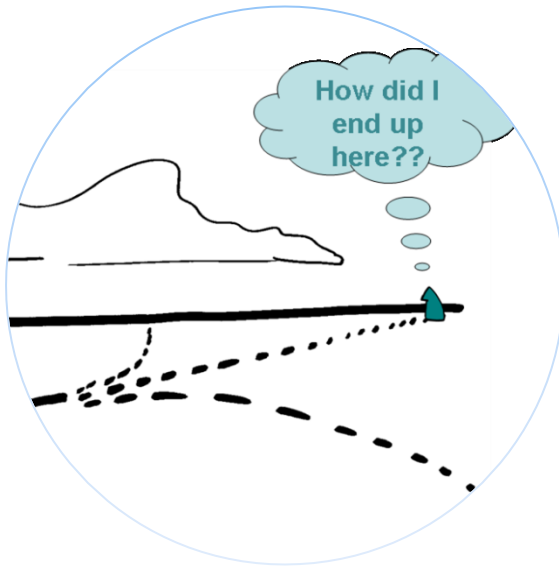# Developing robust governance strategies for uncertain futures

A combined backcasting and exploratory scenarios methodology

3 July 2014, Mathijs van Vliet, Kasper Kok

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY
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Why?

- Increasing need for dealing with uncertainty in policy making

- Scenarios can be used to:
  - capture part of uncertainty,
  - add creativity
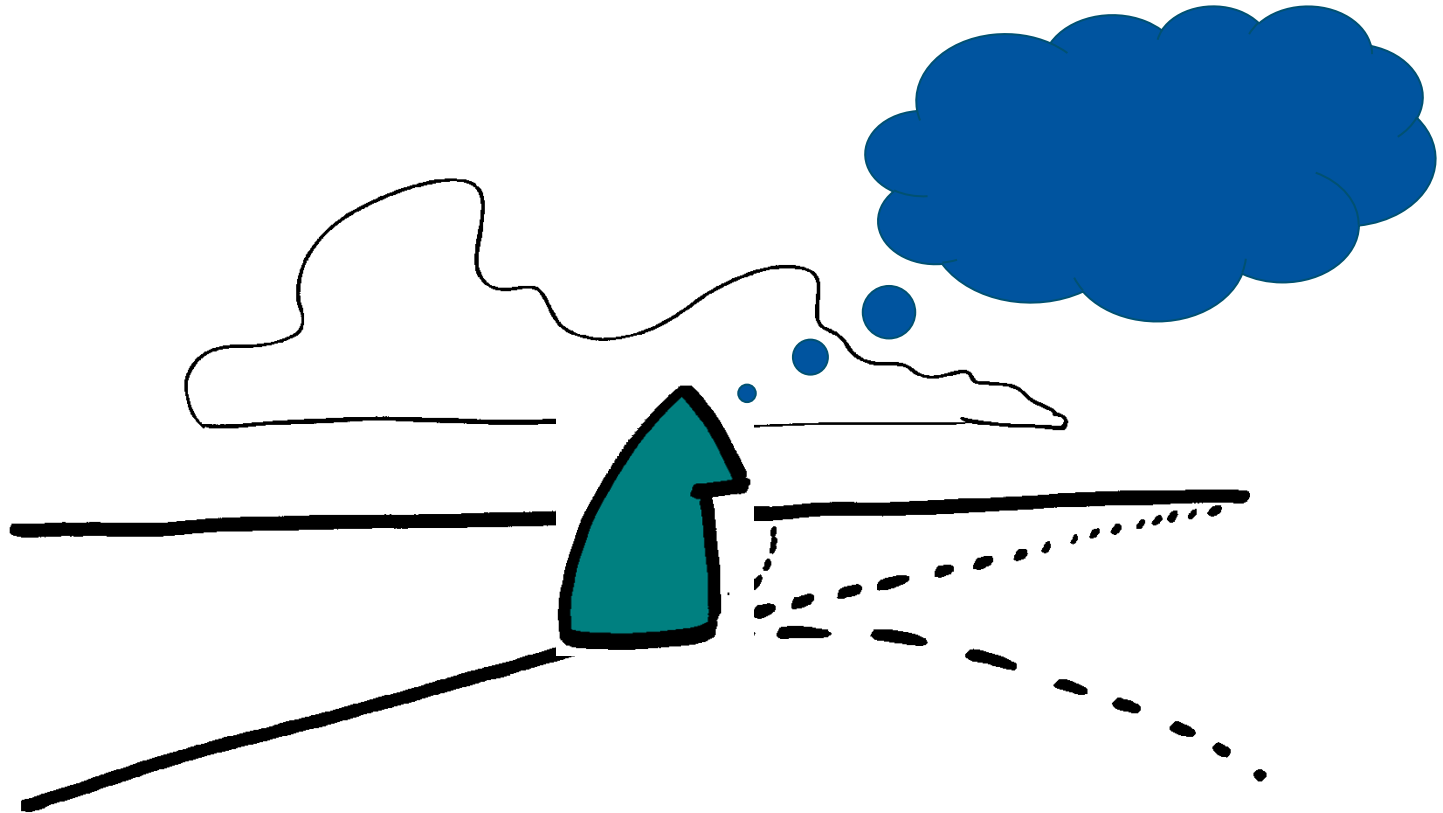 - study robustness of policy actions

