

LEVERAGING THE NEW ZEALAND COUNTRY BRAND IN HORIZON EUROPE FUNDING APPLICATIONS: AN OVERVIEW AND SOME INSIGHTS

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Abstract

Horizon Europe is the EU's primary research and innovation funding mechanism with an estimated budget of over NZ\$ 160 billion for the period 2021-2027. From mid-2023, New Zealand has become a fully eligible partner under Horizon Europe Pillar 2 funding, which is organised into six priority clusters: health; culture, creativity and inclusive society; civil security for society; digital, industry and space; climate, energy and mobility; and food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment. Drawing on first-hand experience of being part of a winning NZ\$ 5.3 million bid with a consortium of European universities focusing on how populism impacts public goods (i.e., the VALPOP project), I hope my viewpoint encourages more New Zealand researchers and their organisations to explore Horizon Europe funding. However, it is important to underscore that from 1 February 2025, the Ministry of Innovation, Business and Employment has scaled back its top-up funding for Horizon Europe projects related to the culture, creativity and inclusive society cluster, making a large majority of social science projects ineligible for top up funding from the New Zealand government.

Keywords: Horizon Europe funding, New Zealand country brand, Research funding

1. Introduction

New Zealand's target of spending 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on research and development by 2028 (from currently under 1.5%) may seem quite ambitious.¹ However, it pales in comparison to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) average of 2.74% of GDP² and also lags behind the European Union's (EU) average of 2.22%.³ Both shares for the OECD and the EU will likely increase further by 2028 against the current global landscape – marred by geopolitics, geoeconomic rivalry *and* techno-rivalry.⁴ Furthermore, the largest overhaul of science and research funding in over 30 years along with an overhaul of the tertiary education system spearheaded by the current centre-right government in New Zealand⁵ has prioritised economic growth, which has had a detrimental effect on social science research funding and social science tertiary education funding. Focusing on consolidation and 'system optimisation' may derail New Zealand's own plan of spending 2% of GDP on research and development by 2028, given that the government has not indicated any additional funding for the foreseeable future. Without increased R&D spending, achieving another ambitious target of doubling New Zealand's exports over the next decade to significantly boost New Zealand's GDP⁶ also seems highly unlikely.

The figures above might seem relatively abstract and pundits would argue that New Zealand is not among the countries with the lowest share of R&D spending relative to its GDP

¹ N. Mandow. "Budget 2023 won't move dial on R&D 'hole'." *Newsroom*, May 18, 2023. <https://newsroom.co.nz/2023/05/18/budget-2023-wont-move-dial-on-rd-hole/>.

² OECD, *Gross domestic spending on R&D*, (Paris: OECD, 2024), <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/gross-domestic-spending-on-r-d.html>.

³ The European Commission, *R&D expenditure*, (Brussels: Eurostat, December 2024), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=R%26D_expenditure.

⁴ L. Yandong, and A. Van Assche. 2023. "The rise of techno-geopolitical uncertainty: Implications of the United States CHIPS and Science Act". *Journal of International Business Studies* 54 (8): 1423-1440. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-023-00620-3>.

⁵ M. Argue. "Govt reveals biggest reset of NZ's science system in 3 decades – Collins." *RNZ/INews*, January 24, 2025. <https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/01/23/govt-reveals-biggest-reset-of-nzs-science-system-in-3-decades-collins/>.

⁶ E. Kahiya. "NZ government has promised to double exports (again) – but as history shows, this is easier said than done." *The Conversation*, January 19, 2025, <https://theconversation.com/nz-government-has-promised-to-double-exports-again-but-as-history-shows-this-is-easier-said-than-done-244907>.

within the OECD. However, while Ireland, for example, spends even less than New Zealand (approx. 1.2% of GDP),⁷ the labour productivity in Ireland is almost three times higher than that of New Zealand.⁸ Beyond the percentages, the actual monetary amounts paint an even more dramatic picture of asymmetry of scale in R&D funding between New Zealand, the OECD and the EU. While the EU, for example, spent EUR357.4 billion on R&D in 2022, which is just shy of NZ\$600 billion,⁹ New Zealand R&D spending of NZ\$ 5.2 billion on R&D in 2022 was primarily driven by the private sector with roughly about NZ\$1.2 billion coming from government funding for scientific research.¹⁰ As a developed country, New Zealand is thus lagging significantly behind in the amount of R&D government spending compared to countries of similar size, like Denmark (NZ\$ 6 billion NZD), Finland (NZ\$ 2.3 billion) and even Ireland (NZ\$ 2.1 billion).¹¹

The purpose of my viewpoint paper is to help New Zealand researchers, research organisations and policymakers understand the immense opportunity for the New Zealand research community to tap into Horizon Europe funding till 2027, since New Zealand became eligible under Horizon Europe Pillar 2 in mid-2023. After a brief overview of Horizon Europe funding, the EU's key research and innovation program worth over NZ\$160 billion,¹² I provide an overview of existing Horizon Europe projects which New Zealand is already participating in. I then focus on outlining how New Zealand can leverage its country brand and international

⁷ OECD, *Gross domestic spending on R&D*, (Paris: OECD, 2024), <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/gross-domestic-spending-on-r-d.html>.

⁸ OECD, *OECD Compendium of Productivity Indicators 2024*, (Paris: OECD, February 2024), https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-compendium-of-productivity-indicators-2024_b96cd88a-en/full-report/component-4.html#section-d1e1837-664817de14.

