Is Localism B------s?

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Outline of presentation

- What do we mean by ‘localism’?
- What do we mean by ‘power’?
- Newcastle-Gelsenkirchen comparison
- Summary

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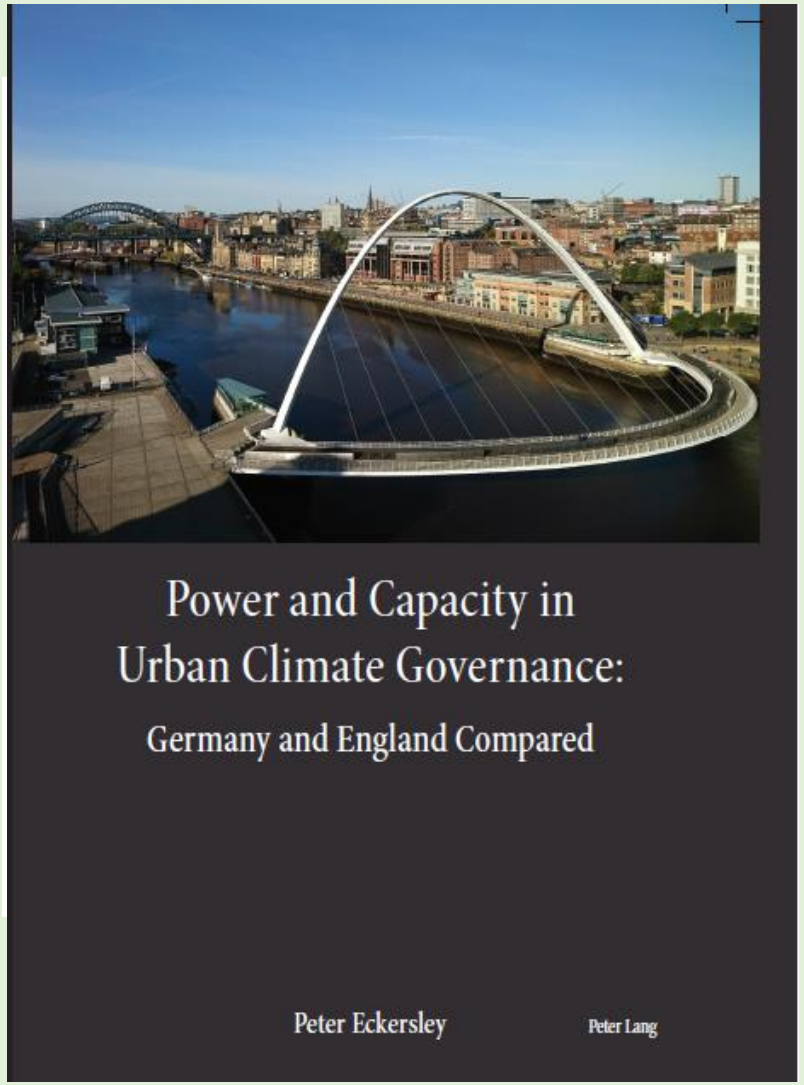
But first… a quick plug



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What do we mean by localism?

Localism Act 2011

- General Power of Competence:

"A local authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do."

- Abolition of Audit Commission and central performance frameworks
- Shift towards self-financing for local government
- Rhetoric of devolving 'powers' to local government, combined authorities and metro-mayors

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Since 2011

- Some great examples of council innovation
- Much less reporting against central government targets
- Councils have more freedom to do what they want to do

But…

Do they have more *power?*

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What do we mean by ‘power’?

- “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” (Mao Tse-Tung, 1938)
- “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Dahl, 1957)
- ‘Restrictive’ dimension of power – people can exercise power by controlling which issues come up for consideration (Bacharach and Baratz, 1962)
- Manipulative dimension of power – those in power may influence what people think, and how they might react to events or decisions, without them even realising it (Lukes, 1974)