Explorative scenarios

- Explore plausible futures
- Shows implications of several external drivers
- Give different socio-environmental contexts
- Captures a range of uncertainty
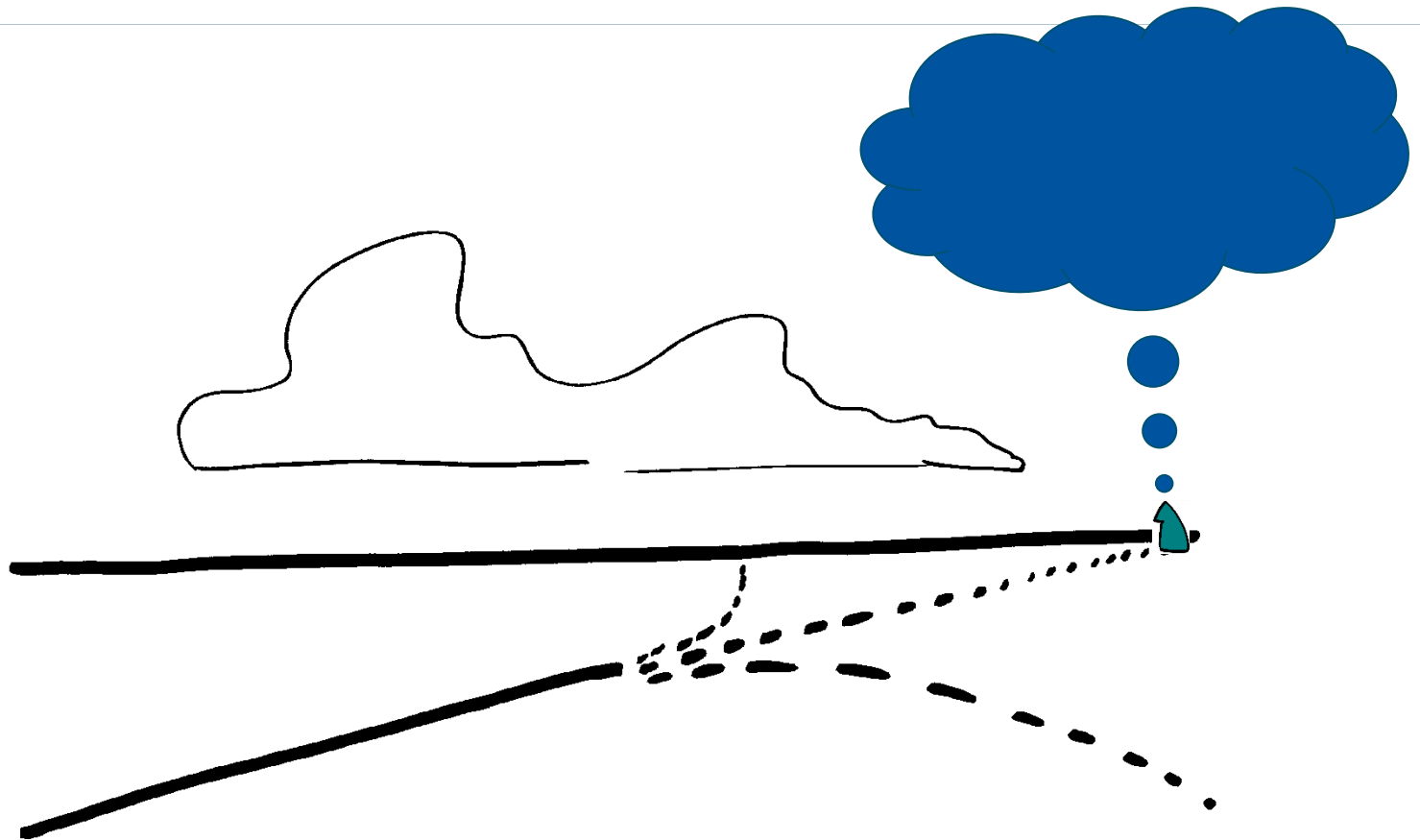- What can happen?