⁹ The European Commission. "EU spent €381.4 billion on R&D in 2023." *Eurostat News Article*, December 11, 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20241211-2>.

¹⁰ Stats NZ, *Research and Development Survey 2022*, (Wellington: Stats NZ, April 2023), <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/research-and-development-survey-2022/>.

¹¹ Eurostat, *GBARD by socioeconomic objectives (NABS 2007)* (Brussels: The European Commission, April 2025), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/GBA_NABSFIN07_custom_7024947/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=768c9e7c-0a4c-4b66-abb5-22d0789c3ddb.

¹² REANNZ, *Empowering Global Research: Strengthening Collaboration and Capability for New Zealand's Research Future*, (Auckland: REANNZ, December 2024).

reputation within Horizon Europe funding to maximise chances of success, not only for New Zealand researchers and their organisations but also for participating EU researchers and participating organisations which may benefit from having a New Zealand research partner and organisation on their application team.

The premise behind my viewpoint is that there is a strategic window of opportunity where the inclusion of New Zealand research partners on Horizon Europe funding applications might provide a form of symbolic capital to be leveraged by European applicants. I conclude my viewpoint by providing some advice and first-hand insights from a New Zealand-based principal researcher at a tertiary education institution, part of a consortium of European universities and researchers which have in mid-2024 received NZ\$5.3 million in Horizon Europe funding to explore the impact of populism and populist politics on public goods (i.e., the VALPOP project). I hope my viewpoint encourages more New Zealand researchers and their organisations to explore Horizon Europe funding and prompts the current New Zealand government to reconsider its recent decision to stop top-up funding by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) for projects in the culture, creativity and social inclusion cluster,¹³ which adversely impacts a vast majority of social science research.

2. A brief overview of Horizon Europe funding

Following its predecessor, Horizon 2020 for the period 2014-2020 (with a budget of EUR 80 billion),¹⁴ Horizon Europe is the EU's primary research and innovation funding mechanism with an estimated budget of EUR 93 billion for the 2021-2027 period, which is just over NZ\$

¹³ MBIE, MBIE Horizon Europe top-up funding scheme (Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, n. d.). <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/science-and-technology/science-and-innovation/international-opportunities/horizon-europe-research-fund/mbie-horizon-europe-top-up-funding-scheme>.

¹⁴ The European Commission, *Horizon 2020*, (Brussels: The EU Commission, n.d.). https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-2020_en.

160 billion.¹⁵ Organised in three pillars – Pillar 1: Excellent Science (i.e., European Research Council, Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme and Research Infrastructures), Pillar 2: Global Challenges & European Industrial Competitiveness (i.e., organised into six clusters) and Pillar 3: Innovative Europe (i.e., European Innovation Council, European Innovation Ecosystems and the European Institute of Innovation & Technology)¹⁶ – New Zealand became an eligible partner country under the Pillar 2 funding mechanism in July 2023. Pillar 2 has an allocated budget of over EUR 53 billion or around NZ\$ 90 billion and is organised into six clusters:¹⁷

1. **Health** (Budget: approx. NZ\$ 15 billion), which includes health, living and working in health-promoting environments, battling diseases and minimising disease burdens, innovative and sustainable healthcare, new tools, technologies and solutions for a healthy society, and maintaining an innovative, sustainable and globally competitive health industry.
2. **Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society** (Budget: approx. NZ\$ 4 billion), which includes democracy and governance, European Cultural Heritage and the Cultural and Creative Industries, and Social and Economic Transformations.
3. **Civil Security for Society** (Budget: approx. NZ\$ 2.8 billion), which includes protection against crime and terrorism, effective management of EU external borders, protected infrastructure, increased cybersecurity, a disaster-resilient society, SSRI or Strengthened Security Research and Innovation.
4. **Digital, Industry and Space** (Budget: approx. NZ\$ 27 billion), which includes climate neutral, circular and digitised production, increased autonomy in key strategic value

¹⁵ The European Commission, *Horizon Europe*, (Brussels: The EU Commission, n.d.). https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en.

¹⁶ The European Commission, *Horizon Europe: The EU Research & Innovation Programme 2021-2027*, (Brussels: The European Commission, March 2021). https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/9224c3b4-f529-4b48-b21b-879c442002a2_en?filename=ec_rtd_he-investing-to-shape-our-future.pdf.

¹⁷ REANNZ, *Empowering Global Research: Strengthening Collaboration and Capability for New Zealand's Research Future*, (Auckland: REANNZ, December 2024).

chains, world leading data and computing technologies, digital and emerging technologies for competitiveness and fit for the Green Deal, open strategic autonomy in developing, deploying and using global space-based infrastructures, services, applications and data, human-centred and ethical development of digital and industrial technologies.

5. **Climate, Energy and Mobility** (Budget: approx. NZ\$ 27 billion), which includes climate science and responses, cross-sectoral solutions for the climate transition, sustainable, secure and competitive energy supply, efficient, sustainable and inclusive energy use, clean and competitive solutions for all transportation modes, safe and resilient transport and smart mobility services for passengers and goods.
6. **Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment** (Budget: approx. NZ\$ 16 billion), which includes biodiversity and ecosystem services, fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food systems from primary production to consumption, circular economy and bioeconomy sectors, clean environment and zero pollution, land, oceans and water for climate action, resilient, inclusive, healthy and green rural, coastal, and urban communities, and innovative governance environmental observations and digital solutions in support of the Green Deal.

