The Advocacy Hub

COVID-19 and advocacy

Our research

What we found

What it might mean for you

Advocacy Hub research

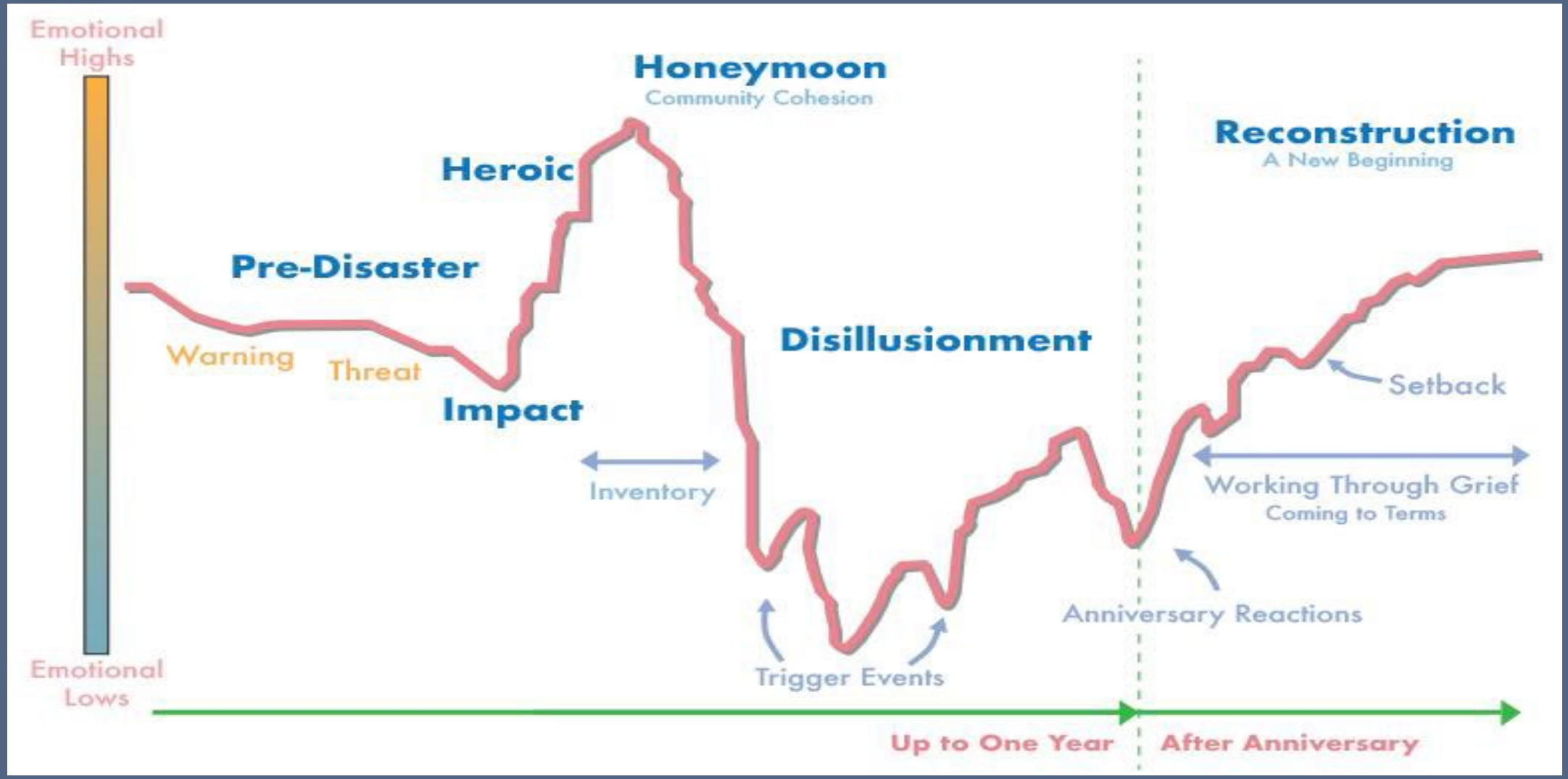
- N = 12
- Semi-structured interviews with advocacy directors or equivalent
- Interviewees from
  - International development & human rights NGOs, trade unions
  - NGOs, CSOs, and networks
  - Global South and North.. but perhaps with a bias towards Northern based INGOs

