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THE PRACTICE OF NATIONAL STRATEGY

CONCEPTS, GLOBAL LESSONS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

DECEMBER 2025

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The 2024-25 Heywood Fellowship set out to examine how governments come to a national view of what really matters over longer time horizons, the ways governments can best confront and tackle future problems, and how the configuration, mechanisms and capabilities of the state can best enable the pursuit and delivery of long-term outcomes for citizens.

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THE PRACTICE OF NATIONAL STRATEGY

CONCEPTS, GLOBAL LESSONS AND THEIR APPLICATION

In our first paper, *Long-term, National Strategy*, we set out the case for a renewed practice of national strategy-making in the UK. In it, we described what a long-term, national strategy needed to be able to do: achieve a collective understanding of: (i) where a country is coming from — its diagnosis and selection of the key challenges it must face, (ii) where it wants to get to — its objectives, and (iii) how it expects to get there — the assumptions and big bets that it is making. Doing this regularly, we argued, would enable a country to look at itself more clearly, learning and adapting from failure and success, and purposely making and sticking to decisions that — while involving trade-offs — would set it up for long-term strategic success.

We also laid out initial concepts and principles for how long-term national strategy should be approached. A key contention is that long-term national strategy should be thought of as a practice. Current practices — the routines, processes, behaviours performed by institutions and individuals — are not proving sufficient for the challenges we face, and we need a new strategic practice: more long-term, outward-looking, more 'national' in approach. The project's aim is to design this future practice, including the institutions, capabilities, processes, frameworks and behaviours required to deliver it, and to publish this in the form of a playbook – *The National Strategy Playbook*.

Any process of design needs 'design principles' — the foundational guidelines around which blueprints for new institutions, capabilities, processes and practices will be developed. This is important, not only to ensure the intention, coherence and integrity of the design, but also to enable transparency about the purpose and values for which institutions and practices are being developed. This will allow for the fundamentals to be debated as much as the ultimate solutions, which will themselves be of a practical nature.

A step towards our ultimate aim, therefore, is to elucidate the concepts behind a renewed practice of long-term national strategy-making — the characteristics that should provide the foundational guidelines for any future design. We ventured some of the components in our initial paper, and have delved more deeply into what would be required from a devolved, local and regional perspective in our paper *Place: Thinking of National Strategy from the Ground Up*.

As well as considering the needs of places around the UK, we have sought to learn from the practices of other countries; what can we draw from those countries with rich strategic practices of their own, and what can we learn from specific instances of strategic transformations in other countries and the capabilities required to deliver them? We draw from visits and studies of over a dozen countries — some very similar to the UK and some intentionally different. These practitioners may not

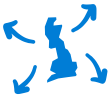
have labelled their actions as 'national strategy,' but we are interested in the features of their approaches and what made them successful — and how those lessons might apply elsewhere. We also draw from our literature review, interviews, roundtables and concept-testing with practitioners in the UK, from government, civil society and business. From this, we have identified eight **characteristics** of long-term national strategy-making which are described in Section 1.

In the section that follows, we unpack each of these characteristics in more practical detail. We review case studies from around the world — examples of specific achievements, practices or experiences that embody or shed light on different aspects of the practice of national strategy.

We conclude by summarising what we can learn, advancing our view of 17 specific **design features** that need to be worked into any practice of national strategy, as well as laying the groundwork for system reforms we think could help transform democracies like the UK to be more long-termist, more strategic and more capable at navigating the challenges ahead.

SECTION 1: The eight characteristics of national strategy

1. **Rooted in inheritance and comparative analysis**
   Only through an understanding of history and how we got where we are, by confronting embedded assumptions, and being honest about our strengths and weaknesses, can the state solve major policy problems and build a successful approach to the future. We will need to:
   - Debate the legacy of the last period and decide whether to continue or diverge from our course
   - Commonly and critically understand our strategic institutions, cultures and capabilities to learn and adapt them to new circumstances and not be inhibited by them
   - Use history — our own and others' — to better ground our choices in an understanding of how past decisions shaped present constraints and future possibilities.



2. **Outward-facing**
   States need to root strategies in an honest understanding of their place in the world, requiring clear-headed assessments of relative performance and (dis)advantage in relation to other countries to identify trends, opportunities and threats. We will need to:
   - Understand — through studying other countries — our comparative strengths and weaknesses, and our strategic advantages and disadvantages. Use this to understand our position and objectives in a competitive environment
   - Build a shared narrative that allows us to confidently and collectively describe our place in the world and the direction we're heading as a first step towards moving in common directions for national purposes.

3. **Future-oriented**

   Many of the challenges we face require a strategic time horizon of 15–20 years. A mindset of accountability for problems, benefits and returns on longer horizons enables confrontation of challenges, preparation for opportunities, and building ambition alongside delivery. We need to:

   - Take a longer-term view across society — in governments, businesses and communities — understanding what the likely trends will be, where we want to head and how to get there
   - Build a shared endeavour that strives to improve, catch-up, innovate; and gives actors across society a common sense of direction
   - Build an equally shared sense of stewardship for the long-term, particularly in Parliament.

4. **Confident with uncertainty**

   Governments need sophisticated relationships with uncertainty. Many trends are highly certain; others are highly volatile. Strategies and toolkits for dealing with different types of uncertainty are needed to avoid missing opportunities or wrong-footing ourselves. We need to:

   - Not treat everything as uncertain but instead seek to understand and explain how certain we are; and decide our risk appetite, designing strategies accordingly
   - Use scenarios — normative and particularly exploratory — to build a collective understanding of the choices we have, the trade-offs they involve and to reimagine futures beyond the confines of trend lines.

5. **Enabling proper choices**

Expectations of the state are higher than ever, encouraging (1) a sense that choices aren't real, and (2) a disenchantment which is driven by poor delivery._States need mechanisms to confront and make genuine trade-offs and frameworks to align and integrate objectives. We need to:

- Be forced to have more open and honest conversations about the trade-offs involved in some of our most challenging long-term choices
- Have institutions, routines, practices, and cultures that allow us to compete and then make big bets about the future and pivot to them effectively
- Have systems that force us to identify a clear sense of national prioritisation about what is important and what is less important; and ensure that our priorities cohere and work together as a unified approach and narrative
- Use the priorities of national strategy as an organising framework, from which other strategies — fiscal and spatial, place-based and policy-specific — can flow.

6. **Open**

The process of national strategy should be one of meaningfully engaging the whole state, building transparency, accountability and capability in all institutions including Parliament; with judgements about prioritisation, future scenarios and uncertainty elucidated and aired publicly. We need to:

- Meaningfully engage the population in our diagnosis, our selection of challenges and objectives and the competing of the big bets we're taking to get there
- Ensure national strategy-making is integrated with democratic processes and decision-making, rather than sitting atop it
- Use national strategy to tell and retell a national story that recognises the value of all our national capacities in achieving collective goals.

7. **Embracing rapid learning**
   Strategic systems must learn rapidly from success and failure, adopting and integrating lessons across government, business, and civil society. They must spot when strategies aren't working, acknowledge this openly through robust feedback, and move on. We need to:
   - Return time and again to our long-term view, our diagnoses and choice of goals, and our strategies to get there. Reviewing them as part of a routine, dynamically updating them to course correct in an uncertain future, and learning from the mistakes and missteps we will make
   - Do all of this in the open and with an open-source method, to enable the public to trust the process but moreover to enable the public — through the press and Parliament — to hold all actors to account for contributing to our shared future.

8. **National endeavour**
   National strategy means fostering and organising the effort of various parts of the state — subnational government, private sector & civil society — towards concerted aims. Geographically located strategies might be as important as 'nationwide' ones. We need to:
   - Understand that government is only one actor among many, and so conduct national strategy as a genuinely joint endeavour with the national actors who control the nation's capacities — business, civil society, unions, devolved and local government, citizens, communities
   - Be honest about the fact that national strategy will have uneven consequences across places, and diagnose in a place-based way, while enabling places to set and pursue their own ambition
   - Use national strategy to find areas of settlement across governance tiers, that enable challenging conversations about differing priorities and trade-offs and that sets objectives that outlast the layered timelines of local, devolved and national election cycles.