It is important to note that while New Zealand has already been an eligible partner in previous EU funding projects, like Horizon 2020, becoming part of Pillar 2 under the Horizon Europe funding mechanism allows New Zealand research institutions *and* even private businesses in New Zealand for the first time to receive funding equally to their European counterparts. In terms of participation in Pillars 1 and 3, while New Zealand is treated as a non-associated country, participating New Zealand researchers can still be involved and through European networks receive some financial support for their research work internationally

alongside their European counterparts or to the benefit of eligible research activities under Pillars 1 and 3.¹⁸ New Zealand has set aside about NZ\$ 50 million dollars in funding support for successful project.¹⁹ With the recent overhaul of the New Zealand research landscape announced in December 2024, as part of a once-in-a-generation overhaul of science and higher education, the future for support from the New Zealand government for successful Horizon Europe projects with New Zealand participants seems less certain after the New Zealand government announced that all successful Horizon Europe projects in the culture, creativity and inclusive society cluster would become ineligible for MBIE top-up funding from 1 February 2025.

3. Existing success of New Zealand in Horizon Europe fundings

Table 1 provides a list of 15 approved projects under Horizon Europe's Pillar 2 funding with New Zealand participation as of 27 January 2025. The data is publicly available through the EU's Cordis research results using appropriate filters for Horizon funding, Pillar 2 (i.e., Global Challenges & European Industrial Competitiveness) and New Zealand as a country.

Table 1: A list of approved Horizon Europe projects with New Zealand participation²⁰

No.	Title	Cluster	Lead	NZ organisation	Budget (in EUR)
1.	Intercultural and transcultural competence through collaborative cultural expression	Culture, creativity and inclusive society	Nord Universitet, Norway	University of Auckland	Total: EUR 2.996 mn NZ share: EUR 387,500
2.	dialoguing@rts – Advancing Cultural Literacy for Social Inclusion through Dialogical Arts Education	Culture, creativity and inclusive society	Nord Universitet, Norway	University of Auckland	Total: EUR 3 mn NZ budget: EUR 141,969

¹⁸ MBIE, *Horizon Europe Research funding*, (Wellington, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, December 2024). <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/science-and-technology/science-and-innovation/international-opportunities/horizon-europe-research-fund>.

¹⁹ REANNZ, *Empowering Global Research: Strengthening Collaboration and Capability for New Zealand's Research Future*, (Auckland: REANNZ, December 2024).

²⁰ The EU Commission, *Cordis – EU Research Results*, (Brussels: The EU Commission, January 2025), <https://cordis.europa.eu/search?q=frameworkProgramme%3D%27HORIZON%27%20AND%20relatedRegion%2Fregion%2FeuCode%3D%27NZ%27%20AND%20programme%2Fcode%3D%27HORIZON.2%27&p=1&num=10&srt=Relevance:decreasing>.

3.	Randomised Controlled Trial of Preventive Treatment of Latent Tuberculosis Infection in Patients with Diabetes Mellitus	Health	Stichting Radboud Universitair Medisch Centrum, Netherlands	University of Otago	Total: EUR 2.337 mn NZ share: EUR 94,446
4.	EU-CIEMBLy: Creating an Inclusive European Citizens' Assembly	Culture, creativity and inclusive society	Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal	Victoria University of Wellington	Total: EUR 2.106 mn NZ share: EUR 110,692
5.	VALPOP: Valuing Public Goods in a Populist World: A Comparative Analysis of Network Dynamics and Societal Outcomes	Democracy and Governance	Universitaet Innsbruck, Austria	Auckland University of Technology	Total: EUR 2.994 mn NZ share: EUR 90,375
6.	MITIGATING ENVIRONMENTAL DISRUPTIVE EVENTS USING PEOPLE-CENTRIC PREDICTIVE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE DISASTER AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE	Climate, Energy and Mobility	IES R&R, Ireland	Urban Intelligence Ltd., University of Auckland, University of Canterbury	Total: EUR 5.319 mn NZ share: EUR 788,687
7.	STELLA: Digital technologies for plant health, early detection, territory surveillance and phytosanitary measures	Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment	Geoponiko Panepistimion Athinon, Greece	Lincoln University	Total: EUR 4.998 mn NZ share: EUR 286,937
8.	UPWEARS: Sustainable solutions for upgraded smart wearables and equipment in sport	Digital, Industry and Space	Institut National de Recherche Pour L'Agriculture, L'Alimentation et L'Environnement, France	New Zealand Forest Research Institute Ltd.	Total: EUR 7.848 mn NZ share: EUR 512,273
9.	m2M: A bioprinting platform for the rapid, reliable, controlled and quantifiable patterning of cellular aggregates and microtissues into macroscale regenerative grafts with programmable architectures	Health	Trinity University, Ireland	University of Otago	Total: EUR 8 mn NZ share: EUR 157,647
10.	HyDRA: Diagnostic Tools and Risk Protocols To Accelerate Underground Hydrogen Storage	Climate, Energy and Mobility	Universitetet I Bergen, Norway	Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences Ltd.	Total: EUR 3.016 mn NZ share: EUR 350,000
11.	Legume: Boosting innovation in breeding for the next generation of legume crops for Europe	Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment	Leibnitz Institut für Pflanzengenetik und Kulturpflanzenforschung, Germany	Agresearch Ltd.	Total: EUR 5.553 mn NZ share: EUR 0
12.	OneSTOP: OneBiosecurity Systems and Technology for People, Places and Pathways	Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment	Agenschap Plantentuin Meise, Belgium	Lincoln University	Total: EUR 6.228 mn NZ share: EUR 203,900
13.	GuardIAS - Guarding European Waters from IAS	Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment	Penepistimio Aigaiou, Greece	Sequenx Ltd.	Total: EUR 7.150 mn NZ share: EUR 380,275
14.	ERDERA: EUROPEAN RARE DISEASES RESEARCH ALLIANCE	Health	Institut National de la Sante et de la Recherche Medicale, France	University of Otago	Total: EUR 145.8 mn NZ share: EUR 31,800
15.	Redesign: tRansformative food value Systems reshaping resilient urban landscapes	Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment	Universita di Bologna, Italy	Lincoln University	Total: EUR 3.196 mn NZ share: EUR 119,890