We asked:

1. How are advocacy activities currently affected?
   - Challenges
   - Political and practical adaptations
   - Impact on topics

2. What advocacy might look like after the crisis?
   - Scenario planning
   - New opportunities
   - New tactics
   - Funding

Eight uncertainties in a time of disillusionment



Green D., LSE / Global Policy April 2020

Eight uncertainties

1. Shifting space for advocacy
2. The local, national or global as the key arena for advocacy
3. Competition or collaboration?
4. Everything is online?
5. The end of informal lobbying?
6. A funding time bomb
7. The importance of agility
8. Temporary or permanent shifts in ways of working?

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Restrictions on activism and CPR

The return of the interventionist state?

Radicalising impulses

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We are all zoom people missing face to face meetings

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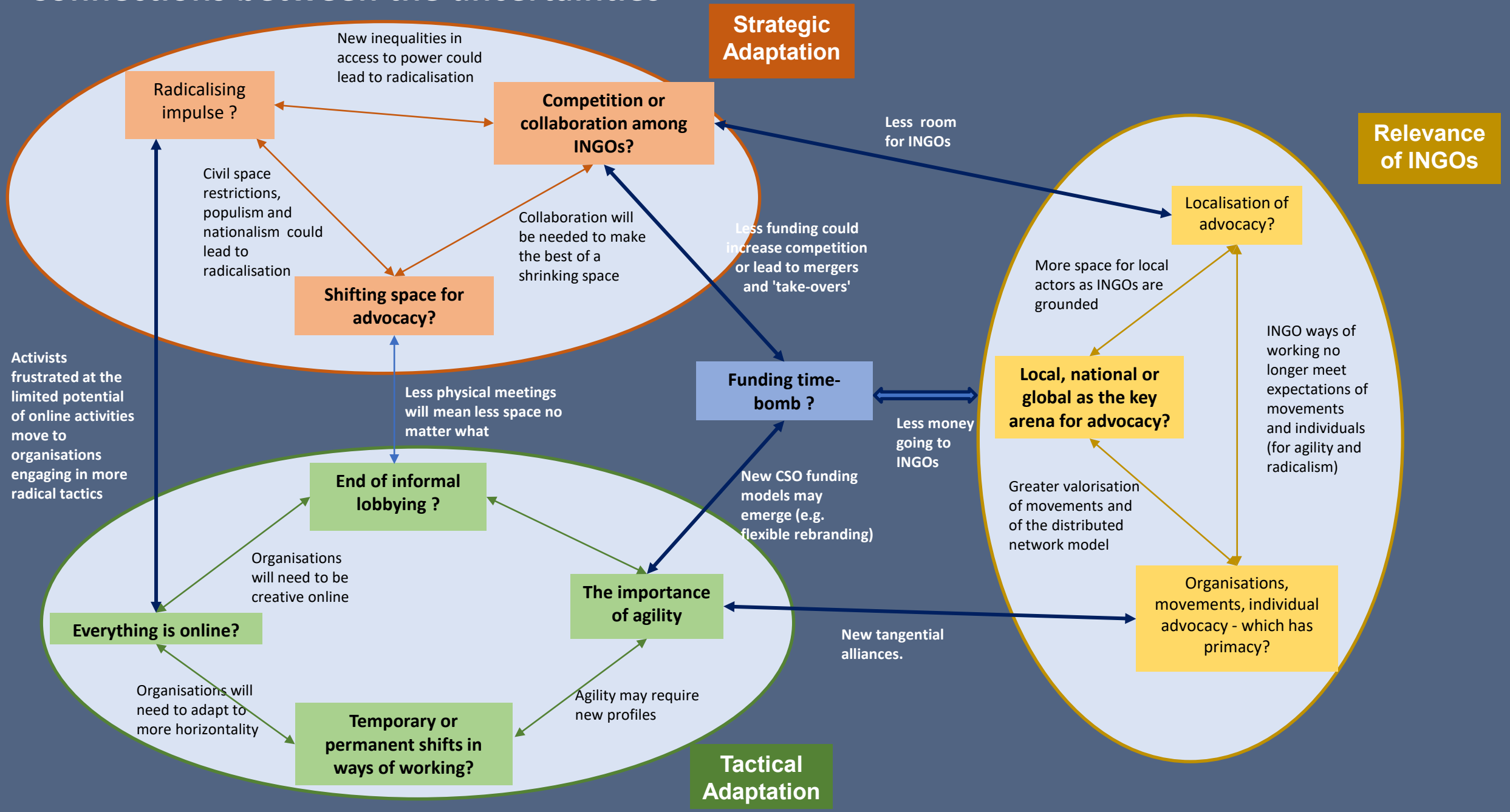
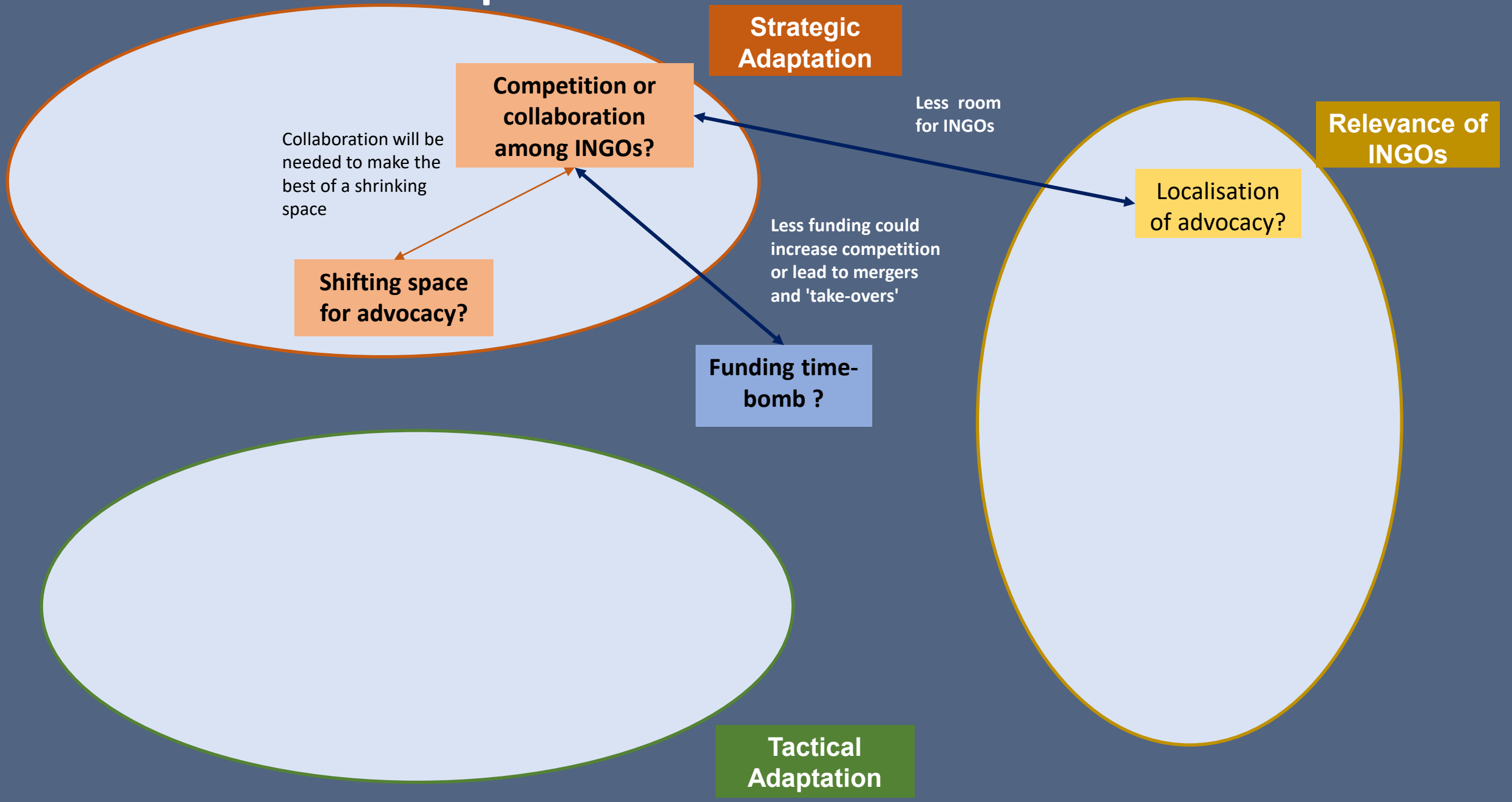
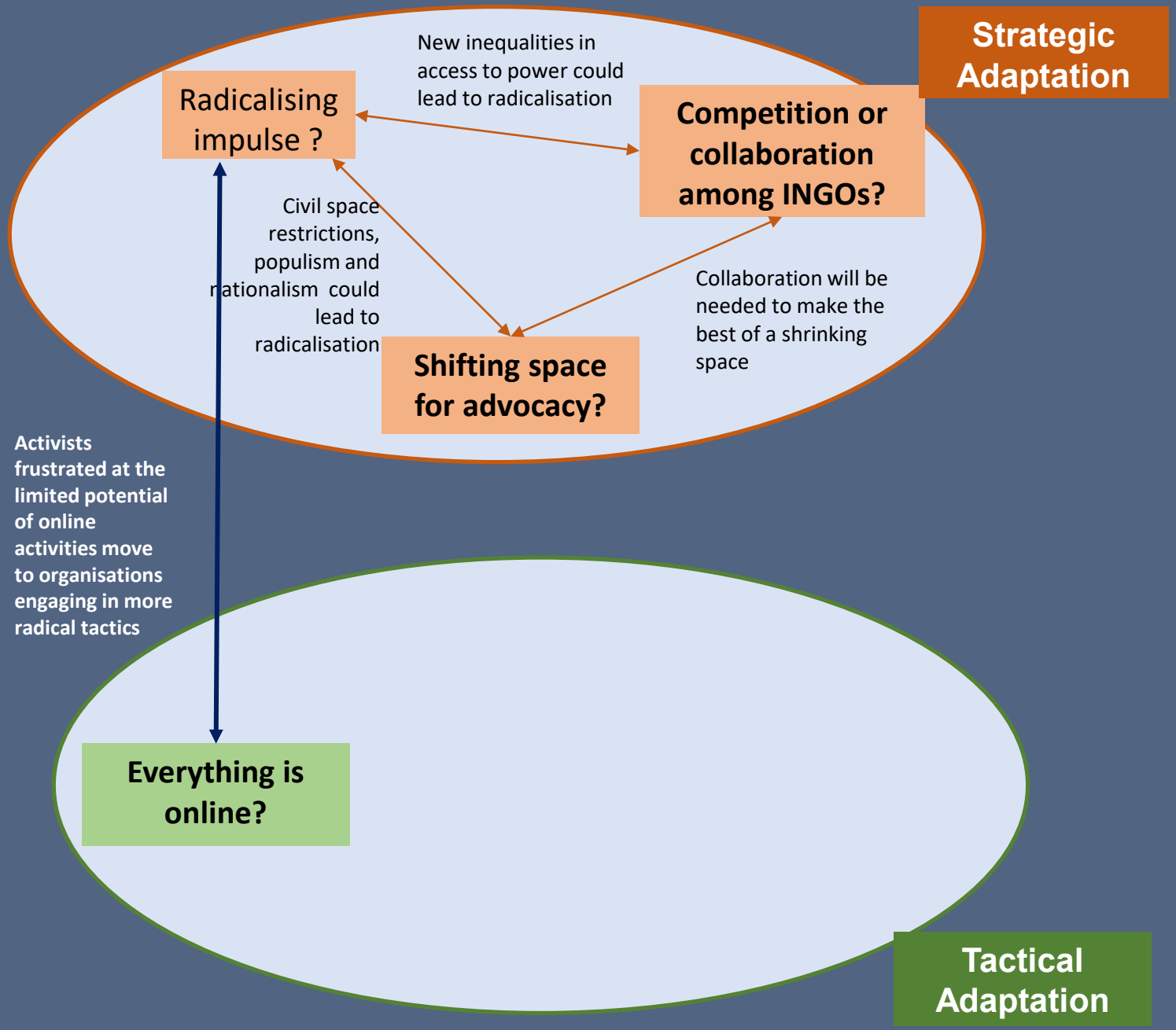
Connections between the uncertainties