Explorative scenarios

Backcasting

- Normative scenario methodology

- Working backwards

- Can include vision development

- Aims for desirable futures

- Focus on short and middle term (policy) actions

Backcasting

Combining backcasting and explorative scenarios

Main advantage: identification of robust actions

— Explorative scenarios set context / boundary conditions

— Actions need to be executable in socio-environmental situation

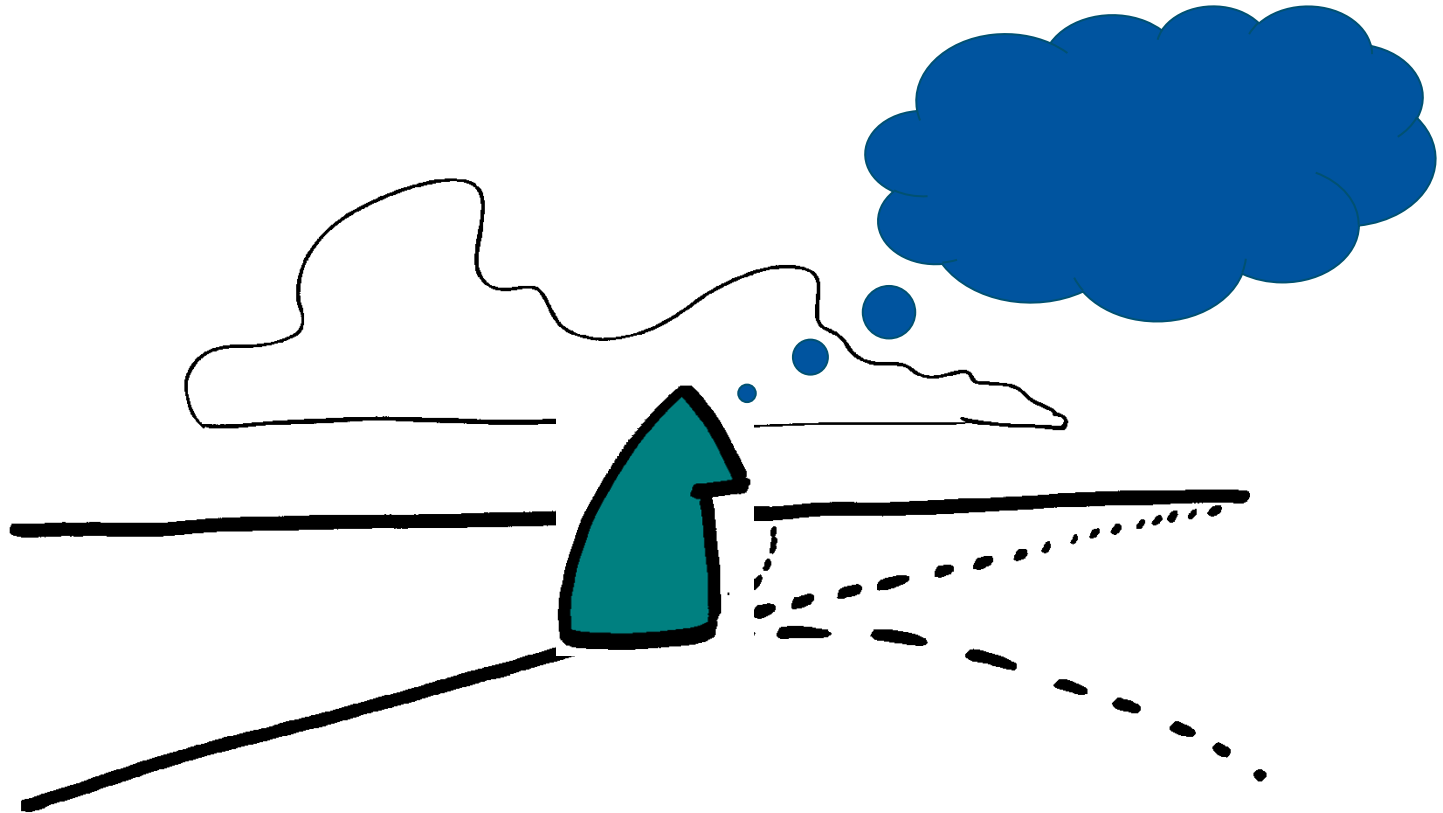— Actions effective within all explorative scenarios are more resilient
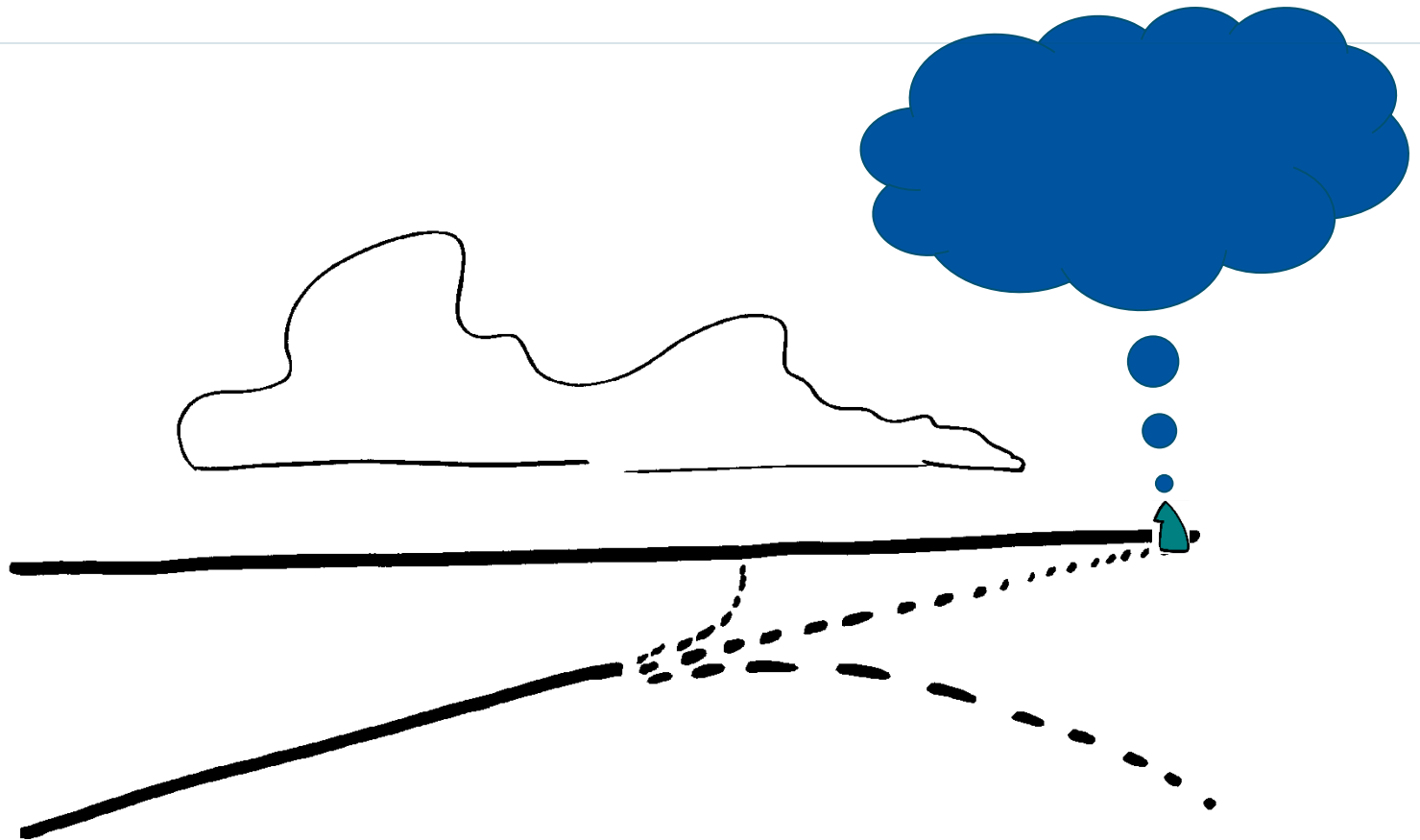
Other reasons for combining