The total value of the 15 approved Horizon Europe projects with New Zealand participation was over EUR 210 million or over NZ\$ 386 million. Jointly, the total funding allocated to New Zealand was EUR 3,656,391 or around NZ\$ 6.7 million, which is about 1.7%. In terms of institutional representation, the University of Auckland, the University of Otago and Lincoln University lead with three projects each. Auckland University of Technology and Victoria University of Wellington follow with one each along some other research institutes and a private organisation.

4. Leveraging the New Zealand country brand

With a long history of nation branding through storytelling and a powerful national branding agency (i.e., the New Zealand Story Group), New Zealand is one of the most recognisable nation brands in the world. For example, in an increasingly fractured global landscape,²¹ New Zealand has been so far relatively successful in avoiding the U.S. vs. China polarisation and continues to be perceived positively by both countries, which is quite rare within the international community.²²

In November 2024, New Zealand won the prestigious *Place Brand of the Year Award* in London from the City Nation Place Awards for the amazing work done by its national storytelling agency, the New Zealand Story Group.²³ According to the 2023 Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand ranking, New Zealand ranked #14 in terms of its country reputation and nation brand strength.²⁴ Looking at the 2023 Nation Brand Index, the New Zealand country brand

²¹ P. Zámorský. 2023. “Editorial: Contextualising the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: A Fractured Globalisation Perspective”. *New Zealand Journal of Research on Europe* 17 (1): 1-7.

²² N. Ross Smith, and B. Holster. 2023. “New Zealand’s ‘Maori Foreign Policy’ and China: a case of instrumental rationality”. *International Affairs* 99 (4): 1575-1593. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad123>.

²³ R. Green. “New Zealand wins prestigious Place Brand of the Year at 2024 City Nation Place Awards.” *Campaign Brief*, November 8, 2024. <https://campaignbrief.co.nz/2024/11/08/new-zealand-wins-prestigious-place-brand-of-the-year-at-2024-city-nation-place-awards/>.

²⁴ Anholt-Ipsos, *Nation Brands Index: Press Release – Supplement Report*, (Paris: Ipsos, November 2023). https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-10/NBI_2023_Press_Release_Supplemental_Deck_WEB.pdf.

ranked #1 in terms of “friendly” and “happy” as brand personality traits, #2 in terms of “generous” and #3 in terms of “attractive”. New Zealand also ranked #2 in terms of its natural beauty and #3 in terms of wildlife protection and habitat restoration.²⁵ Coupled with being one of the least corrupt countries in the world with very high levels of trust in the government and public institutions,²⁶ this helps us better understand the strengths of the New Zealand country brand and international image as one of the most desired places for expatriates/for relocation.²⁷

Figure 1 illustrates the Anholt-Ipsos nation brand hexagon, which shows the six dimensions of a nation brand. Together, the six dimensions make up the so-called Nation Brand Index used to rank countries according to the strength of their nation brands. Built on a methodology of nation brand equity,²⁸ which plays a major role in international business and country perceptions,²⁹ the nation brand hexagon helps unpack a well-crafted nation brand for New Zealand. Such a brand relies heavily on national storytelling,³⁰ which acts as a powerful asset in not just international business, education and tourism but also public diplomacy and international relations.³¹ So far, to the best of my knowledge, the impact of a nation’s brand on research funding success has remained unexplored, pointing to a possible theoretical gap waiting to be explored.

²⁵ Anholt-Ipsos, *Nation Brands Index: Press Release – Supplement Report*, (Paris: Ipsos, November 2023). https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-10/NBI_2023_Press_Release_Supplemental_Deck_WEB.pdf.

²⁶ M. (M.) Raskovic. “A slide in global corruption rankings in bad for ‘Brand NZ’ – what can the government do?” *The Conversation*, February 12, 2024. <https://theconversation.com/a-slide-in-global-corruption-rankings-is-bad-for-brand-nz-what-can-the-government-do-222995>.

²⁷ S. Pollok. 2024. “Best place to move and live: New Zealand ranks third in search data analysis.” *NZ Herald*, July 8, 2024. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/travel/best-place-to-move-and-live-new-zealand-ranks-third-in-search-data-analysis/ZW5DOVVJANCY5P3UZBOF6NX6QQ/>.

