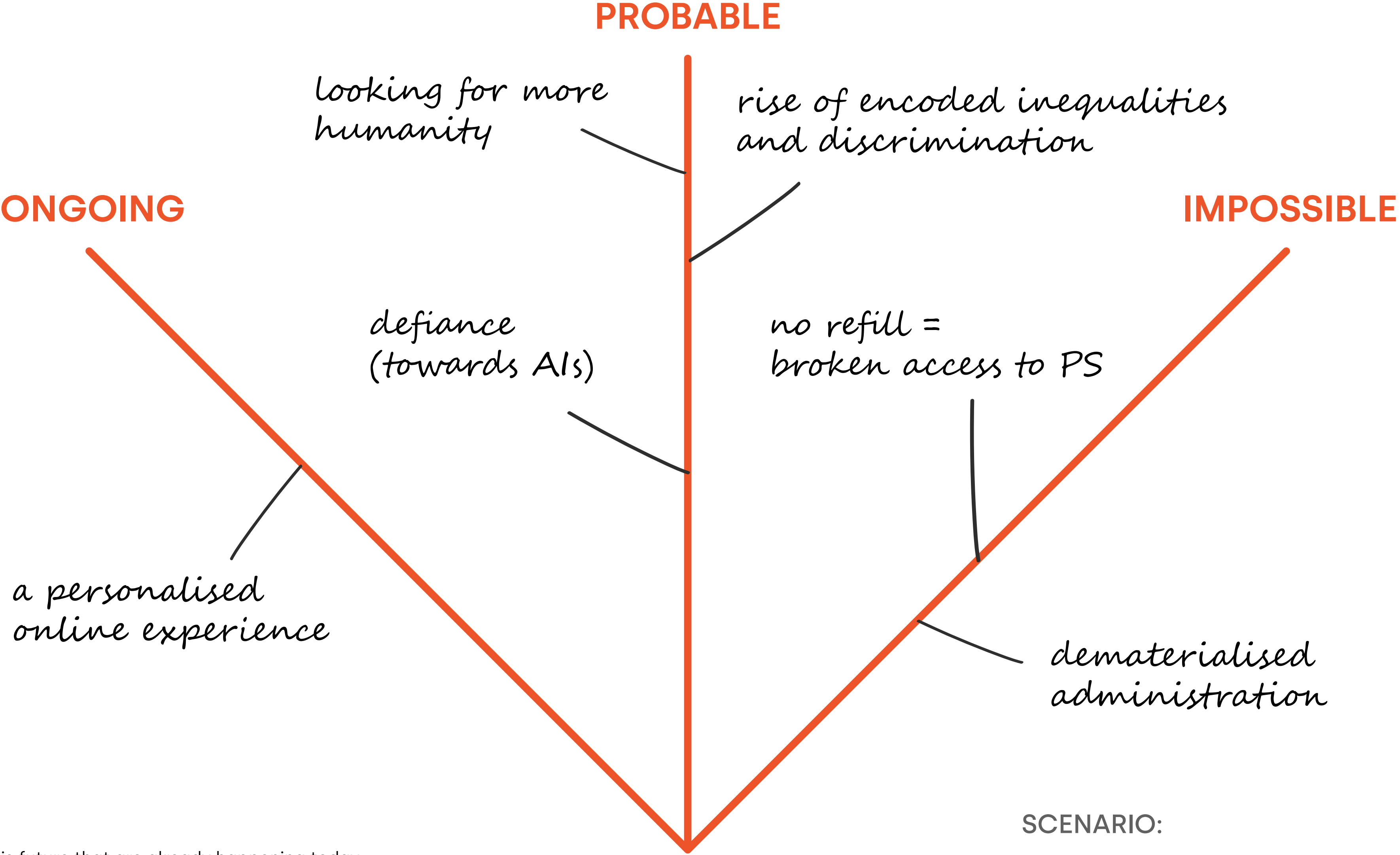
# RETROSPECULATION
## Enrich

## In a few words

The retrospeculation activity invites you to enrich and develop the initial scenario by imagining what happened *'before'* this future. The exercise aims at answering the following question, *'How did we get there?'*.

There is a double goal for a retrospeculation session:

- Bringing new ideas to get grips with this future and pluralise it, by playing with the unsaid and the gaps in the scenario.

- Identifying the factors, events and actions that would foster or mitigate the future perspectives underlined by the speculative scenario.

As a prequel, a retrospeculation suggests both a reinterpretation and a rewriting of this scenario.

## User manual

### Material
- The speculative scenario and its visual(s)
- A retrospeculation timeline (template following at the available page)

### Setup

Duration: from 30 min to 60 min per scenario.

Participants: from 2 to 4 participants.

## Instructions for facilitation

1. Presenting the scenario, supported by the design fictions (visuals) illustrating this future.

2. Filling in the milestones of the retrospeculation timeline, which led to this future. Each milestone can be different: an event, a law, a citizen mobilisation, a technological disruption, etc. Also, participants have to fill in the date (year) of each milestone.