- Shared visions for a sustainable future

- Creative, less linear actions

- Opening minds for new ideas
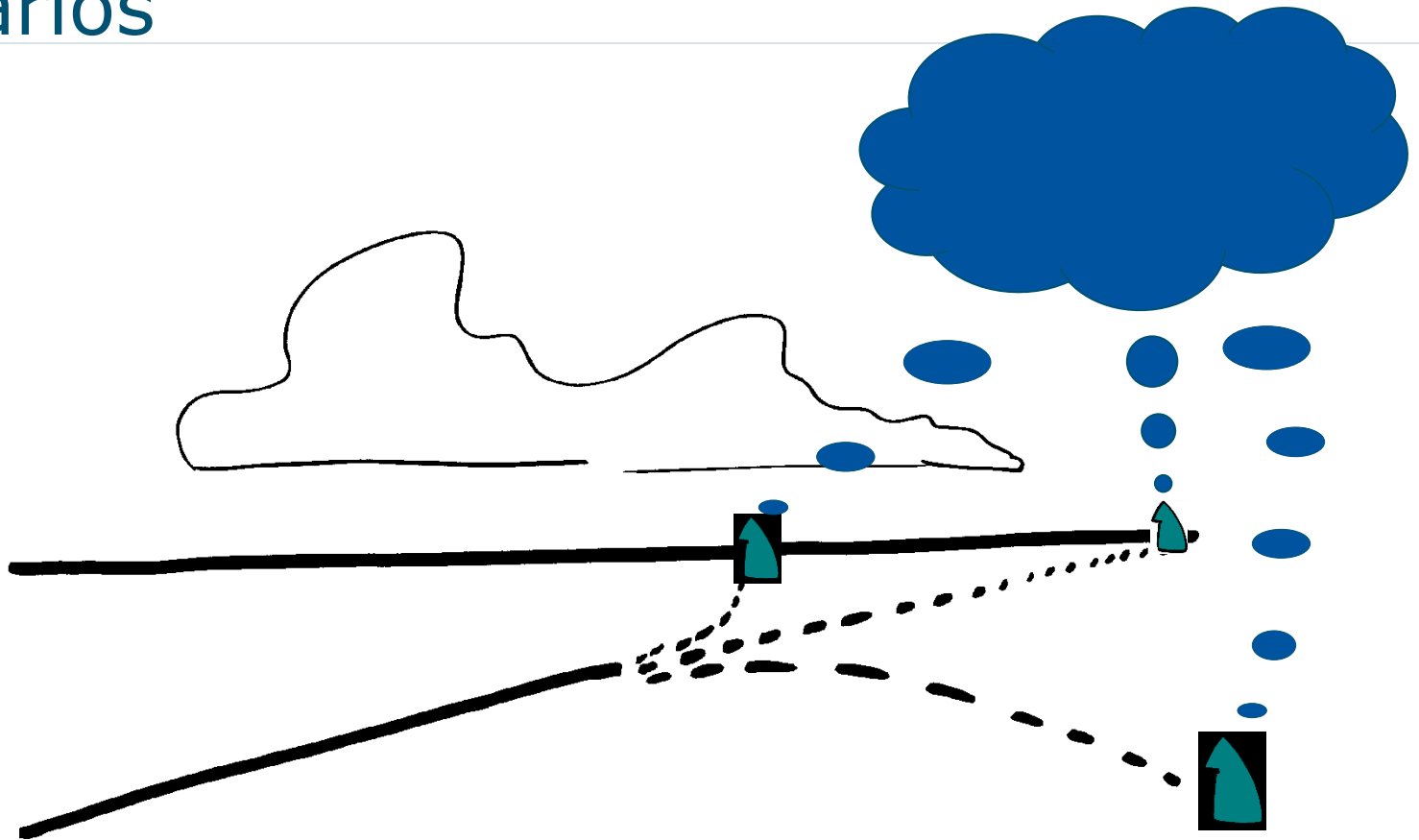
- Make scenarios more concrete