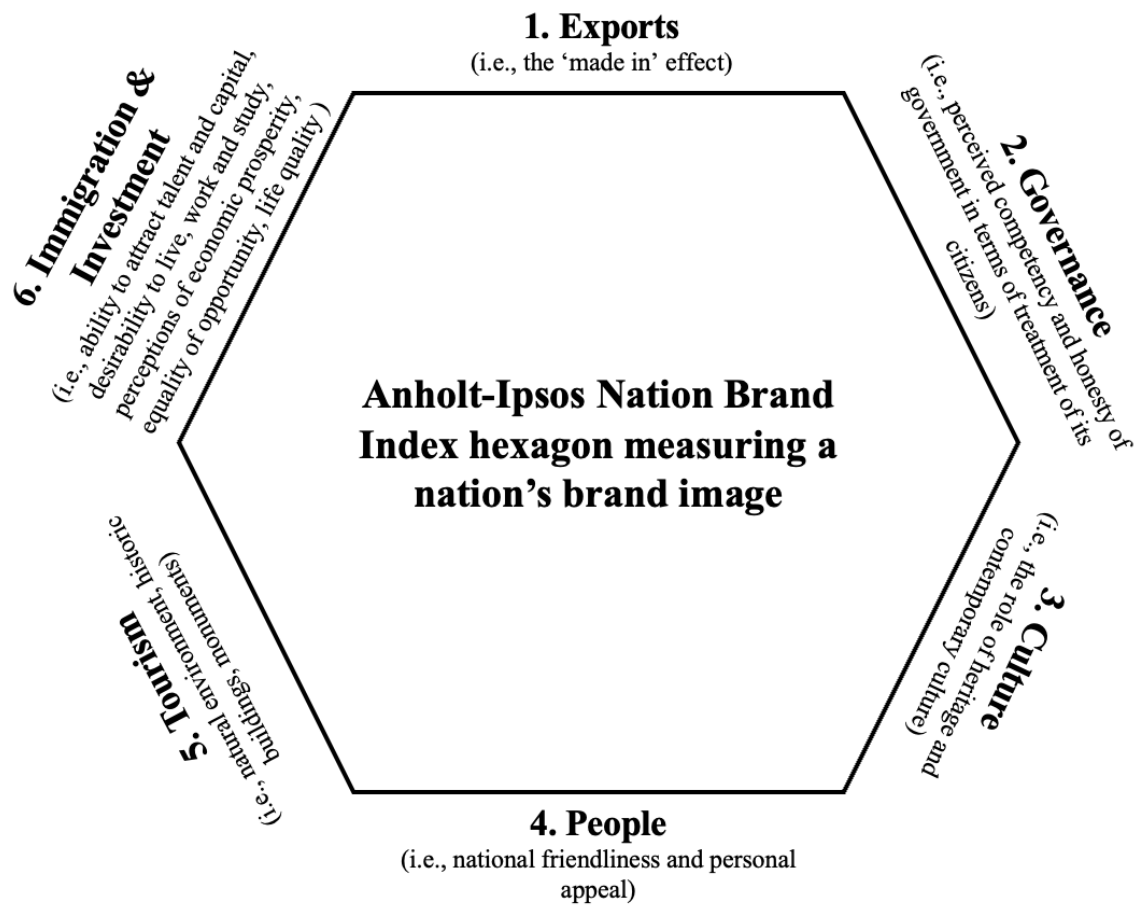
²⁸ R. Pappu, and P. Quester. 2010. Country equity: Conceptualization and empirical evidence. *International Business Review* 19 (3): 276-291.

²⁹ R. J. Brodie, and M. Benson-Rea. 2016. “Country of origin branding: an integrative perspective”. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 25(4): 322-336. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-04-2016-1138>.

³⁰ New Zealand Story Group, *The New Zealand Story Group: Briefing for Incoming Ministers – File Reference: MIN-2021-0165*, (Wellington: The New Zealand Government, 2021).

³¹ S. Anholt. 2011. “Beyond the Nation Brand: The Role of Image and Identity in International Relations,” *Brand and Branding Geographies*, 289-304. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Figure 1: Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index hexagon³²



However, while the role of nation branding has been relatively well-researched in terms of export promotion, foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction, international education, immigration and tourism,³³ its role in attracting international research and development funding (not just research and development investment) is much less well researched. Existing evidence and strategic assessment of the Horizon Europe funding scheme carried out by the European Parliament, for example, *has* identified widespread stakeholder perceptions of some countries being favoured. Interestingly, perceptions of country favouritism are particularly

³² The author's own depiction adapted from Anholt-Ipsos, *Nation Brands Index: Press Release – Supplement Report*, (Paris: Ipsos, November 2023). https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-10/NBI_2023_Press_Release_Supplemental_Deck_WEB.pdf.