“Power *over*” some*thing,* some*one* or some *people*

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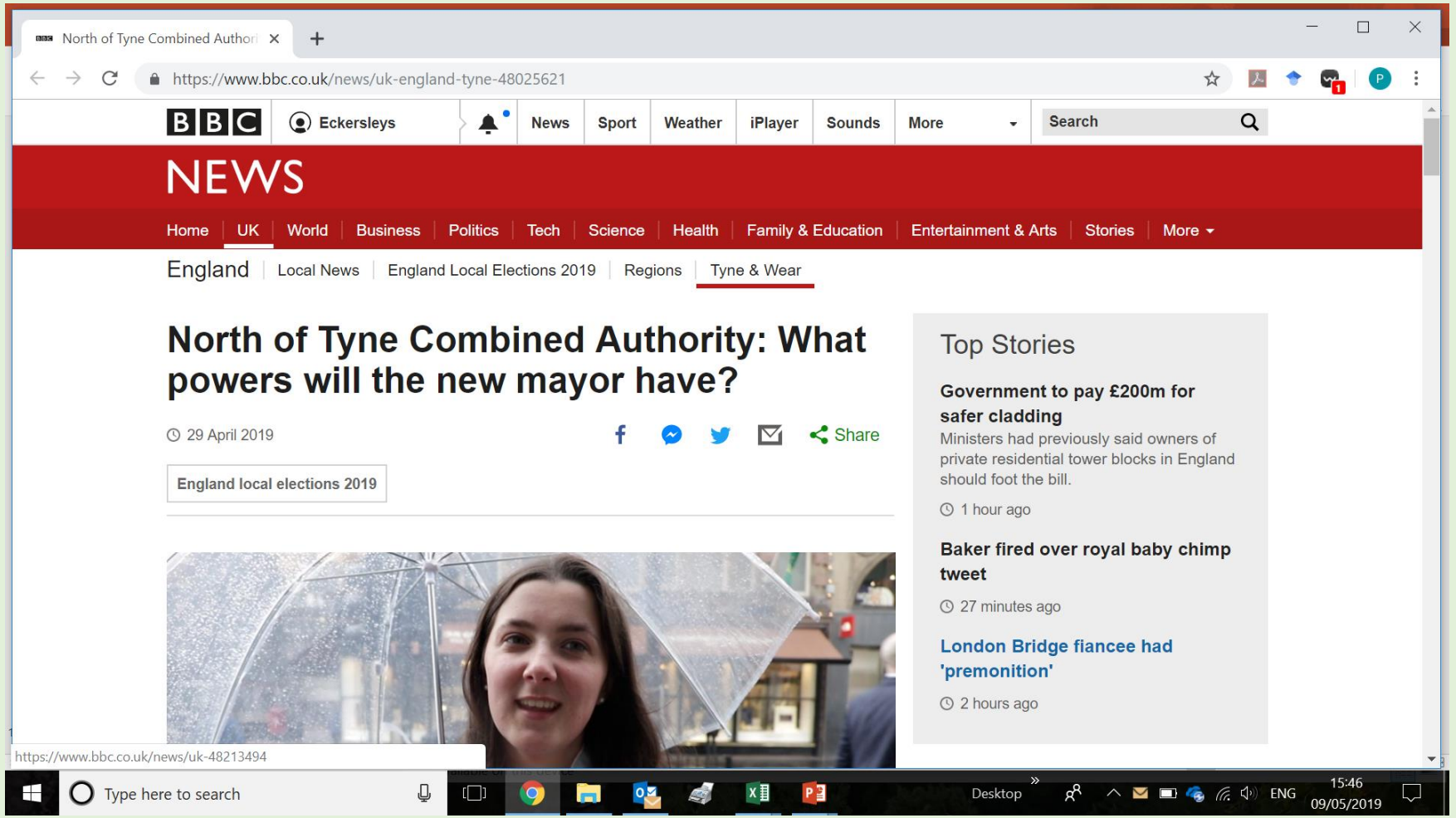
Are any of these definitions relevant for localism?