Explorative scenarios

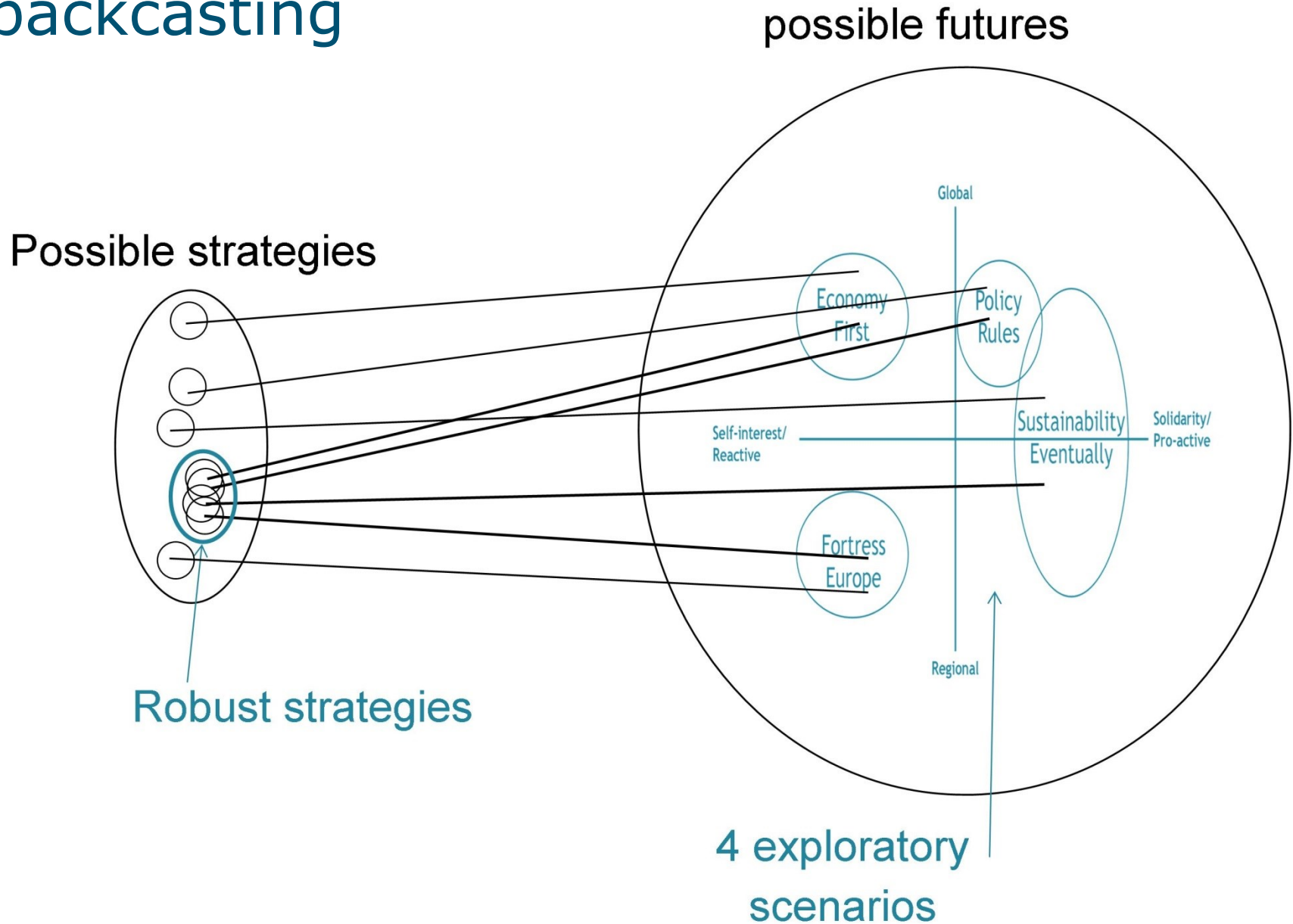# Backcasting

Combining backcasting and explorative scenarios

Combining explorative scenarios and backcasting

possible futures

Possible strategies

Global

Economy First

Policy Rules

Self-interest/ Reactive

Sustainability Eventually

Solidarity/ Pro-active

Fortress Europe

Regional

Robust strategies

4 exploratory scenarios
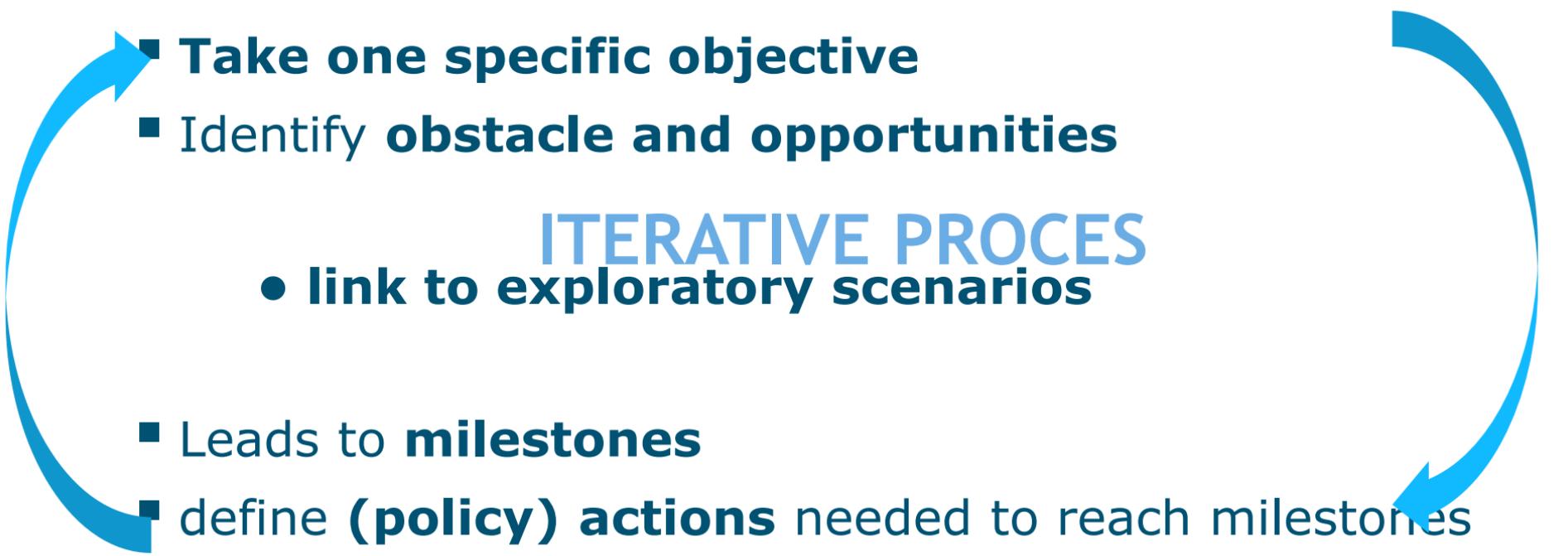
Backcasting Process SCENES