³³ A. Tijani, M. Majeed, K. S. Ofori, and A. Abubakari. 2024. "Country branding research: a decade's systematic review". *Cogent Business & Management* 11 (1): <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2307640>.

strong among less developed countries with weaker country brands, called “widening countries,” which include the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Portugal, as well as additionally Belgium (i.e., a developed country with a relatively strong country brand).³⁴

Research looking into regional and sectoral differences in the ability to secure EU funding (with the EU’s 7th framework programme and the Europe 2020 programme – as predecessors of the current Horizon Europe programme) has found that both the quality of research ecosystems, as well as *reputation* impact country-level research funding success within the EU.³⁵ While many would argue that organisational reputation *should* be a strong predictor of an applicants’ ability to secure prestigious research funding, research on organisational reputation in turn also suggests that country of origin (which is an effective proxy for a country brand³⁶) can also have a significant effect on organisational reputation via liability of foreignness in international contexts.³⁷ Interestingly enough, European Parliament’s strategic assessment of Horizon Europe funding published last year also found that international evaluators may not be as effective as national evaluators in judging the quality of applications, which could be the result of either differences in quality benchmarks and/or potential bias. Supporting the latter, is the EU Commission’s own acknowledgement³⁸ (p. 58):

³⁴ European Parliament, *The Horizon Europe Programme: A strategic assessment of selected items*, (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2024). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/757813/EPRS_STU%282024%29757813_EN.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

³⁵ F. N. Piro, M. Seeber, and L. Wang. 2023. “Regional and sectoral variations in the ability to attract funding from the European Union’s Seventh Framework Program and Horizon 2020”. *Scientometrics* 129 (6): 1493–1521. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-024-04942-3>.

³⁶ Newsweek. 2010, *The World’s Best Companies*. <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/08/15/interactive-infographic-of-the-worldsbest-countries.html>.

³⁷ W. Newbury. 2012. “Waving the flag: the influence of country of origin on corporate reputation,” *The Oxford handbook of corporate reputation*, 240-259. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199596706.013.0012>.

³⁸ European Parliament, *The Horizon Europe Programme: A strategic assessment of selected items*, (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2024). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/757813/EPRS_STU%282024%29757813_EN.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

“The issue of real or potential bias in proposal selection is a reoccurring one, inherited already from the previous framework programme – Horizon 2020. Despite the Commission’s efforts to minimise it through the recent “blind evaluation pilot”, implemented for the Working programme 2023-2024, the current survey results suggest it still is a concern. Further enquires are needed in the future, to assess whether this initiative yielded positive results towards bias minimisation.”

In the next section, I provide some recommendations based on my own funding success with Horizon Europe funding, where I also discuss some ideas on how to best leverage the New Zealand country brand in Horizon Europe funding applications.

5. Some insights and recommendations

Based on first-hand experience in securing international contestable funding from both Europe (i.e., Horizon Europe) and North America (i.e., the U.S. Department of State), I would like to provide some recommendations to New Zealand scholars and their respective organisations, which can hopefully increase their chances of success. I organise these recommendations into two categories: operational/tactical and strategic recommendations:

5.1 Operational/tactical recommendations

- Reach out to your National Contact Point (NCP) for Horizon Europe Funding. At present, New Zealand has 10 National Contact Points of which 6 are specialists covering specific topics aligned with the six designated clusters within Horizon Europe. The main contact

point at the New Zealand Mission to the European Union is Ms. Marry Mulholland (e-mail: nznep@mbie.govt.nz).³⁹

- Given still relatively high level of unfamiliarity with Horizon Europe funding in New Zealand and the associated bureaucracy, it is important to check who the designated person for international/EU research funding applications at your organisation is and to check the level of their experience with Horizon Europe. While at the initial stage such a person will most likely be involved in helping with a provisional budget and ensuring sign-off from the relevant person within your organisation, their role will become much more crucial once the project starts and reporting gets underway.
- New Zealand researchers considering joining on Horizon Europe applications should approach other New Zealand researchers with Horizon Europe funding success. In most cases, successful New Zealand researchers are either of European background or have studied and/or worked for considerable periods of time in Europe. A full list of successful Horizon Europe projects where New Zealand is a participating partner can be found at the European Commission's *Cordis – EU Research Results* webpage.⁴⁰
- When considering participating in Horizon Europe funding applications, it is important to have experienced research organisations with strong organisational reputation (within Europe) and to be part of a coalition of diverse EU member states – some of which should come from large and well-established member states, like, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and/or Austria, while others should come from new(er) member states, like, Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania. The coordinating institution also has to have

³⁹ MBIE, *Horizon Europe Research funding*, (Wellington, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, December 2024). <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/science-and-technology/science-and-innovation/international-opportunities/horizon-europe-research-fund>.

⁴⁰ The EU Commission, *Cordis – EU Research Results*, (Brussels: The EU Commission, January 2025), <https://cordis.europa.eu/search?q=frameworkProgramme%3D%27HORIZON%27%20AND%20relatedRegion%2Fregion%2FeuCode%3D%27NZ%27%20AND%20programme%2Fcode%3D%27HORIZON.2%27&p=1&num=10&srt=Relevance:decreasing>.

appropriate administrative support and should have sufficient experience with EU funding even if it is not Horizon Europe funding.

- Make sure to spend sufficient time on setting up your budget and get a clear understanding from your organisation around teaching buyouts and administrative support. Pay extra attention to the cost of travel from/to New Zealand, which might be considerably higher than within Europe or even for European researchers. Also be mindful of exchange rate fluctuations, as all funding from the EU is in Euros. The weakening of the New Zealand dollar against the Euro can in some ways actually work as an advantage and provide an additional incentive to pursue EU funding. A small change in the exchange rate can easily translate into several tens of thousands of NZD extra funds. Of course, the risk runs both ways. Be realistic with your budget and expect that you will receive under 3% of the project Budget. Given the size of the average Horizon Europe project, even a small share of, let's say, 3% can represent a 0.1 or 0.2 full-time equivalent (FTE) allocation for the duration of the project and provide substantial funding for conference and international travel. Given the symbolic importance and reputational benefits associated with such prestigious international research funding, try and negotiate better teaching and/or research buyouts with your research organisation in New Zealand.
- Keep in mind different academic calendars between Europe and New Zealand, as well as time zone differences for scheduling frequent project meetings. Kindly remind European colleagues of the time difference between New Zealand and Europe and manage online fatigue.
- Share best practices and experience with other New Zealand researchers and organisations. For example, if you do not have people knowledgeable about Horizon

Europe funding within your organisations, reach out to other organisations across New Zealand and specific administrative research staff with funding success.