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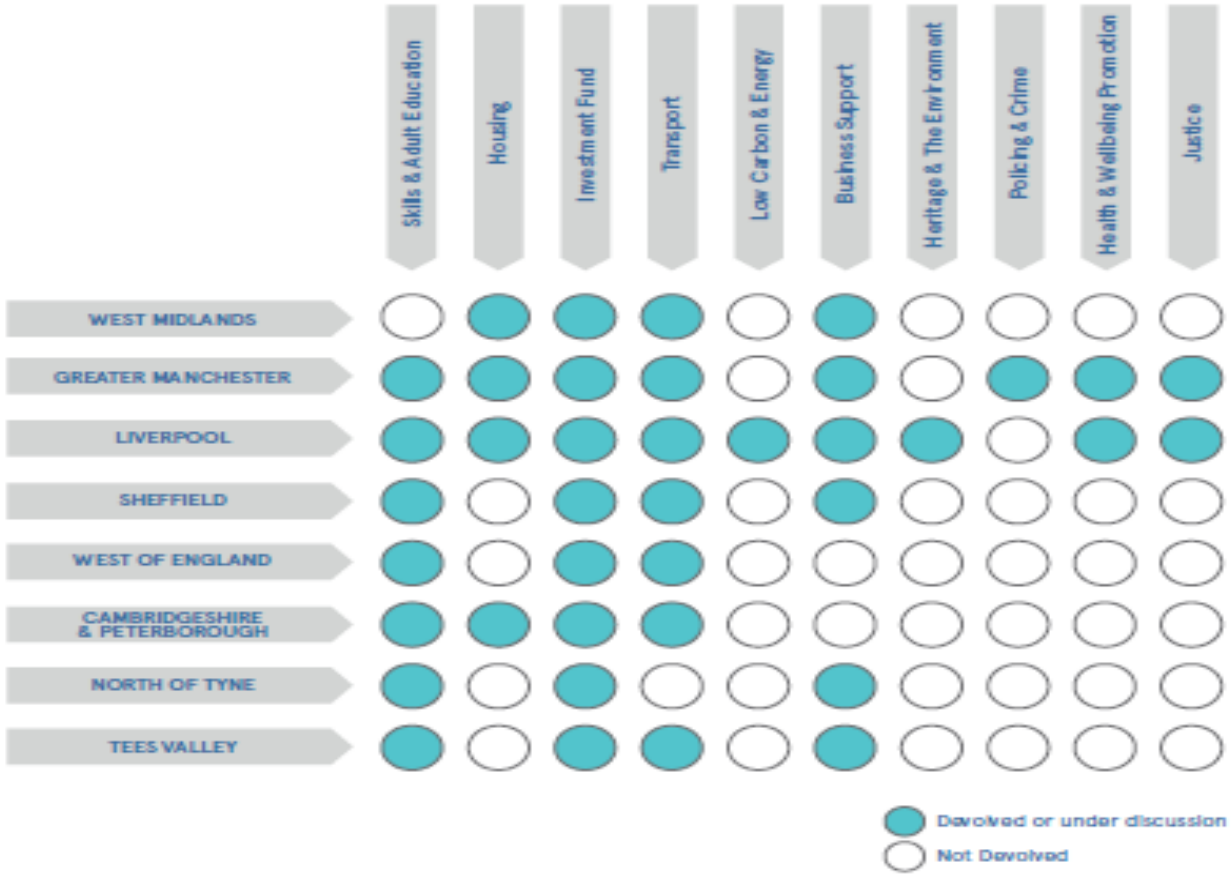
‘Powers’ in functional legal terms

12 Powers and Resources

Figure 11

Powers by Combined Authority Area[22]



Pike, A., Tomaney, J, and Jenkins, M. 2019. *The North of Tyne Metro Mayor: An office without power?*

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Power and capacity

- Power is not just about being *allowed* to do something – you also need to be *able* to do it!
- Power as *having the resources to achieve your political objectives* (Stone 1989; Matthews 2011)
- Power is not just about control, and not just about legal competence or jurisdiction – it's about having the resources and *capacity* to do what you want to do
- Austerity and economic decline have stripped out capacity within many councils
- Most are far more concerned with balancing the books than developing new initiatives or policies

"Power *to*" do something

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Where might this capacity come from?

- Internally
- From higher tiers of government
- From other local actors

- If we do not have sufficient internal capacity we have to look elsewhere to find it. And we might expect those actors that provide it to exert influence over decision-making
- This leads to increasingly *interde*pendent or even *de*pendent relationships between local authorities and other organisations, according to the amount and type of resources they exchange with each other

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Newcastle-Gelsenkirchen comparison

- Contrasting institutional arrangements in the two countries
- Similar-sized ‘twin towns’ that have experienced economic decline and budgetary constraints
- Both municipalities have sought to use the green agenda as a tool for regeneration
- 34 fieldwork interviews
- Focus on three sectors: climate change strategy, planning and corporate policies
- How were the cities developing and implementing climate policies?
- Which actors were influencing decision-making?
- What might this tell us about localism?