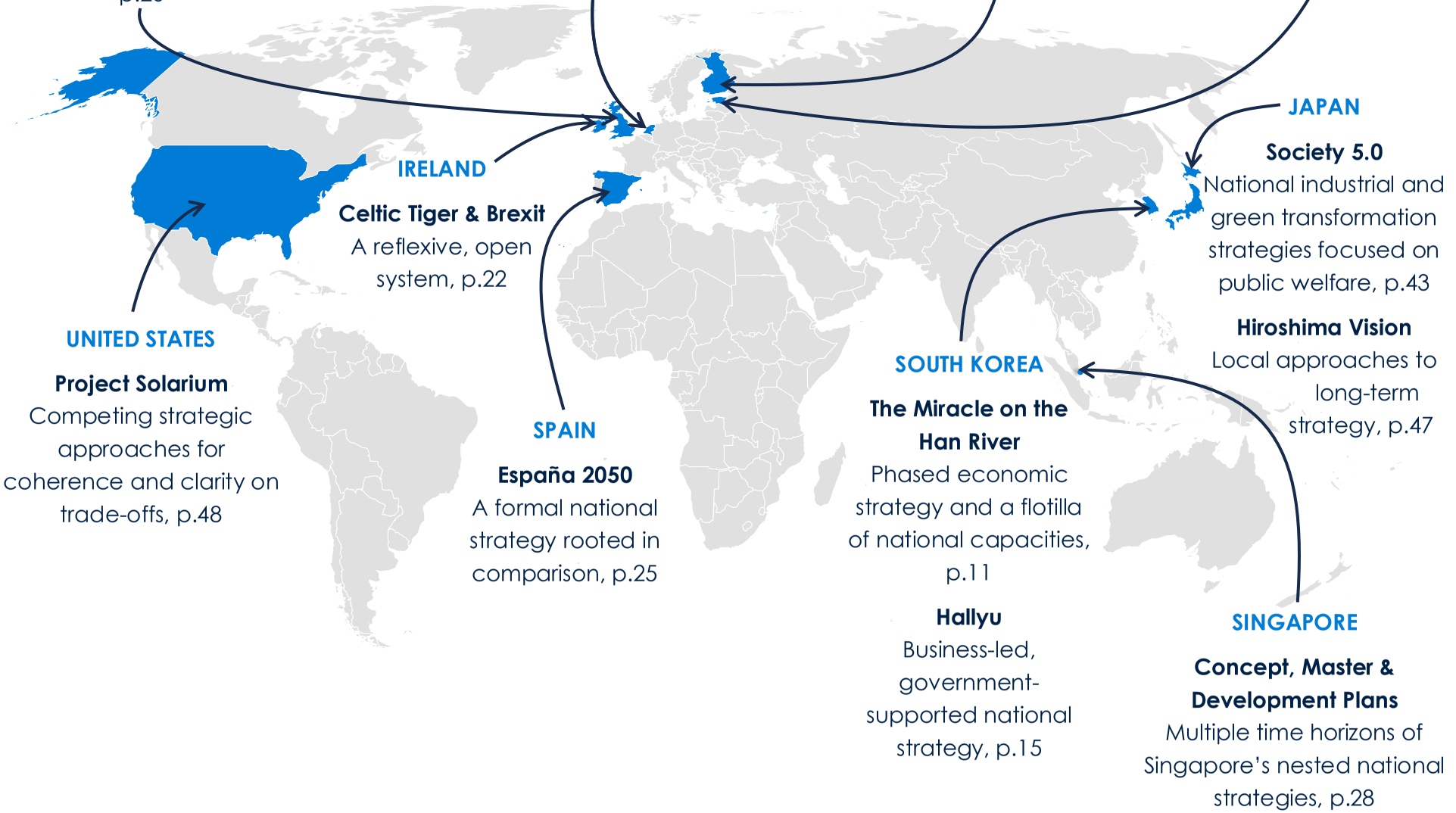
These characteristics describe how we need our institutions to frame thinking and actions. They relate to the skills, outlooks and experiences we need to equip our policy and decision-makers with. They are the guidelines that determine the processes we must use to create national strategy and they describe the eight key features of the practice of national strategy.

SECTION 2: Case studies

Our studies of ten different countries focused not only on deliberate, highly intentional efforts to set a national strategy, but also on moments where nations exhibited the methods, cultures, systems, processes and practices of national strategy. Many of the examples are familiar — much has been written on *hallyu* or the Celtic Tiger — but our angle was different. As we set out in our first paper, our concern is *how* to do long-term national strategy: the practical approaches and components required for success. To that end, we asked politicians, policymakers and academics not so much why a path was chosen, nor whether it was the right one, but how choices were made: what techniques were used, how the public was involved, how long-term objectives were set and sustained, and how institutions were designed to support them.

We visited Japan, South Korea, Spain, and the Netherlands, conducted virtual visits to Ireland and Singapore, and used extensive desk research to study Estonia, Finland, and the US. Our objectives in studying each country varied: in Japan, to understand the culture of long-term strategy-making; in South Korea and Ireland, to explore different interpretations of cooperation with industry and workers; in Spain and the Netherlands, to examine institutions and procedure. Some countries resemble the UK — Ireland shares a common history, Spain and South Korea wrestle with similarly highly contested politics. Some are intentionally more distinct — Estonia is much smaller and newer as a democracy; Japan differs culturally and politically.

All are democracies. Our contention is that while democracies face the constant pressures of election cycles, shifting mandates and contested politics, this need not be an obstacle to long-term national strategy. Many are demonstrating the opposite: finding ways to set priorities, sustain long-term investment, and mobilise across state and society. They are also experimenting with democratic innovations designed to strengthen this capacity. Democracy, then, does not preclude strategy, but rather demands distinctive methods and practices to make it work.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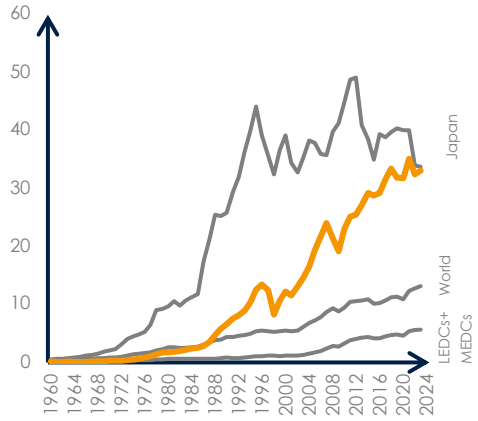
South Korea: the Miracle on the Han River — phased economic strategy and a flotilla of national capacities

In 1953, war-ravaged South Korea was one of the world's poorest countries — poorer than the North, with a GNI per capita of $67. Today, it is among the world's richest with a GNI of nearly $37,000; and this has resulted in dramatic improvements in social indicators, e.g. infant mortality fell from 22.2% in 1950 to 0.2% by 2020.[1]

Figure 1 — GDP per capita: **South Korea** and **selected comparators** ($'000s at current prices)[1]

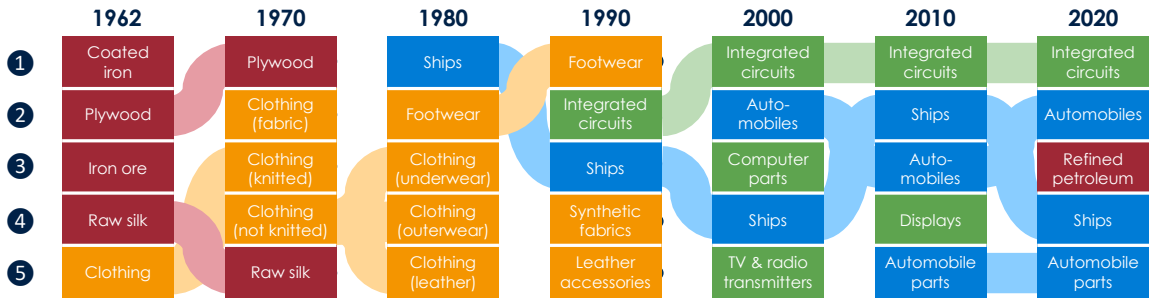


We heard this transformation — which started under the authoritarian administration of Park Chung Hee but accelerated after his assassination in 1979 — rested on three characteristics of Korean strategic practice: (i) the use of phased national strategies to build a world-class economy in distinct stages; (ii) rigorous self-awareness of comparative strengths and weaknesses guiding policy choices; and (iii) mobilisation of a coordinated "flotilla" of national capacities to execute these strategies.

Phased development and cycles of reassessment

From 1962 to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, South Korea implemented seven five-year economic plans, each focusing on successive industrial priorities, sequentially climbing the value chain. The first focused on the development of basic industries such as agriculture and mining; the second on establishing export markets in chemical, steel and machinery sectors; the third marked the start of Korea's drive towards heavy and chemical industries; the fourth weaning the economy off aid and towards self-sustained and foreign direct investment; the fifth the start of considering welfare as well as growth; the sixth saw moves towards consumer electronics; the seventh towards quality education and high technology.[2] This strategy is reflected in its top exports (see Figure 2).[3] [4] Each leap demanded higher engineering skills enabled by a rapidly advancing education system and mass crowding of investment from business, government and abroad.

Figure 2 — South Korea's top five exports by volume: **raw & processed materials**, **textiles**, **transport equipment**, **tech**[3 4]



If they were strategically phased, they were also remarkably coherent over time too. All:

- **Were mercantilist.** They focused on growing a self-sustained economy driven by Korean businesses (especially *chaebols* — large, family-controlled South Korean business conglomerates) and expected that wealth to trickle down.
- **Centred on attracting foreign investment.** Disparate stakeholders told us the same story of a resource-poor nation that cannot exist as an island but needs the flow of ideas and (particularly) resources from competitors.
- **Targeted human capital**. As Korea's development relentlessly climbed up the value-chain, we repeatedly heard 'all it had going for it' was its highly educated, creative, industrious people. Education reform has therefore been as crucial as any other policy in its success story.
- **Were intentionally protectionist**. Even after IMF-mandated liberalisation, Korea's strong non-tariff barriers such as data localisation rules shield domestic firms. This has enabled companies like Coupang — the 'Amazon of South Korea' — to develop and scale without competition from the global industry leader.