5.2 Strategic Recommendations

- It is important to understand that the primary motivation of Horizon Europe funding is to advance the competitiveness and prosperity of the EU through research and innovation. Therefore, New Zealand researchers and their organisations need to consider what value can they provide to the EU and show that supporting research in New Zealand is a worthwhile investment. The best way to think about it is that participation of New Zealand researchers is an investment by the EU to benefit the EU by leveraging research expertise in New Zealand within Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe. Such expertise can draw on both proven research expertise in specific areas of research globally (i.e., earthquake research, certain areas of construction, natural conservation, indigenous studies, Antarctic studies) or areas where New Zealand's international reputation is particularly strong (i.e., indigenous governance, political stability, cultural heritage, natural heritage, natural conservation, creative industries, etc.). The New Zealand Story Group regularly assesses international perceptions of New Zealand in key international markets, it is always worth having a look at its publicly available international perceptions surveys.
- It is important to have a clear understanding of the key philosophical principles underlying the functioning of the EU (i.e., human rights, rule of law, diversity, equity and inclusion, circular economy and the Green Deal, human-centric technological advancement, etc.) and the specific priority areas within each of the six clusters under Horizon Europe funding programme. Aligning the strengths of the New Zealand country brand and image (i.e., natural environment, wildlife and conservation, political stability, indigenous rights, low levels of corruption, natural disaster mitigation) with

organisational strengths and specific priority areas within a given cluster can help increase chances of success. Again, it is important to best leverage areas where New Zealand science has competitive or comparative advantages internationally and globally.

- When participating in Horizon Europe applications, New Zealand applicants are advised to search for common touchpoints and possible overlaps between key strength areas of New Zealand's country brand and specific priority areas outlined by the EU.
- Having well-established international networks with recognised European researchers is perhaps the most critical point for Horizon Europe funding success. It is therefore important for individual researchers and their respective organisations in New Zealand to invest in both the maintenance of existing, as well as the creation of new collaboration networks with European researchers. At an operational level, this can be done through attending conferences and workshops in Europe, hosting conferences and/or workshops in New Zealand and maintaining memberships in relevant international organisations and/or academic associations. However, given growing financial constraints among many universities in New Zealand, this is increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, individual researchers also need to be aware of the considerable time investment for maintaining and establishing collaborative relationships with European colleagues. At a strategic level, New Zealand research organisations should consider pooling resources and collaborating in joint bids to host recognised international conferences, while New Zealand researchers should consider applying for Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi Catalyst Seeding funding to organise important international events, like workshops and conferences.
- At present, given that the number of successful Horizon Europe Funding applications with New Zealand partners is still quite limited, there might be a degree of symbolic capital for any Horizon Europe applications with New Zealand collaborators. Such

symbolic capital can, however, only be leveraged through the alignment of the researchers' track record and expertise, areas where New Zealand science has comparative strengths internationally and specific dimensions of the New Zealand country brand.

5.3 Some implications and recommendations in terms of the country brand hexagon

In addition to both tactical and strategic recommendations targeting New Zealand researchers and research organisations, I would also like to point out some theoretical implications related to Anholt's country brand hexagon which relate specifically to international research funding success. The research funding landscape and ecosystem *are* also part of a country's national brand. Given limited resources within the New Zealand research funding landscape, international research funding opportunities, such as Horizon Europe, will play an increasingly important part in the future. Such funding opportunities are linked to its ability to attract top talent and retain it (i.e., the immigration and investment dimension of the hexagon), consistent with a fit-for-purpose governance system and institutional support (i.e., the governance dimension of the hexagon), and are also part of a thriving export sector (i.e., science and education are also export sectors in their own right).

The country brand provides reputational and other benefits in terms of research funding success.⁴¹ However, the relationship is not unidirectional but works also from the bottom up.⁴² While a strong country brand 'trickles down' to organisational reputation, enabling

⁴¹ European Parliament, *The Horizon Europe Programme: A strategic assessment of selected items*, (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2024).
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/757813/EPRS_STU%282024%29757813_EN.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

⁴² W. Newbury. 2012. "Waving the flag: the influence of country of origin on corporate reputation," *The Oxford handbook of corporate reputation*, 240-259. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199596706.013.0012>.

organisations to leverage positive country-of-origin effects in various stakeholder decision-making processes (i.e., consumers, partners, and evaluators of research projects), internationally successful organisations (i.e., research organisations in international research funding) can in turn also help build up a country's reputation through specific elements of the country brand,⁴³ like immigration and investment, governance and exports.