1. Present and near future

2. Looking at the future (developing explorative scenarios)

3. Playing it back

Why those three steps:

- Present as foundation

- Then jump into the future

- Then focus on time in between present and future -> robust policy options for short &middle term

Backcasting workshop outline

- **Take one specific objective**
- Identify **obstacle and opportunities**

ITERATIVE PROCES

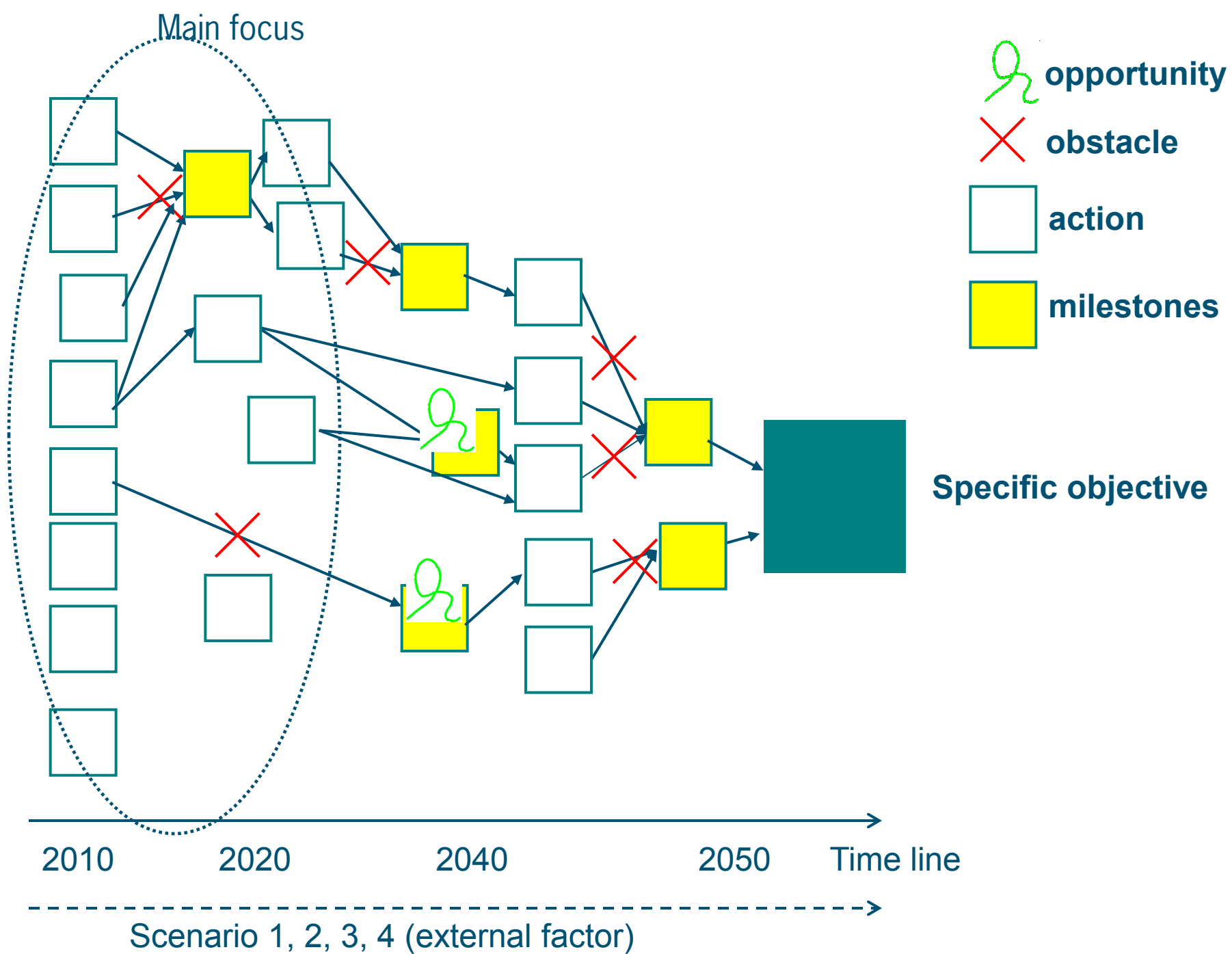- **link to exploratory scenarios**

- Leads to **milestones**
- define **(policy) actions** needed to reach milestones