The methods they chose to use in creating their five-year economic plans showed the same pattern: progression with overarching coherence. All relied on outside expertise and included public forums; all considered flexibility to be paramount — this explained their quinquennial reassessment but also the revised plans that popped up between major revisions; all focused on coordinating diverse parts of the Korean economy — government and private, foreign and domestic, between ministries and *chaebols*; and all showed remarkable commitment in their implementation by these diverse actors.[2] The first few were characterised by a government-dictated economy. Such was the relative economic power of government that they operated in a command-and-control way. As the economy expanded, financial power was more distributed and so the latter plans were more indicative and target-oriented: created with and for both government and industry. In preparation for OECD accession and during the IMF-mandated restructuring after the Asian Financial Crisis, South Korea adopted economy-wide liberalisation

reforms. Financial deregulation and liberalisation of capital markets were prioritised, reducing the state's capacity to enforce centralised economic planning.

Self-awareness

These economic national strategies were rooted in a deep understanding of Korea's place in the world. It was remarkable how clearly and consistently interlocutors described Korea's strengths and weaknesses: it was strong on human capital, weak on natural resources; strong on creativity, initially strong but weakening on intergenerational relationships; had strong profit-turning conglomerates, was not generating the desired level of innovation start-ups.

This self-awareness was described to us as rooted in geography: its position — at the end of the Korean Peninsula, between China and Japan, and with North Korea cutting it off from the rest of the Asian continent — presents significant challenges but also opportunities. South Korea's complex and changing relationships with China and Japan are of particular interest: at times very collaborative, and at others more competitive or even fractious. But South Korea's close study of its two larger neighbours also enables it to compare itself to them, to take advantage of potential gaps in the market, or adapt its approach.

Throughout much of its modern economic history, South Korea has used such self-awareness by replicating and adapting the success of others. After the Korean War, it consciously drew on Japan's model, driving growth through exports and fostering large family-owned corporations, the *chaebols,* modelled on Japan's *zaibatsu*.[5]

This strategy of replication has enabled South Korea to leapfrog competitors in key sectors. Today it outspends Japan on R&D,[6] with the semiconductor industry as the clearest example. What began in the 1960s as Japanese and US firms outsourcing low-cost labour to Korea became a national growth engine. The *chaebols* recognised the opportunity and, under President Park's push to move from low-skilled manufacturing to higher-valued industries like chemicals and electronics, made hard choices about specialisation. They built independent manufacturing capacity rather than relying on outside expertise or investment. Firms such as Samsung and SK, which began in dried fish and textiles respectively, transformed into two of the world's largest semiconductor producers. By the late 1990s, Korea's semiconductor industry had overtaken Japan's.[7]

Mobilisation of national capacities

If the Korean semiconductors story is one of an outward-looking self-awareness, it is equally one of a joint endeavour between Korea's national capacities. Critical to success was the strong sense that everybody — governments (of different colours), *chaebols*, small businesses, individuals and society itself — were all closely aligned and driven towards a common goal of development — described to us as a "flotilla" of actors rowing in the same direction. This is most clearly evident in the close relationship between government and business: the five-year plans

demanded a strong, shared export discipline, driven by a joint recognition that, with a small domestic market, global trade was essential.

But this mobilisation extended beyond the state–business nexus. Citizens themselves were bound into the project through a culture of generational sacrifice: the belief that present effort and hardship would pay off for future generations and for the nation as a whole. The 1998 Gold Collection Campaign during the Asian Financial Crisis illustrates this powerfully: 3.5 million people donated 227 tons of family gold worth $2.1 billion, enabling Korea to repay the IMF early and symbolising extraordinary solidarity across government, banks, media, and civil society.[8]

National identity reinforced this flotilla effect. Successive slogans such as *Dynamic Korea* and *Team Korea* may seem vague, but domestically they helped mobilise pride and discipline. Over time, Korea's self-image shifted — from industrious, to dynamic, to creative — while retaining deep traditions of meritocratic governance and cultural sophistication.[9] Today that identity fuses a globally admired pop culture (see below) with a deep ethic of striving, binding citizens and firms into a shared national brand.

The flotilla was never static. In the 1960s and 1970s, government held the lead, directing industrial policy through the five-year plans. By the 1980s and 1990s, power was more balanced with business; and since the Asian Financial Crisis, the private sector has increasingly dominated, with *chaebols* no longer dependent on state support and government now reliant on their global success. The dismantling of the Economic Planning Board and end of the five-year plan cycle marked the end of state-led industrial planning.[10] Yet the culture of coordinated endeavour — actors working in specialised but aligned roles, adapting collectively to shifting priorities — has endured. It remains one of the defining features of Korea's national strategy.

South Korea: Hallyu — business-led, government-supported national strategy

If Korea's national economic and industrial strategy was about the state leading, making choices and working with business, its cultural strategy could be viewed as more of a team effort, with government spotting the opportunity presented by Korea's unique cultural output and supporting its continued growth, rather than spearheading growth in this sector from the beginning.

Although the meteoric rise of Korean culture since the late 1990s came as a surprise to many, it has arguably been centuries in the making. We heard from sector experts that Korea had a well-established tradition as entertainers stretching back centuries, driven by their geography and the mix of influences received from across east Asia. This tradition led to a strong sense of Korean culture that transitioned into modern mediums like TV and music, and was keenly consumed by the domestic market and the large Korean diaspora towards the end of the twentieth century. We also heard that modern K-Culture started both as a defensive, domestic response — pushing back against dominant US and Japanese cultural influences — as well as a way to connect diaspora households around the world back to Korea. This strong foundation presented an opportunity for international growth that was recognised by Korea's cultural sector before any significant support from government.

K-Culture's global spread took more than two decades, expanding first to China and East Asia, to the Middle East, and eventually Europe and the Americas. Both industry and government quickly recognised its export potential and the utility of a non-manufacturing economic base (it was once noted that the first *Jurassic Park* film earned as much revenue as 1.5m Hyundai cars). In 2001, the government created the Korean Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) to promote K-Culture, backed it with trillions of won in investment, offered loans and tax incentives, and reformed IP law to better protect Korean creatives. Furthermore, as the industry matured and government recognised how much of a national asset K-Culture was, the depth and regularity of dialogues between industry and government grew. Government also stayed the course and consistently supported the industry despite some content having challenging themes or levying criticism at Korean society, which may have led other governments to curtail support. Experts familiar with Korea's cultural sector noted that this reflects the role that culture played in Korea's democratisation over the 1980s.

Since the initial wave of growth in the late 1990s, K-Culture's international profile and popularity was deliberately engineered and sustained by the private sector and government. Furthermore, K-Culture producers have adapted and evolved their offering to appeal to specific markets — we heard examples of K-Drama storylines that were amended to better appeal in particular countries, as well as more noticeable examples of K-Pop artists taking specific steps to appeal to a global audience, like greater use of English in songs and marketing, and more regular

performances outside Korea, particularly in Europe and America. Today, K-Culture is Korea's leading export driver, generating $13.2 billion in export revenues in 2022 and employing over 600,000 people.[11] [12] It has fuelled tourism and the rise of complementary sectors like beauty and food.

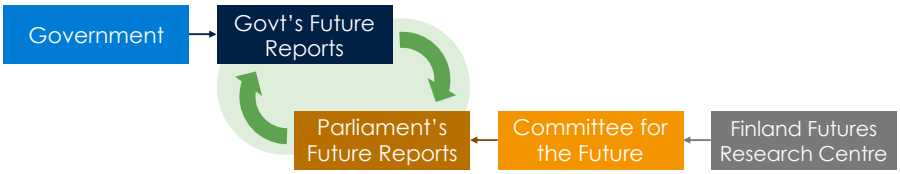
Finland: The Committee of the Future — societal stewardship of the long-term

Finland's approach to thinking about the future and setting specific priorities and objectives in response differs from Korea's due to the different ways in which the practice of national strategy was developed in both states. In Korea, national strategy was born from the need to rebuild from a devasting war, unite the population against a persisting threat, and was defined by President Park's leadership and autocratic rule. In Finland, the decentralised and transparent nature of democratic, parliamentary Finnish politics clearly had a strong influence on the early adoption of systems to openly and collectively think about and plan for the future. This approach highlights several features that should be incorporated into any future UK practice.

Finland is the pacesetter in integrating futures thinking into the core institutions of the state, with the most advanced public foresight system in the world. Its origins lie in a concern — first raised by academics and later shared across political parties in the *Eduskunta*, Finland's parliament — about the short-termism of policy-making. While it initially faced opposition by members of government it has now gained pseudo-constitutional status.