Part of New Zealand's national brand identity and storytelling is also its positioning as a country with great science, world-class education system and a thriving research environment married with innovation.⁴⁴ To support the success of New Zealand researchers and research organizations in international research funding programmes, like Horizon Europe research funding, the New Zealand government and its agencies could consider the following actions and measures:

- Create a registry of successful New Zealand researchers who have secured significant international research funding, including Horizon Europe.
- Mobilise researchers in New Zealand with European background, previous employment in Europe and/or European ancestry, and start using them as a strategic human resource to be leveraged to grow international R&D funding in the function of boosting R&D funding as a percentage of GDP (i.e., getting closer to the 2%). This is because one in four New Zealanders were born overseas.⁴⁵
- Organise an annual networking event for New Zealand researchers who have been successful in Horizon Europe funding and facilitate the sharing of good practices and

⁴³ M. Kang, and S. Yang. (2010). "Comparing effects of country reputation and the overall corporate reputations of a country on international consumers' product attitudes and purchase intentions". *Corporate Reputation Review* 13 (1): 52-62. <https://doi.org/10.1057/crr.2010.1>.

⁴⁴ The New Zealand Story Group, n.d., *Science & Technology*. <https://toolkit.nzstory.govt.nz/assets?tag=Science+%26+Technology>.

⁴⁵ Treasury, *Immigration by the numbers* (Wellington: New Zealand Productivity Commission, April 2022). <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2024-05/pc-inq-is-immigration-by-the-numbers.pdf>.

experiences. Such visibility can prompt others to start thinking about and engage with Horizon Europe funding.

- Provide targeted seeding funding for securing Horizon Europe funding, as part of Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi (i.e., the Catalyst Seed funding mechanism).
- Re-instate MBIE top-up funding for successful Horizon Europe projects with New Zealand partners linked to the culture, creativity and inclusive society cluster, which has been disestablished.
- Strengthen top-up funding and diversify incentives to participate in international research funding, including Horizon Europe. Such incentives needn't just be monetary and could even include a special Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi prize for international research collaboration, as part of its awards' portfolio.
- Better communicate international research funding success as part of the brand New Zealand narrative and storytelling.

6. Conclusion

I hope that my viewpoint has gone beyond merely familiarising the New Zealand research community with Horizon Europe funding and will encourage (more) researchers in New Zealand and their respective organisations to consider applying for Horizon Europe funding – one of the biggest international research funding opportunities available to New Zealand researchers and their organisations.⁴⁶ As the current government focuses on 'consolidating' existing research funding, which it believes it should be 'in the function of economic growth'⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A. Verrall, "*Horizon Europe opens world of opportunities for New Zealand researchers*" (Wellington: New Zealand Government, February 2023). <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/horizon-europe-opens-world-opportunities-new-zealand-researchers>.

⁴⁷ A. Ganley. 2025. "Growth through innovation will be tough without Marsden funding," *Newsroom* (February 10, 2025). <https://newsroom.co.nz/2025/02/10/marsden-cuts-will-block-innovation-in-new-zealand/>.

and as inflation chips away at available existing funding,⁴⁸ New Zealand researchers and research organisations will need to increasingly look beyond research funding in New Zealand and pursue international opportunities. The geographic location of New Zealand is in this regard a huge hindrance, while its global image and reputation are its biggest strengths. While the administrative burden of applying for and participating in a successful Horizon Europe research project should not be underestimated,⁴⁹ the large amount of financial resources available along with the opportunity to collaborate with world-class European researchers is a worthwhile pursuit for New Zealand researchers.

From a country brand perspective, New Zealand researchers and their organisation looking to pursue Horizon Europe funding should consider Anholt's country brand hexagon and understand that a country brand has both a direct impact on funding success in pursuing international research funding, as well as an indirect one through organisational reputation. Prospective New Zealand applicants should consider leveraging the strengths of the New Zealand country brand, like its Māori culture, natural environment and stability of institutions. They should be encouraged to especially participate in Horizon Europe applications where New Zealand might be perceived as an authority, like, research related to political stability and public trust in institutions, integrity and low levels of corruption, the emancipation of indigenous peoples and possible co-governance models, as well as resilience to natural disasters, the treatment of natural entities as legal person and the governance of natural resources shaped by indigenous principles.

If the government is serious about reaching its target of boosting R&D spending to 2% of GDP by 2028, then one of the ways of increasing its share of R&D spending in GDP –

⁴⁸ P. Hunter, J. Paton, K. Krause, and G. Chase, “*A new model for science funding*” (Auckland: The University of Auckland, May 2024). <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2024/05/29/new-model-for-science-funding.html>.

⁴⁹ European Parliament, *The Horizon Europe Programme: A strategic assessment of selected items*, (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2024). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/757813/EPRS_STU%282024%29757813_EN.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

currently at 0.29% of GDP compared to 0.5% of GDP OECD average⁵⁰ – should also be incentivising the New Zealand research community to pursue international funding opportunities, regardless of disciplinary background. In that regard, the government ought to reconsider its decision to discontinue MBIE top-up funding for all successful Horizon Europe projects linked to the culture, creativity and inclusive society, as the amount of top-up funding is quite small and could easily be offset by the benefits coming from such research. It should also consider the reputational impact of its decision to ‘starve out’ social science and humanities research, which can put a dent in New Zealand’s country brand. After the disestablishment of the Marsden social science and humanities panels, Horizon Europe funding should be seen by the current and future governments as an alternative to preserving social sciences and humanities research funding, which is essential for any thriving society.

⁵⁰ P. Hunter, J. Paton, K. Krause, and G. Chase, “*A new model for science funding*” (Auckland: The University of Auckland, May 2024). <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2024/05/29/new-model-for-science-funding.html>.

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