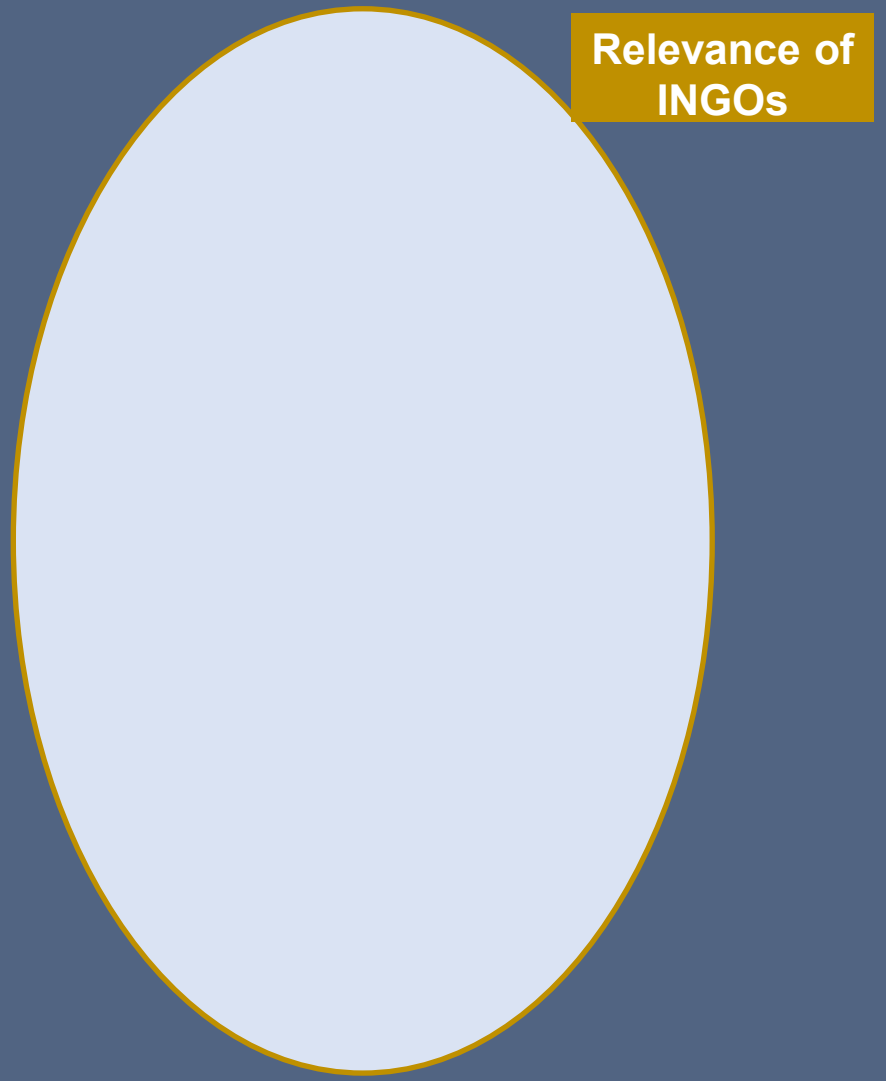


Collaboration or competition

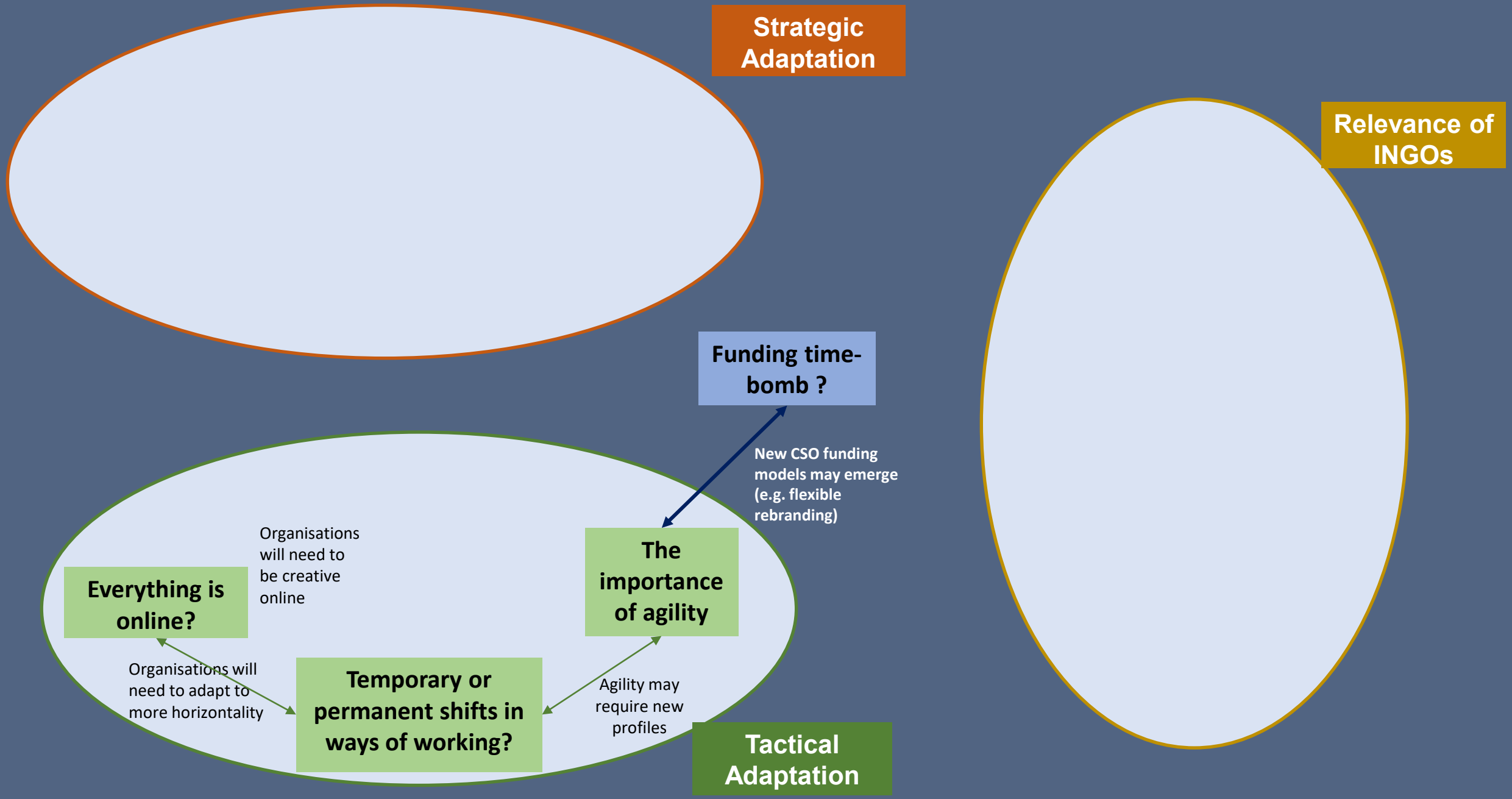


Radicalisation of advocacy

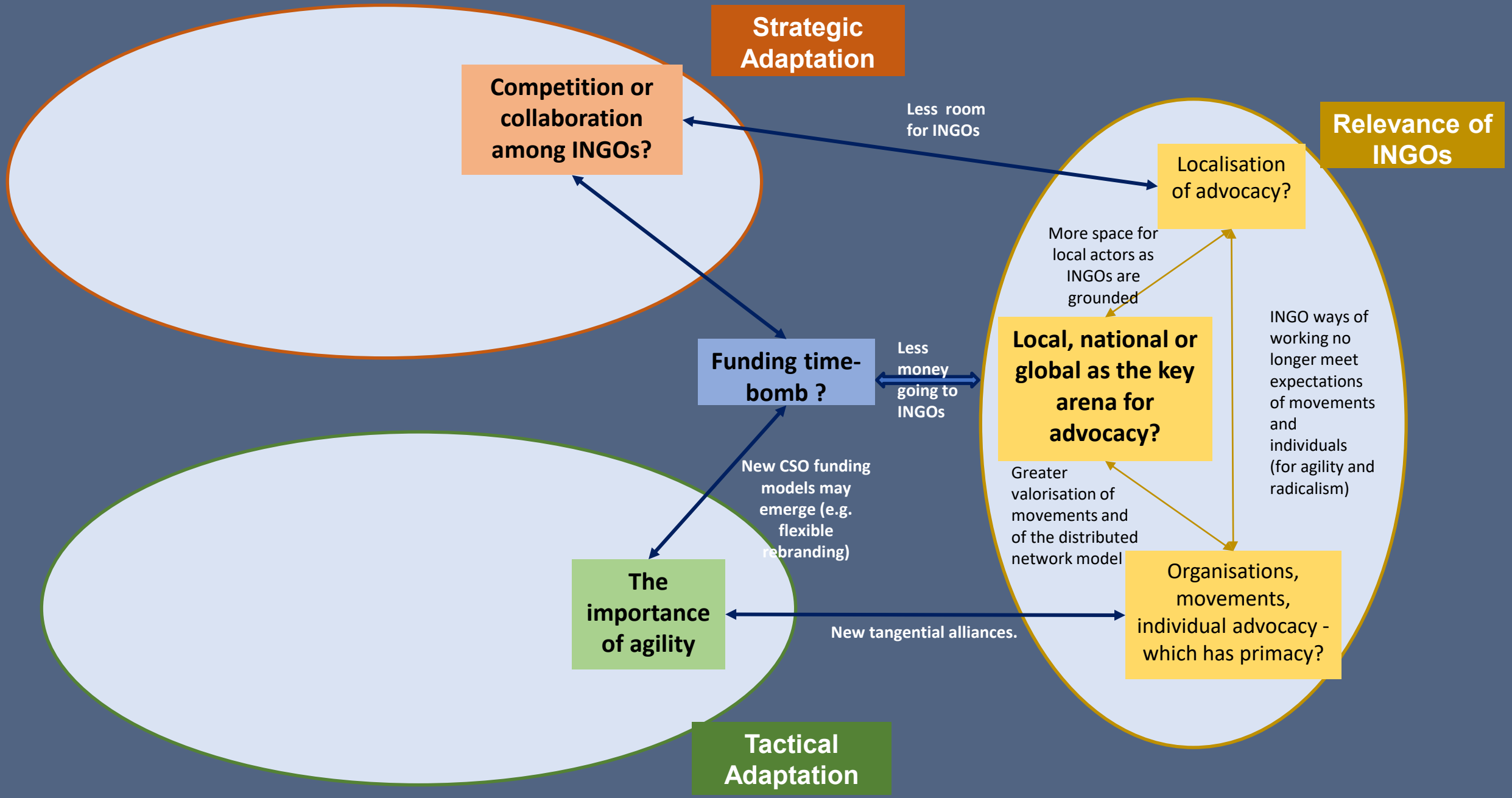




What will organisations look like



Relevance challenge



A new normal for advocacy

New trends (COVID) → Pre-existing trends

Advocacy environment

- Less direct physical access to decision makers
- Fewer organisations invited to physical events
- Less money for advocacy activities
- Trust towards institutions still decreasing
- Covid exposes and causes multiple inequalities so there's a lot to fight for
- Many countries with increased controls linked to Covid
- Rise in nationalism and populism hinders collective response

Strategies

- Mergers to secure access and to cover broader angles
- Mix of niche advocacy and systemic change advocacy (with connections made to CC, HR, poverty). Back and forth between the two modes.
- Mission driven but flexibility and creativity valorised (less strategic planning and more opportunity analysis)