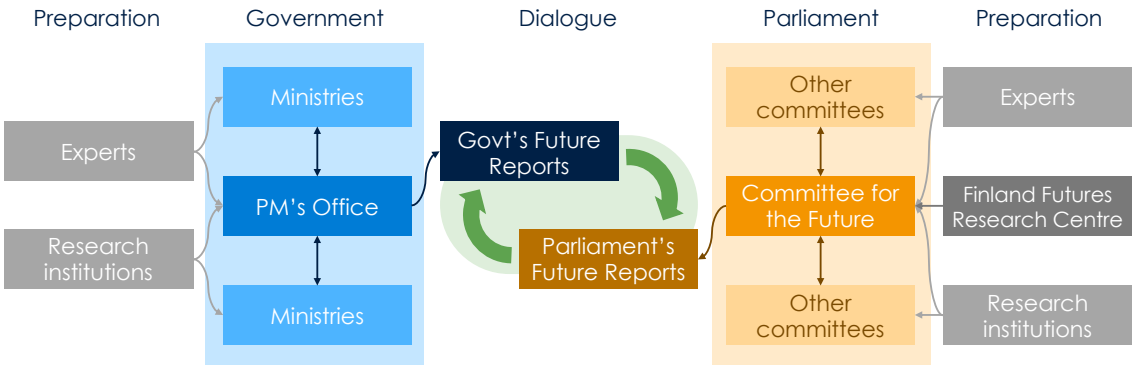
Once each electoral term, the government produces a report on the future, to which the Committee for the Future responds. The Finland Futures Research Centre — the 'permanent advisor' of the Committee — has existed since 1992 and is a world-leading institution on futures research partly because of its institutional links. It is entirely independent of government or parliament, funded by its host university and research grants.[13] In this way, these democratic and independent institutions are reliably, cyclically in open dialogue about the future (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3 — Simplified map of Finland's futures ecosystem (adapted from Heinonen 2020[14])



Over time, the Committee's and Research Centre's reputations have grown and their remits expanded. The Committee now contributes reports and statements to inquiries led by other committees. The Research Centre too is commissioned by other committees, central and local government and other private and research bodies. Around these two institutions, a busy and mature futures ecosystem has emerged — more diverse, evidence-led, and interconnected. While the procedural, future-focused dialogue between parliament and government remains at the core of Finland's model, this now sits within a more organic proliferation of thinking and spreading strategic ideas about the long-term across this evolving (and messy) landscape (see Fig. 4).[15]

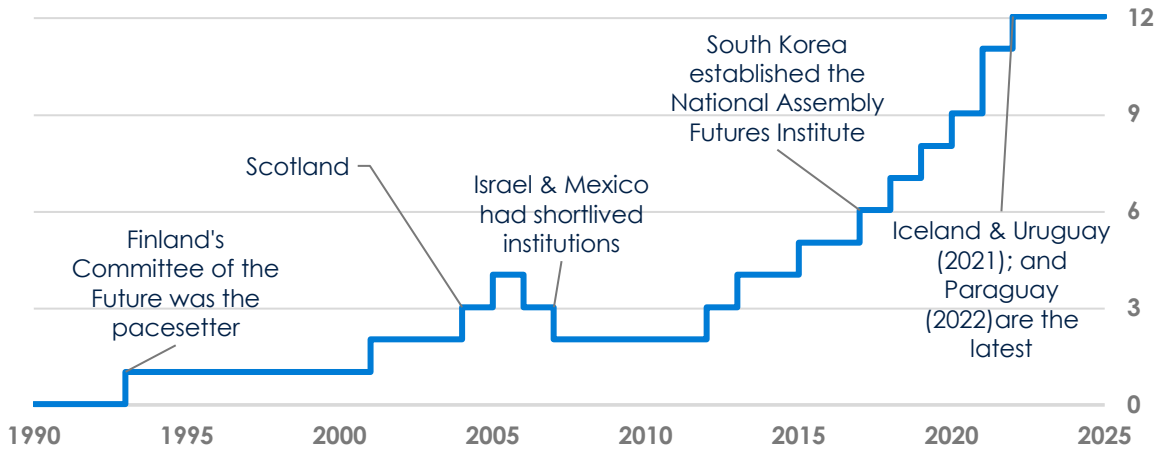
Figure 4 — More mature map of Finland's futures ecosystem (adapted from Heinonen 2020[14])



Beyond the innovative institutions, rhythms and practices of the Finnish state, it is also a culture of guardianship of the future that pervades these institutions and the people that comprise them. Those institutions help shape that culture: power is relatively fragmented within the executive (Finland tends to be governed by broad, diverse, yet stable coalitions); between executive and the legislature (powerful parliamentary committees); and between the executive and the bureaucracy (a highly expert, well-regarded, tenured and semi-independent civil service). But it is also in the perspectives those actors have. In Finland, "commitment to long-term perspectives has become embedded in institutions" because success is defined and measured in comparative long-term ways.[16]

Alternative parliamentary mechanisms

Figure 5 — Number of legislatures with future-focused committees or institutions[15 17]



While committees of the future are becoming more and more common (see Fig. 5), Finland's mechanisms are not the only parliamentary methods being pursued internationally. In New Zealand, for instance, the Public Service Act 2020 gives departmental chief executives an explicit duty to steward the Crown's medium- and long-term interests.[18] The aim is to counter short-termism by safeguarding the state's ability to serve future governments and citizens, and to maintain the sustainability of the system of government itself. In practice, chief executives must

support ministers to steward the long-term public interest and exercise an independent stewardship role on behalf of Parliament and the public. An example of the latter is the requirement to produce independent *Long-term Insight Briefings* every three years: reports laid before Parliament. These set out to identify and describe medium- and long-term* trends, risks, and opportunities facing New Zealand, along with possible policy responses.[19] [20]

* Defined in guidance as, "ten years should be the beginning of the medium- to long-term period".[20]

The UK: the Climate Change Act 2008 — institutions and routines as commitment devices

Finland's (and New Zealand's) parliaments assert the role of thinking about the long-term as theirs, and through the use of regular cycles, routinely reassess this thinking in the open. For an example of a legislature taking on a role in ensuring long-term strategies actually happen, we can look closer to home.

The UK's 2008 Climate Change Act offers an example of national strategy backed by institutional architecture designed to endure.[21] At its core was the legal requirement for successive governments to reduce emissions in line with long-term targets through a series of quinquennial carbon budgets. To maintain discipline across electoral cycles, the Act established the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC), tasked with advising on and proposing future carbon budgets, tracking progress, and publicly scrutinising government performance.

This institutional setup created a system of external accountability and internal pressure: ministers were required to respond to CCC recommendations and publish sectoral strategies aligned with the latest carbon budget. Over time, this structure helped normalise net zero planning across departments and different levels of government and sustain strategic consistency through political transitions. While governments retain discretion over how to act, the carbon budgets and CCC reports have served as a 'ratchet' — embedding a culture of continuity and reinforcing the state's commitment to its long-term decarbonisation trajectory.

As a result, the UK has decarbonised to an impressive degree. The UK was the first country in the world to embed legally binding carbon budgets and they have been stuck to: the UK has cut emissions by over 50 percent below 1990 levels and met its first three carbon budgets (and is on track to exceed the fourth).[22] The courts have upheld the legality of this position, forcing governments to strengthen plans and its 2019 amendment elevating the target to net zero by 2050 strengthened its ambition. Even as the Committee on Climate Change warn that acceleration must happen and public sentiment seems to be waning from its 2019 high, the UK remains among the highest-performers in indices such as the Climate Change Performance Index.[23]

Involving the public — Climate Assembly UK

Through the Climate Change Act, Parliament forced action with significant costs in the present — in society as well as for government — to mitigate against harm far into the future. It was enabled by a "competitive consensus": politically, all three major parties subscribed enthusiastically to the purpose of the Act, resulting in a highly ambitious commitment, significant legitimacy, and a strong sense of momentum.[24] But this didn't make the incredibly challenging trade-offs any easier to square in public, particularly when the Climate Change Act was upgraded to mandate the UK meet net zero by 2050.

This was the thinking behind Climate Assembly UK which brought together 108 people, creating a representative microcosm of the UK, to discuss how the UK could reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. The assembly was commissioned by six House of Commons Select Committees in 2019 and took place over six weekends, first in person and then online, over 2020. At the assembly, participants learnt about climate change and how the UK can address it, took time to discuss this with one another, and then made recommendations about what should happen. The assembly provided a report to Parliament,[25] which resulted in a number of subsequent committee inquiries. As with other deliberative and participative exercises, the assembly had impacted the views and behaviours of assembly members, particularly around their strength of concern around climate change and its impacts.[26] It also impacted public debate — its conclusions and recommendations were included in the Sixth Carbon Budget which also called for further participative forums on climate change noting that the assembly,

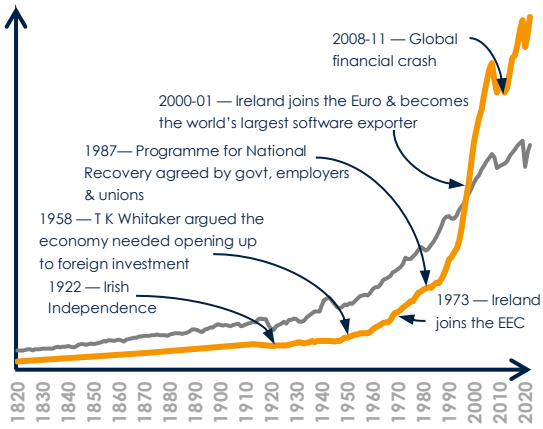
> shows that if people understand what is needed and why, if they have options and can be involved in decision-making processes, they will support the transition to Net Zero.[27]

And several select committees integrated the assembly's recommendations into their own.[28]

Ireland: The Celtic Tiger and Brexit — a reflexive, open system

Ireland's national strategic history over the last 70 years offers several practical lessons, particularly about how to generate, inculcate and iterate big ideas.