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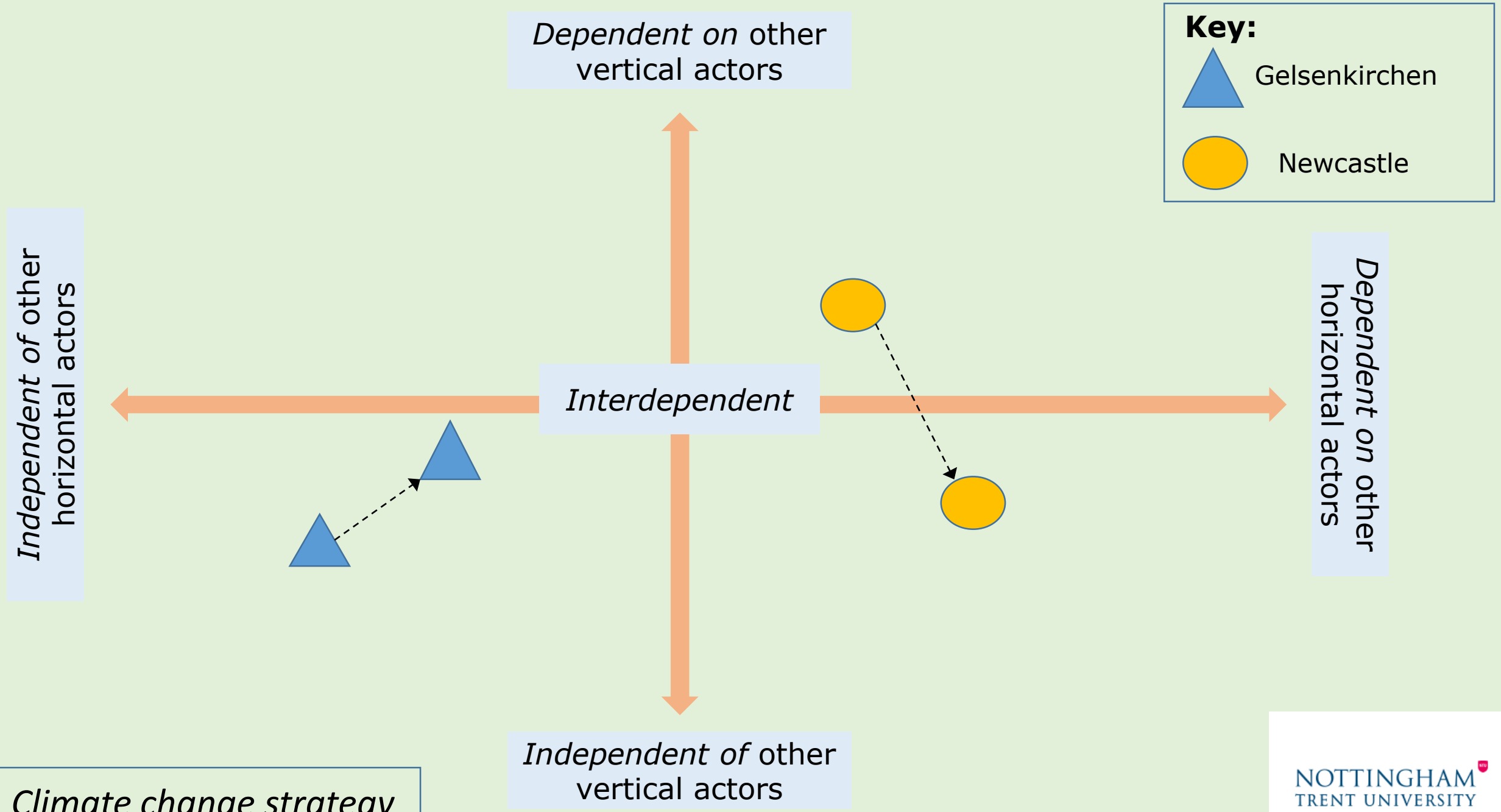