- Competition for money, collaboration for representation
- Large coalitions calling for systemic changes

Tactics and ways of working

- Sync with the rhythm of the pandemic
- Physical protests used strategically; potentially more violent
- Less important to be seen as solutions-based
- On-line working
- Greater horizontality, strategic geo-positioning of staff to optimise physical access
- More refined online tactics: better petitions and something better than petitions
- New hiring profiles: generalists; story-tellers; spies

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How advocacy organisations could react to the new normal

Flexible rebranding

Organisations that no longer want to be seen as established institutions but as leaderful movements
Newcomer organisations

Attributes:
- multiple identities and constant rebranding
- back and forth between being a movement and an organisation
- fundraising based on «independent» characters
- operating to a distributed network model
- putting people in the right physical places
- new balance between local-national-regional-global advocacy based on complementarity and horizontality

Still in the room

Direct physical access to decision makers

Organisations that have maintained access to decision makers
Leaders in their sector with historic access and established partnership with decision makers
Foundations making the move to direct advocacy (mix of disintermediation and pandemic analysis)
Big international networks that have an identity / image to defend

Attributes
- lead very large coalitions on systemic change
- large advocacy departments; pyramidal organisation
- mergers and acquisitions
- mission driven, strong image, close to decision makers
- use weak moments of governments for big wins

Positioned as institutions with an image to defend

Organisations that are losing access due to COVID 19
Both those that are dissatisfied with the limits of online activism and those that believe in civil disobedience under a 'no time to lose' logic

Attributes
- focused on emergencies, not on solutions
- a rise in physical protests; an irony that activists *have to* wear masks
- organisations loosely associated with each other and working in tangential alliances

Organisations that are deciding to go all-virtual on the basis that being locked in is the future of humanity
Newcomer organisations

Attributes
- on-line working
- horizontality
- innovation in online tactics
- very active fighting for digital liberties
- citizen-led advocacy
- opportunity driven

Darkweb organisations
Hacktivism

Radicalisation

All - virtual

Winners and losers?

- There will be winners in all four profiles; there isn't a 'right' and 'wrong' place to be.
- Successful organisations will be those which find an equilibrium – a modus operandi and funding model – from being situated in one of the four profiles.
- Business as usual won't work: all need to adapt, but some to a greater extent than others.
- Newcomers will emerge and prove themselves to be adept at identifying available spaces before established organisations.
- Those that can phase their campaigning with the pandemic in a sophisticated way will have an advantage.