Figure 6 — GDP per capita (2011 international dollars): **Ireland** and the **UK**[29]



Ireland's economic trajectory followed a similarly remarkable trend to South Korea's: transformed since the 1980s. In 1989, GDP per capita was $10,760 (the lowest in the EU bar Greece); by 2024, it had reached $103,500 (second only to Luxembourg) — see Fig 6.[29] This 'Celtic Tiger' phenomenon was not an overnight leap, but the result of a long-term strategy first authored in the 1950s: consistent focus on export-led growth, deregulation, EU integration, and deep education reform.

Openness to new ideas

Many of these ideas (often attributed to the Secretary of the Irish Department of Finance and, later, Governor of the Central Bank, T K Whitaker) were slow-burn in nature, emerging from a close and consistent relationship between Irish politicians, bureaucrats and academics. Even today, political commentators describe a cultural attitude towards independent advice that differs markedly from the UK. Irish governments frequently commission independent, trusted figures — or democratic initiatives like citizens assemblies — to provide advice, but feel little obligation to agree with it, often rejecting recommendations outright. This contrasts with the UK's preference for unity of message: governments feel compelled to endorse independent advice, which shapes how, and how often they seek it (and who they seek it from). Counterintuitively, Ireland's cultural confidence to disagree fosters a more dynamic strategic environment. Ideas are aired, debated, allowed to mature in public view and, in time, often resurface in future manifestos or policy decisions.

And so it was with the economic and education reforms of the Celtic Tiger. Rather than dramatic shifts, Ireland leveraged small margins — showing how small, well-timed policy choices can amplify structural advantages — especially for smaller, globally exposed states. With an English-speaking population and a strong US diaspora, Ireland faced outward by necessity, acutely aware of its dependence on international markets. Rather than attempting sweeping reform, it made calculated moves that gave it a consistent edge: reducing corporate tax early to signal long-term competitiveness, streamlining regulation to attract global capital, and investing in higher education to meet the needs of multinationals. These decisions were not isolated — they were layered over Ireland's exogenous characteristics in a

coherent strategy that combined structural self-awareness with a sharp, outward-looking understanding of where small advantages could be turned into global strengths.

Collective decision-making

A key strength lay in its routines of collective decision-making. From the late 1980s through the early 2000s, Ireland used a model of social partnership to guide national economic strategy. Facing stagnation and high unemployment, successive governments convened structured agreements between employers, trade unions, farming groups and the state to shape medium-term goals. These deals tackled hard issues — wage restraint, tax reform, education investment — in return for clear policy commitments.

The approach helped make explicit the difficult trade-offs needed to restore competitiveness and attract investment. For example, agreements in the 1990s involved public-sector pay restraint in exchange for increased spending on education and infrastructure. While not all sides agreed on every detail, the clarity of objectives and the public nature of the negotiation process fostered stability and collective buy-in.

Social partnership didn't eliminate tension — but it framed national priorities in a way that made disagreement constructive, and helped stakeholders align their own strategies around a shared national direction. The formal social partnership model, though ended post-2008, fostered habits of consensus among government, employers, and unions. These built trust and shared responsibility, turning economic policy into a national endeavour. In turn, innovations like citizens' assemblies and referenda reinforced these routines, embedding a culture of collective ownership.

Actively learning and applying strategic lessons

Ireland's strategy has shown both consistency and adaptability. While its core direction remains recognisable from early strategies, major events, notably the 2008 crash, reframed its economic model, broadened growth drivers, and loosened its formal corporatist structures. But its outward-facing, anticipatory posture, honed in crisis, proved crucial in preparing for future challenges like Brexit.

Indeed, multiple commentators described the strong causal relationship between Ireland's experience of the Great Recession in 2008 and its highly successful strategy in negotiating Brexit. The crash forced a deep strategic reorientation, pushing the Irish state to adopt a more anticipatory, outward-looking stance in order to recover and return to economic growth. This muscle — to think long, and act early — had been built over a decade, and was deployed quickly when Brexit emerged. Ireland began planning for Brexit long before the UK or EU governments did. It sought to co-opt its corporatist networks, reshaped during the financial crash, to understand the likely impacts and therefore its key defensive interests. And even before the vote, it was already using its diplomatic networks to ensure it would have the support of the

EU and the US to its key position — that Ireland would remain an EU member state with single market access and, simultaneously, that the border with Northern Ireland should not form any impediment to the movement of goods or people.

The discipline of this message unified the country behind a single stance: a hard border would be disastrous, and any solution must preserve Ireland's place in the single market and seamless cross-border life. With this focus, Ireland made concessions elsewhere to secure unified EU backing for keeping the border central. This produced a united front across farmers, tech, unions, employers and all major parties. It then used its full diplomatic reach to secure EU and US alignment. Every single EU country's Europe Minister was brought to the border to see its invisibility; as was Nancy Pelosi.

Spain: *España 2050* — a formal national strategy rooted in comparison

Ireland's culturally strategically outward-looking perspective – its ability to understand its place in a future world and to influence global players to make this happen – was a core part of its success. Spain's national strategy, produced in 2020, provides a similarly outward-looking but more formal and procedural method of doing this in a country that had little recent history of doing so, providing valuable lessons to the UK.

Whereas some countries develop a specific strategic vision or understand their strengths or areas of relative advantage compared to others organically, Spain's *España 2050* provides a valuable example of how countries can think about and set priorities for the future in a more structured and rigorous manner. *España 2050* is described as:

> A collective intelligence and strategic foresight exercise that pursues two goals:
> - To improve our understanding of the social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities that Spain will face in the coming decades
> - To generate, through a multi-stakeholder discussion, a shared vision of the country we want to become in the future, so we can set priorities, coordinate efforts, and guarantee the prosperity and well-being of our citizens in the coming decades.

The exercise was led by the National Office for Foresight and Strategy (located within the Office of the Prime Minister), who engaged and worked with over 100 experts with different backgrounds, perspectives and areas of expertise to develop España 2050. In its own words, *España 2050* provides:

- A diachronic and forward-looking analysis of nine major challenges that Spain will have to overcome between now and mid-century in order to draw level with the most advanced countries in Europe;
- 200 policy actions to achieve this; and
- A dashboard of 50 quantitative goals and indicators for designing lines of action, taking specific measures, and monitoring progress over the coming years.

Development of *España 2050* was divided into two phases. In the first phase, the Office examined previous trends in Spain and Europe and used foresight techniques such as megatrends analysis, scenario planning and horizon scanning to project possible future trends to create "a range of future scenarios… to serve as a basis for reflection and strategic conversation." The Office developed two core scenarios on which to base discussion and planning: a baseline scenario which assumes past trends continue into the future; and a desired scenario that assumes changes that enable Spain to meet its objective of catching up with high performing EU countries. In the second phase, the Office used backcasting to develop a roadmap that would allow Spain to progress from its current state to its desired scenario. Building on this roadmap, the *España 2050* report sets out the key challenges currently facing Spain and, for each challenge, puts forward a set of goals and indicators to drive improvement that together would enable Spain to reach the desired scenario.

The importance of narrative and vision to national strategy

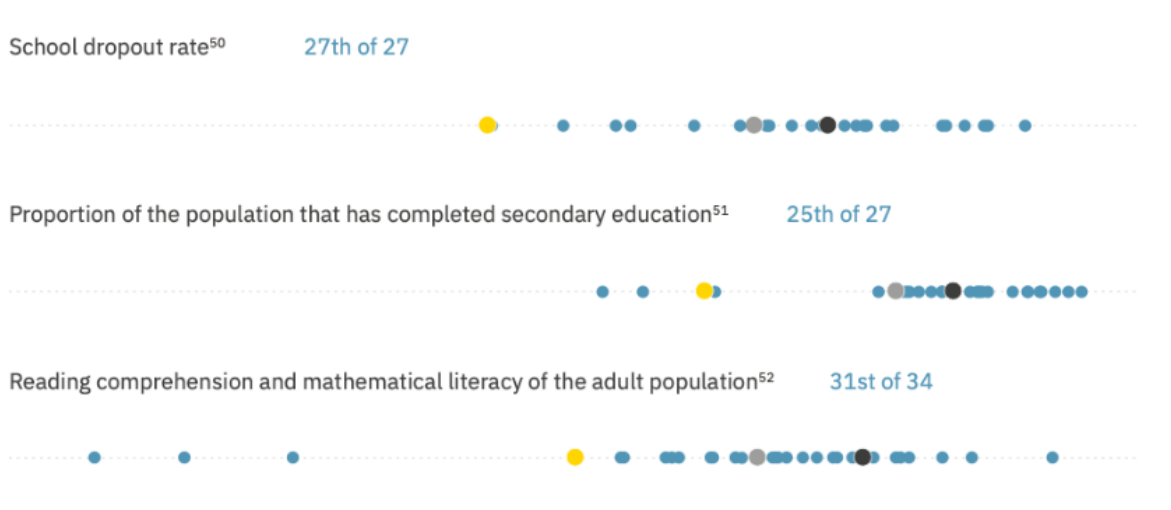
A particular strength of *España 2050* was the story it told. Rather than frame the strategy negatively — needing to respond to challenges and problems — it specifically chose to emphasise how, over the preceding 30 years, Spain had developed from being one of the poorest performers in the EU28 across many metrics, to being firmly mid pack. The vision *España 2050* sets out is that if this rate of progress can continue, and if Spain's most incalcitrant issues can be resolved, then Spain would be able to ascend to top of the EU. This sense of hope is palpable throughout the strategy and we heard from many stakeholders of how successful they felt this narrative was as a convening and direction-setting mechanism.