Climate change strategy

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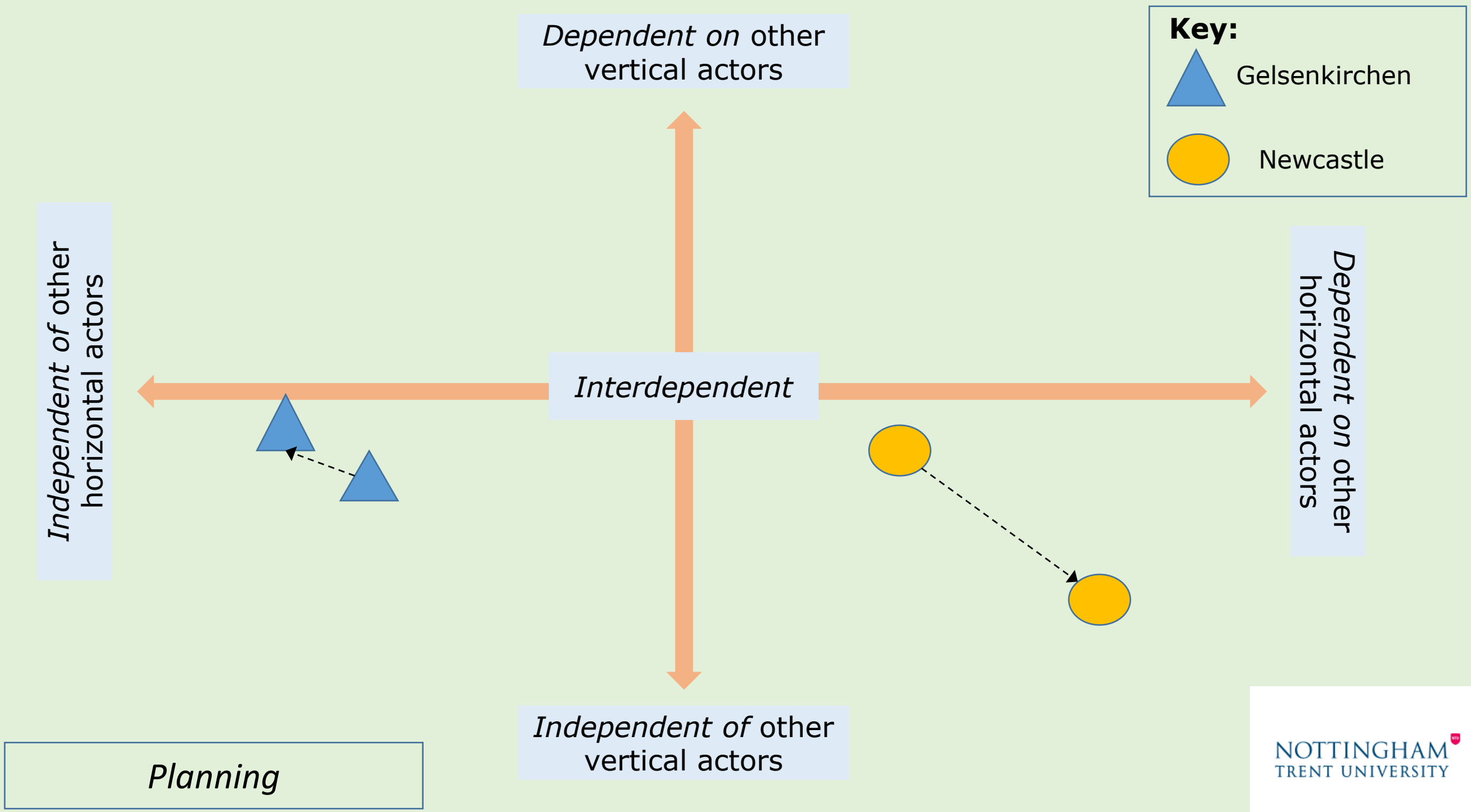
Key:
Gelsenkirchen
Newcastle
Dependent on other vertical actors
Independent of other horizontal actors
Interdependent
Dependent on other horizontal actors
Independent of other vertical actors
Planning
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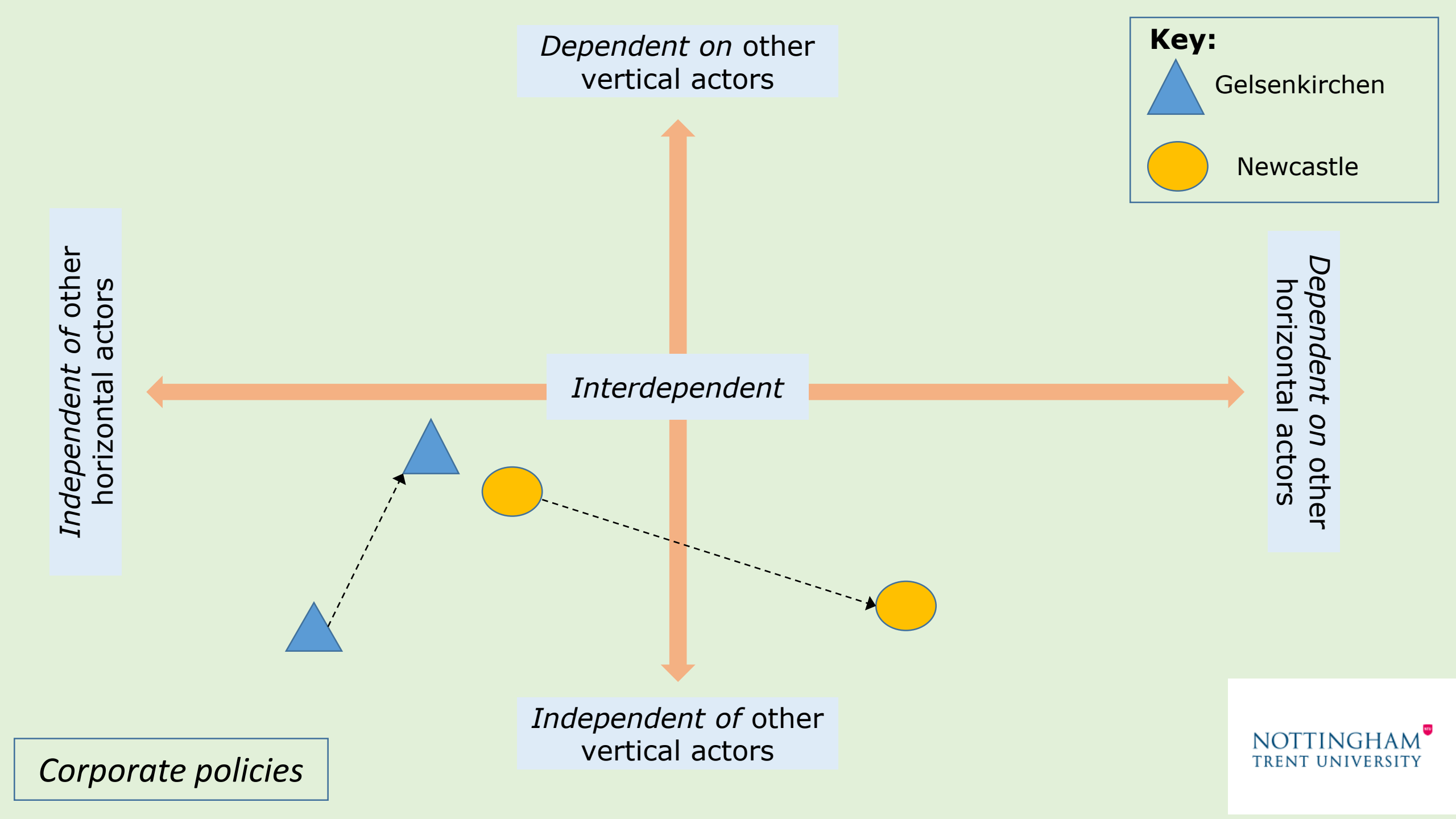
Key:
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Interdependent
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Independent of other vertical actors
Corporate policies
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Municipality	Dimension	Policy sector		
		Climate strategy	Planning	Corporate policies
Gelsenkirchen	Vertical	Increasingly more interdependent	Highly interdependent	Increasingly more interdependent
	Horizontal	Largely independent, though increasing interdependence	Largely independent, though some interdependence	Largely independent, though some interdependence
Newcastle	Vertical	Becoming highly independent	Becoming highly independent	Becoming highly independent
	Horizontal	Increasingly dependent	Increasingly dependent	Independent in internal activities; dependent in other public functions