Plenary:
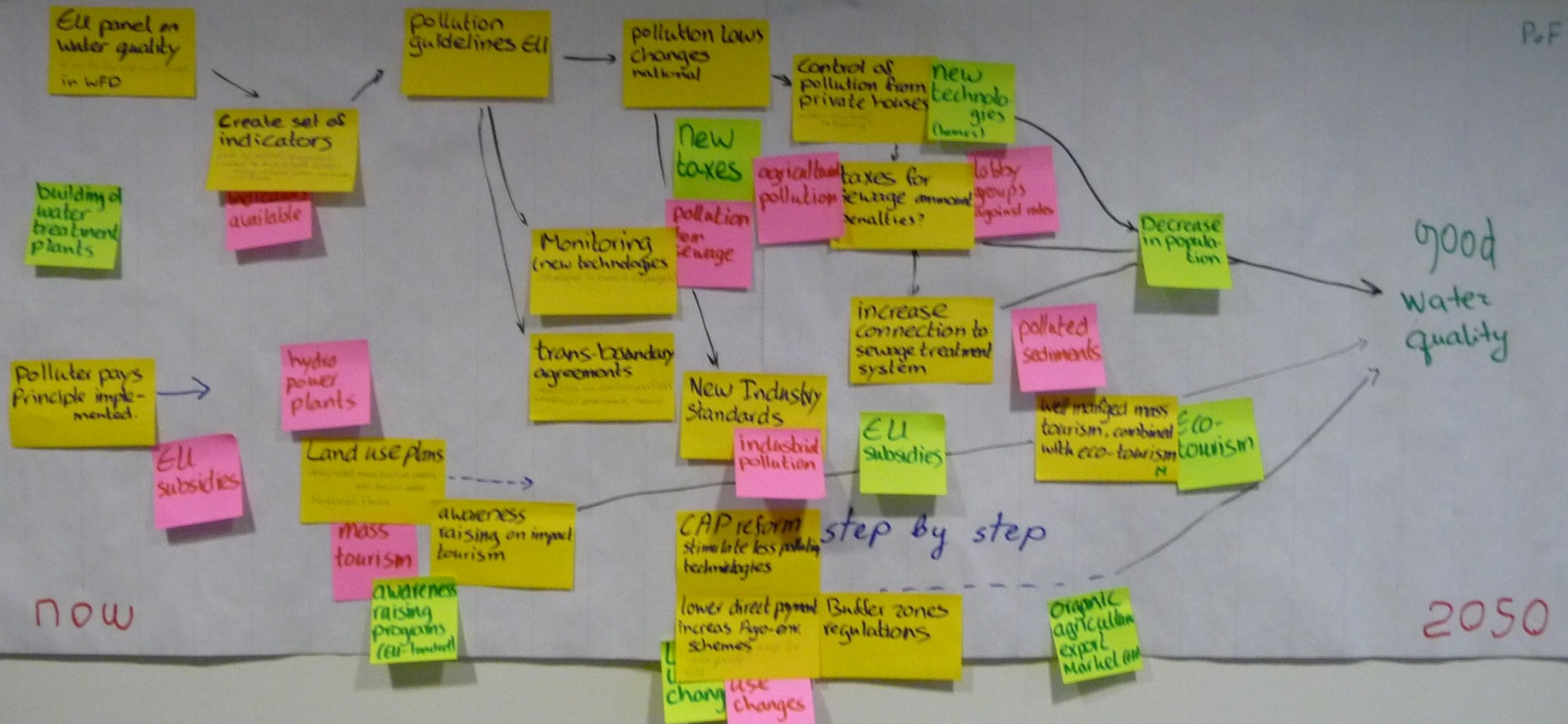
- **Compare solutions and actions**
  - look for robust actions

Main focus

opportunity

obstacle

action

milestones

Specific objective

2010   2020   2040   2050   Time line

Scenario 1, 2, 3, 4 (external factor)

Example Baltic region

Results of analysing 10 workshops:

- Backcasts included a large number of elements from contextual scenarios

- Introduces elements of sustainability in otherwise negative futures

- More surprising strategies

- List of robust strategies, that
  - are more resilient to different futures / different socio-environmental contexts
  - containing both technological and social/organisational strategies
  - highlighting the need for integrated approaches

Examples of robust strategies

- Cooperation across boarders and sectors
- (environmental) education
- New financial mechanisms
- Improve governance capacity
- Improve / expand waste water treatment
- Implement monitoring programmes
- Delete exemptions and derogations from achieving the good water quality status of the WFD

Future research

- Need better connection to policy processes
    - Include more policy makers, as this aspect was difficult for many other stakeholders
- Increase usability for water managers:
    - Add more quantitative tools?
- Shorten overall process
    - Especially in areas where participation is new

Questions?

More info:

[Van Vliet and Kok, 2013](#)

[Kok et al, 2011](#)