3. After having completed the retrospeculative timeline, participants are invited to discuss which milestone would be the most crucial to be changed to make sure this future doesn't arise or happens in a different way.

At the end of the session, discussions can be articulated around the following question: which elements from the timeline could be already influenced today to see this future evolving towards a more preferable horizon?

Note:
The retrospeculation timeline template includes three milestones to be filled in. Of course, participants can add milestones to enrich their retrospeculation.

YEAR:

SCENARIO:

2021

WHAT HAPPENED?

# RETROSPECULATION

**Some ideas to envisage what might have happened:** an international event, a national crisis, a law, a social movement, a technological disruption, a climatic shock...

YEAR:

**SCENARIO :**
*Fail-soft mode in a degraded world*

*2023*

*2026*

*2028*

2021

WHAT HAPPENED?

*Learn to do 'without' = blackouts are multiplying resources such as rare earth elements are rarefying... cities must self-organise and learn to ration digital uses!*

*new law sets and organises interruptions of digital public services in order to set an example to follow!!!*
*people in need are then facing additional complications*

*the public administration finds inspiration in countries used to work in a degraded way for many years and then calls on their know-how in low-tech solutions*
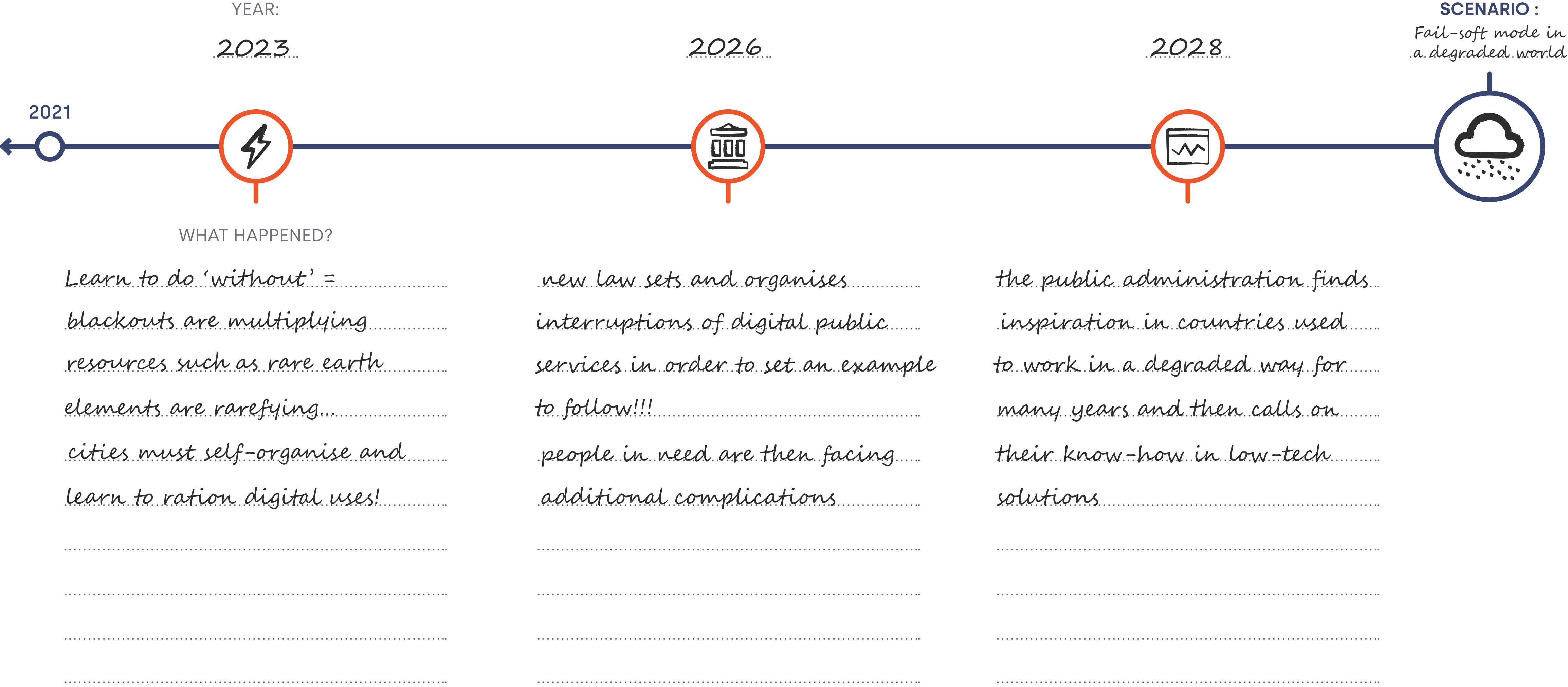
## RETROSPECULATION

**Some ideas to envisage what might have happened:** an international event, a national crisis, a law, a social movement, a technological disruption, a climatic shock...

**Many other futures remain to be told and questioned.
It's your turn to speculate!**

Futures, ethics and opportunities for public algorithms: a speculative exploration

By Design Friction and Etalab