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Summary of empirical findings

- Both councils adopted policymaking approaches that they felt were most likely to deliver desirable policy outcomes
- Gelsenkirchen works increasingly *interde*pendently with the state and federal governments, which gives it greater capacity to operate more *inde*pendently of other local actors
- Newcastle is becoming more and more *inde*pendent of central government, but this means it needs to *de*pend increasingly on other local organisations to achieve policy objectives
- These dependency relationships shape the policy approach: Gelsenkirchen can choose to be more hierarchical and invest in more ambitious solutions because it operates more *inde*pendently of other horizontal actors.

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Who governs?

I think at a very basic level, we can't tell the big partners what to do… We can't just go in very heavy-handed… There's a real balancing challenge there around how we use our strategic powers to further the green agenda, whilst at the same time taking businesses with us

(interview with officer at Newcastle City Council, 9 December 2013).

A politician who came out strongly on climate protection here would not do well at the next election… The policy is always a bit more advanced than the average voter, but it cannot lose touch from them. I think the policy in Gelsenkirchen is where it is able to be

(interview with officer at Gelsenkirchen Council, 22 July 2013).

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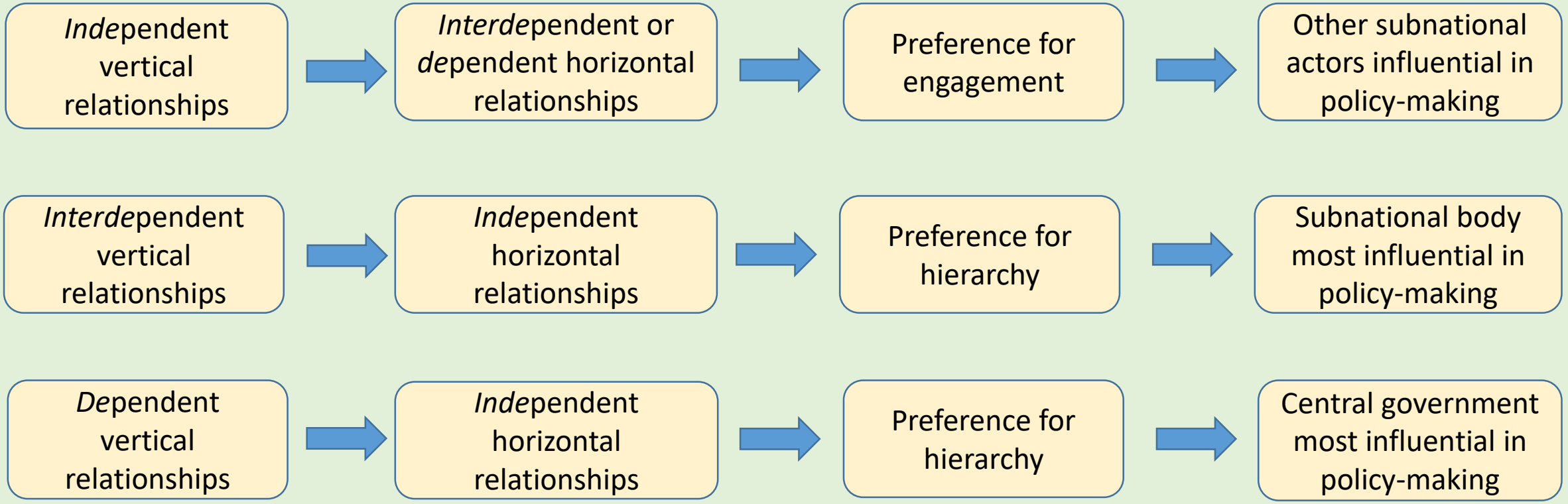

How vertical power dependencies might shape local policy-making: A hypothesis

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Wider implications

- Interdependent, 'joint-decision' systems have been criticised for being bureaucratic and resulting in sub-optimal policy (Scharpf, 1988) – but they strengthen the hand of the state and help to empower subnational government

- The support a municipality receives from other vertical actors is a key factor that shapes local policy-making. What does this mean for 'localism' and council autonomy? Is it such a good idea after all?

- What about English cities that don't have local 'anchor institutions' like Newcastle University? Where will they get their capacity from?

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Questions?

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