The role of data and comparative analysis

A second strength was *España 2050's* choice to explicitly position Spain's performance across a wide range of metrics against the rest of the EU-27, and use that data to identify the key strengths and (moreover) weaknesses it should target to catch-up with the "EU-8", the EU's most advanced countries.

This both matched its core narrative — that Spain had made remarkable progress since 1975 but that it now needed to break into the top eight — and provided a solid grounding for its impressive analysis of Spain's relative position across a wide range of factors. For example, a significant portion of the strategy is focused on education and skills following the team's analysis that, particularly on school attendance, Spain ranks last of all EU member states measured. The first part of *España 2050* makes this position clear, framing each metric as comparative to the other EU member states or comparator (e.g. OECD) countries. In the excerpt in Fig. 7, Spain's position is shown in yellow, other states in blue, the EU's average in grey and the average of the EU-8 — its core comparator — in black.

Figure 7 — Excerpt from *España 2050* showing a comparative approach to problem identification



Acknowledging the need to prioritise and make trade-offs in the open

The final report selected nine core challenges to focus on. These were all formed with the 2050 timeframe in mind and the Office for Foresight and Strategy used the following criteria to select them:

1. key to the economic development of the country, the prosperity and health of its population and the sustainability of the welfare state; and
2. because there is abundant empirical evidence, academic studies and success stories in countries around us from which we can draw lessons and ideas.

They were intentionally selective. Some topics were purposefully excluded either because they fell outside *España 2050*'s quite domestic focus or because they represent deeply rooted, politically charged issues — such as territorial organisation — that demand more dedicated methods. This focus avoided an unmanageable list and created a coherent starting point for action, from which the team and over 100 external experts worked up the appropriate directions of travel and big policy bets that needed to be taken to get there.

What followed was equally significant: a *national dialogue,* a year-long national conversation involving universities, think tanks, regional governments, business, civil society, and the public. Rather than presenting a fixed plan, the government used the document as an invitation to debate difficult questions: how to compete while cutting emissions; how to support ageing populations without overburdening younger workers; how to build consensus on reforms that may take decades to bear fruit.

This openness helped shift the focus to the shared challenges. The dialogue acknowledged hard choices — for example, between short-term subsidies and long-term investment — and gave legitimacy to areas of broad agreement while airing persistent tensions. Crucially, it gave institutional and civic actors a clearer sense of direction and a shared framework to engage with, even when they disagreed with aspects of it.

For more detail see our full paper on España 2050.

Singapore: Concept, Master & Development Plans — the multiple time horizons of Singapore's nested national strategies

Singapore has a well-established and world-renowned approach to long-term national strategy and foresight. It has purposefully and over a number of decades set up the institutions, the cycles, the practices, the capabilities and mindsets to coherently and boldly plan fifty years ahead. And while the model cannot be lifted and shifted wholesale (Singapore is a dominant-party city state), there are many aspects of its practice of national strategy that are highly applicable to the UK.

Approach to foresight and planning

Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF) emerged from a steady evolution in the city-state's approach to long-term governance. In the early 1990s, strategic foresight took institutional root within the Ministry of Defence, which began using scenario planning to anticipate regional security shifts. As this practice proved its value, it was broadened to whole-of-government use with the establishment of the Strategic Policy Office (SPO) in 2003 under the Public Service Division. The SPO expanded foresight beyond defence, integrating long-range thinking into domestic policy by training civil servants in systems thinking and scenario planning. In 2009, recognising the need to further institutionalise these capabilities amid rising complexity and uncertainty, Singapore created the CSF as a dedicated unit within the Prime Minister's Office.

This transition was not simply bureaucratic reorganisation: it reflected a strategic judgement that traditional planning tools were no longer sufficient. Civil service leaders recognised the importance of building adaptive capacity — embedding horizon scanning, weak signal detection, and imaginative thinking into routine governance. Rotating personnel between CSF and other ministries helped mainstream these techniques across government, gradually shifting Singaporean policymaking from reactive problem-solving toward anticipatory, future-ready governance.

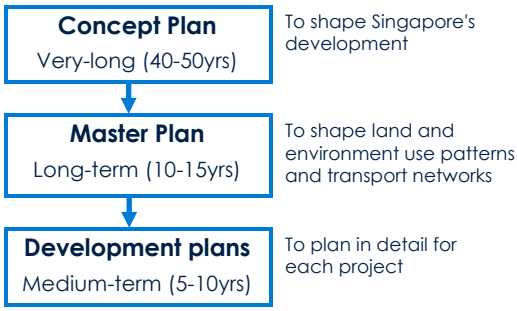
Indeed, Singapore's whole approach to civil service development is now designed to foster a longer-term outlook across government. The Civil Service College, reporting directly to the Prime Minister, instils a whole-of-government mindset and orients officials towards national, rather than narrow departmental ,goals. Training emphasises shared vocabulary, cross-cutting policy awareness and strategic perspective as core public sector values. [30] This is reinforced through structural mechanisms: staff are rotated across ministries to build system-wide understanding, and performance evaluations are conducted over three-year cycles to reward lasting impact.[31] Civil servants are paid 2% more than private sector equivalents (cf. 13% below in the UK), reinforcing a professional, long-term ethos and helping attract and retain leaders with the capacity and incentives to think beyond the short-term.[32] To support this culture, the Public Service Division invests heavily in strategic foresight capabilities — including through the CSF — while agencies such as the

Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of Finance embed scenario planning and long-range infrastructure forecasting. These efforts are designed to inform both senior officials and ministers, feeding into everyday decisions across the public service.[33]

Nested spatial planning

With a population of nearly six million and a land area half that of Greater London, Singapore is the world's third most dense country in the world.[34] Land is therefore the most prized resource and its national strategy reflects this: a rigorous three-tier urban planning framework, looking at very long-, the long- and the medium-term horizons.[35]

Figure 8 — National planning framework in Singapore[34]



Overarching everything is the Concept Plan: a systemic, comprehensive way of thinking about how to use Singapore's land and resources strategically. Looking 40–50 years ahead and updated roughly each decade, it considers Singapore's economic and geopolitical trajectory; likely needs for water, air quality and housing; how to protect its scarce natural habitat; and then how to sustain economic and population growth accordingly.[35]

Sitting underneath that is the Master Plan — a long-term view that, every five years or so, looks 10–15 years ahead to work out how to operationalise the Concept plan — precise land use patterns and transport plans, or updates to planning guidelines and principles for instance. Such a long horizon is needed because these decisions require this sort of staging, and such a frequent iterative cycle is needed to ensure implementation is flexible to changing conditions.[36] Below that are tens of development plans, one for each project. These work on a more familiar basis with the timeline determined by the development.[33 36]

What is crucial is this nesting structure: it provides a way of ensuring a coherent, whole-nation approach to planning to very long time frames; but also provides through iteration cycles, the opportunity to tweak plans as needed to account for the latest technology, societal developments and priorities.

Use of Scenarios

Singapore pioneered the creation of national scenarios in the 1990s. The Scenario Planning Office was established in the Prime Minister's Office and created their first set of scenarios in 1997. Convinced major geopolitical and economic trends were already on the radar of senior policymakers, they initially focused on "softer, social issues", basing their work off mostly qualitative analysis derived from interviews with politicians, policymakers and people external to government. 'Hotel Singapore' was one such scenario; it imagined a prosperous, global city but one in which

citizens felt transient and disconnected, more like hotel guests than a cohesive society. 'A Home Divided' was another. It posited a future strong common identity within many community groups but with no overarching, Singaporean self-image.[33]

We heard how influential these sorts of scenarios were, not in predicting the future, nor even in capturing the public's imagination, but by capturing the imagination of policymakers. Neither scenario was entirely positive nor entirely negative and this helped them (once disseminated across the whole of the Singaporean government) act as thought-provoking correctives to policy thought — 'If I continue with this policy, will we end up in "Hotel Singapore" in a few decades' time?'

There is no single way to do scenarios and the Singaporean system has morphed how it does scenarios over time to suit the needs of policymakers, e.g. focusing instead on disruptive, improbable events following the Asian Financial Crash. Throughout though, their thought-provoking and widely-disseminated nature helped make them tools used regularly and commonly by decision-makers.

Our Singapore Conversation

In 2012, the Singaporean government launched a national conversation exercise called *Our Singapore Conversation* (OSC), which set out, "to engage Singaporeans on their desired future for the nation and to establish a broad consensus on the key issues that should be addressed".[37] Input from citizens was primarily gathered through around 660 dialogue sessions, engaging approximately 47,000 people and involving over 40 non-governmental organisations, in addition to online contributions and a follow-up survey of 4,000 people. Whilst this was not the first public engagement activity the government of Singapore conducted, it was notable in its structure and scale. Engagement took place over two phases: starting broadly and becoming more detailed and narrow in scope over time, and gave the public and non-governmental organisations greater opportunities to shape the format and subjects for discussion.

The result of OSC was *Reflections of Our Singapore Conversation*,[38] described as an account of the process and insights gathered, a selection of the perspectives from Singaporeans, and a "signpost for key directions that Singaporeans feel our society should move towards". Whilst this result was explicitly not a policy document or formal government response to the public's input, the government did seek to show how OSC had informed key policy reforms. Public servants involved in or close to OSC described it as a major qualitative shift in Singapore's approach to government-public engagement. Garry Rodan, Emeritus Professor of Politics and International Studies at Murdoch University notes that through the OSC, the Government of Singapore, "recognized the need to concede some measure of control over deliberations in order to ensure the widest participation", which was not risk free. Rodan does, however, highlight how the government, "retained total discretion in the translation of feedback into policy" which "enabled reforms to be depicted as the outcome of a direct engagement between government and the

people".[39] Whilst it is difficult to ascertain its true impact, the scale, breadth and tone of OSC is notable.

The Netherlands: *Planbureau* scenarios — convening devices for public debate and planning

Like Singapore, the Netherlands has developed a strong, collective practice of looking to the future, thinking in shared time horizons, and developing scenarios to guide public debate. But how they generate and use these scenarios differs markedly to Singapore — they are far more open tools of public debate, not internal thinking; perhaps reflecting the highly contested and layered nature of Dutch politics, more akin to the UK.

Its first scenarios-based forward look was in the 1950s and the production of scenarios looking 10-20 years ahead is commonplace at national and local levels. Scenarios are well-understood in the Dutch system, not as projections, "but as visions of the future that can inform debate on consistent long-term policy choices".[40] Real policy is acknowledged as inevitably messier, but scenarios intentionally "show what is possible when a clear course is set".

In contrast to the central-led and government-led effort in Singapore, a group of state research institutions have led this charge: the *planbureaus* — roughly akin to the UK's Office for Budget Responsibility in status. There are currently three of these: one focused on the economy (CPB), one on the environment and spatial planning (PBL) and one on social science (SCP). Funded and sponsored by government but with total editorial and research independence, these organisations have important roles in providing expert research and improving decision-making. CPB even has a pseudo-constitutional role: analysing and costing parties' manifestos ahead of an election. All have significant futures capability and they frequently use scenarios to explore the options the Netherlands has in the long-term future. Three examples are below.

Crucially, this scenario-development happens in the open: scenarios are published and much publicised — PBL's latest scenarios[41] were launched with a roadshow reaching an estimated 5,000 individuals across 200 events. They are intended to inform public debate and their main impact has been providing the whole of Dutch society with shared temporal anchors — enabling cities, government departments, industries, and businesses to align their long-term plans and investments around common timeframes. All interlocutors we spoke to agreed the *planbureau* scenarios are of very high quality and both government and business agreed they formed useful, common "starting points" from which to plan policy. Their impact was indirect: they didn't radically and suddenly change the direction of government policy. Instead, they helped frame government research, they informed public debate, and — importantly — they provided substantive analysis for parties to use in their future manifestos and coalition agreements. We did hear a suggestion that their impact was lessened by their sheer number — unlike the Singaporean example, the scenarios didn't narratively guide policymaking because there were so many of them, diluting their power to stick in the collective imagination.

CPB's 2050 Four Scenarios for 2050

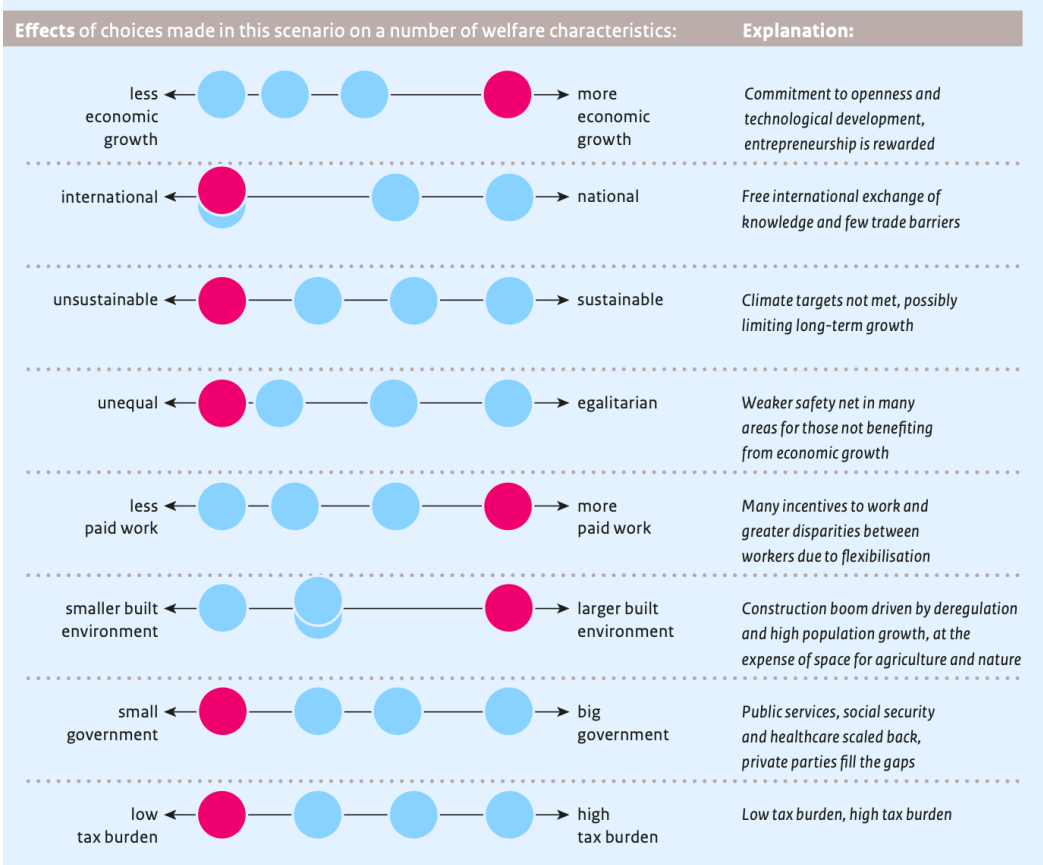
The CPB have produced whole-economy scenarios roughly every 15 years since the mid-1950s. Its latest exercise sets out four competing, nuanced futures for 2050.[40] None is wholly positive or negative; each show what might unfold if a clear path is chosen and maintained, assuming stable public finances. They are assessed using the Dutch concept of "general welfare"— eight dimensions including life satisfaction, health, income, education, spatial cohesion and quality, economic capital, natural capital and social capital. Each scenario yields similar overall welfare but reflects different trade-offs:

- 'Market': Prioritises economic growth and material well-being, with high global interconnectedness and relatively low trust in government.
- 'Autonomous': Emphasises national self-reliance and strong community bonds, in a world marked by intensifying geopolitical competition.
- 'Sustainable': Focuses on environmental sustainability pursued through international collaboration to safeguard the planet's habitability.
- 'Together': Stresses the need for collective responsibility and social equity, supported by strong trust in government and coordinated societal action.

The project took three years. It began with a deep historical analysis of 200 years of Dutch demography, economy, labour, fiscal policy, welfare state, and wellbeing; projecting forward the outcomes of current policies. Published halfway through, this work provided the base for four* scenarios, designed to maximise different societal values (for instance, 'Market' prioritises wealth, 'Sustainable' the environment), and to span the Dutch political spectrum. Each combines contextual drivers with policy choices — for example, 'Autonomous' assumes both a factious world and domestic decisions favouring self-reliance. The scenarios were qualitatively designed, then modelled quantitatively to understand and highlight the key trade-offs. For instance, the expensive 'Together' scenario required raising the retirement age to remain fiscally viable.

* PBL suggested four was the correct number: three tend to result in people trying to pick the 'middle' scenario even if they aren't scaled; five and upwards is too many to have impact.

Figure 9 — Effects of the 'Market' scenario compared against others, *Choosing for the Future: Four Scenarios for 2050*[40]



Comparison was structured around five domains: economic development, and the labour market (seen as essential for CPB as an organisation given its economic focus); social security, and health care (the largest spending lines in the Dutch budget); and space and living (reflecting the Netherlands' acute housing challenge). Other themes, such as the environment, were judged to fall outside of CPB's remit.

It is too early to judge the impact of these scenarios but they were widely known about across multiple sectors, thought highly of, and national press suggests they were positively received as setting out the choices clearly, something that may well feed into the upcoming general election.[42] [43] CPB's previous scenarios published in 2010 looking to 2040 did have significant cut-through despite being published at the height of the financial crisis.[44] Following its publication, actors from across Dutch society published a slew of publications using similar futures techniques to the same timescale:

- In 2011, the Environmental Assessment Agency published *The Netherlands in 2040* which integrates housing, employment, transport, and spatial planning into scenarios up to 2040, guiding regional development.[45]
- In 2013, the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure published *Dutch Logistics 2040*, setting out how the Dutch logistics sector can help key Dutch industries make a successful transition to circular economy.[46]

- In 2020, the Dutch Research Council (NWO) produced a *Vision for Chemistry 2040*, aligning academic and industrial strategy toward 2040. [47]
- In 2022–3, the cities of Zoetermeer, Utrecht and Almere created visions for their cities to 2040 supported by a spatial strategies mapping out how and where changes should happen by 2040.[48] [49] [50]
- In 2024, the Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) published its *High-Tech Industry in 2040*, projecting how the high-tech sector will evolve by 2040, emphasizing sustainability, productivity, and resilience.[51]
- Also in 2024, the SER — the Dutch board of government, employers and employees — published *Perspective on Broad Prosperity in 2040*, setting out thinking on how to achieve 'broad prosperity' — a Dutch concept encompassing the overall quality of life, including economic, social, and environmental wellbeing, both now and for future generations.[52]

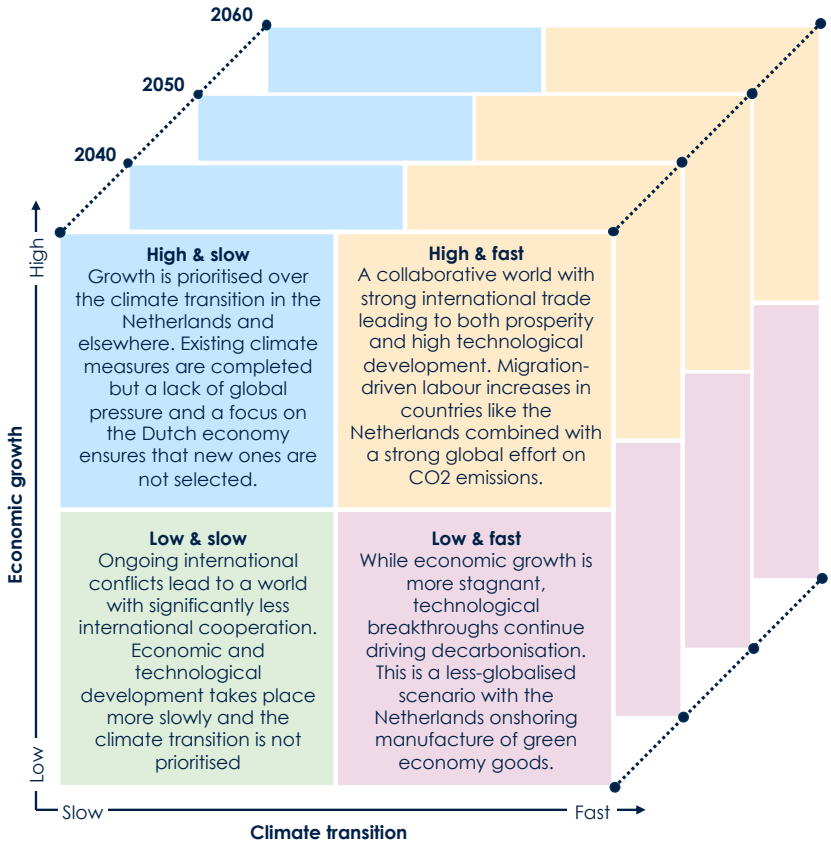
Whether it was CPB's scenarios that set such collective, national timeframes of thought and research or not, the Dutch political system has clearly developed a practice of thinking decades ahead communally and these various forward-looks, while independent from each other, form parts of an ongoing conversation about in which direction the Dutch want to head.

PBL's economic-environmental scenarios to 2040, 2050 and 2060

PBL's futures-oriented output is more diverse, encompassing predictive methods such as Delphi and superforecasting, explorative ones like horizon scanning and scenarios, and speculative ones like looking at wildcards.

Their latest major scenario study[53] looks at the balance between economic growth and the climate transition, mapping four scenarios as in Fig.10. Each scenario is mapped out across three timeframes and the ramifications — for social policy, energy policy, regional development, demography, mobility, etc. worked through.

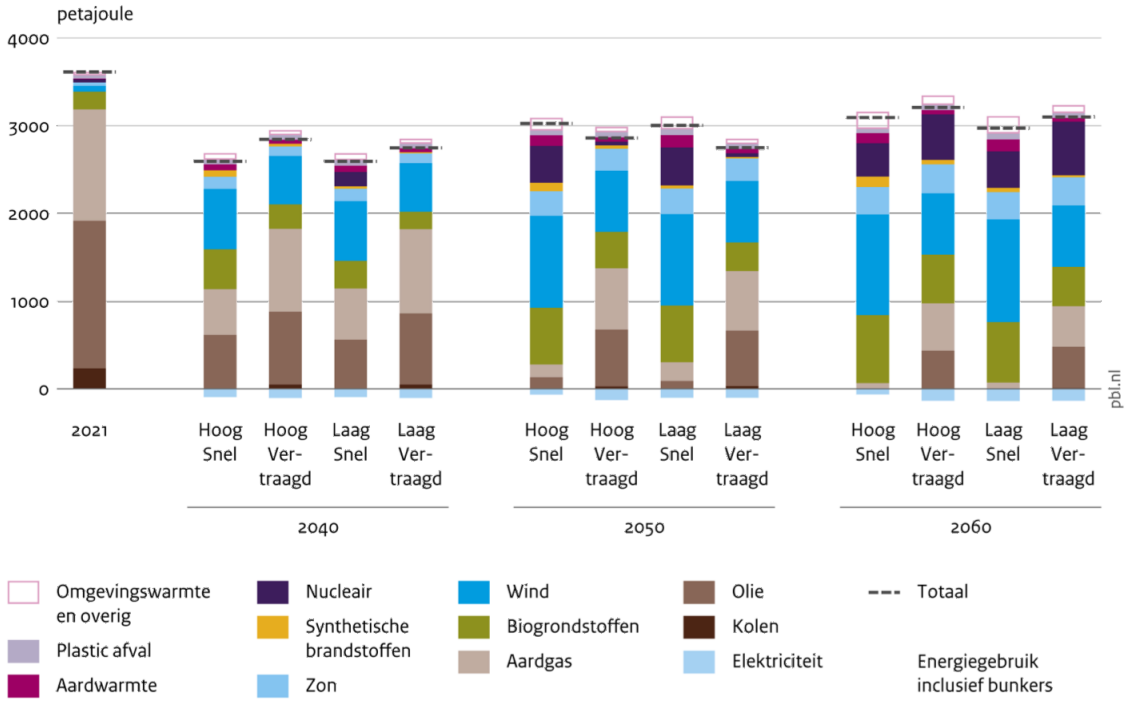
Figure 10 — Illustration of the two axes, four scenarios and three timeframes of PBL's WLO scenarios[53]



It is able to derive quite specific illustrative images of what the Netherlands would like in each, not as predictions but as alternatives to consider, weigh up and make decisions against. Fig.11 is an illustration of what the Dutch energy mix might look like under the four scenarios in each of the three timeframes.

The point of providing such numerical illustrations of the different scenarios is to illustrate to policymakers and the general public the choices the Netherlands has about one of its most challenging trade-offs. They allow the impact of choices — on urbanisation, infrastructure, social makeup and the economy — to be explored and provide a basis for assessing future policy proposals.

Figure 11 — Illustrative energy mixes across the four scenarios and three timeframes in PBL's WLO scenarios, cf. the actual energy mix in 2021[53]



PBL's organisational focus tends to be more on the use of space however, and a 2023 study[54] illustrated this well. It, more akin to CPB's four scenarios, described four qualitatively different ways the Netherlands could transition towards a climate-neutral and circular society. The four scenarios had different focuses and transitioned at different rates but all focused on the spatial conflicts and opportunities and who would lead the decision-making. It produced four scenarios and culminated in four maps of what the land use of the Netherlands would look like in 2050.

Figure 12 — The four scenarios and their maps of PBL's Spatial Outlook 2023[45]

SCP's use of public participation in scenario-design

SCP's forthcoming scenarios-based assessment of public participation in 2050[55] was notable for involving citizens directly in scenario design. A roughly representative group of 35 citizens led the process, exploring historical patterns, future trends and academic arguments on how people might interact with the state, from caring roles to engagement with formal government. Their conclusions were then shared with participation experts, whose reflections fed back into later citizen sessions in asynchronous dialogue.

This led to the experts being challenged: the citizens questioned the low-trust they assumed government should have of citizens to do the right thing; and highlighted the importance of 'downtime' in general wellbeing — something ignored by most economic theory or reduced to recovery for more economic activity. SCP found they had to switch the order when it came to how to make these aspirational scenarios plausible: experts led and citizens responded. But here too, citizens challenged the experts. Whereas experts were dubious about the technological change required for some aspirations, the citizens urged them to think more holistically and radically about the societal changes needed to make that a reality.

The Netherlands: Fiscal and spatial strategies — setting national direction through resource allocation

The Netherlands has a complex political system with multiple layers of governance, overlapping electoral timelines and is often led by diverse and complex political coalitions. Despite fixed four-year terms, Dutch governments on average have only lasted 2½ years since 1945 due to coalition break-ups. We heard from multiple interlocutors that they felt this tumult was increasing: traditional parties have been waning in popularity, while populist and single-issue parties have gained more support; retail politics plays a greater role while the tripartite, corporatist, consensus-based model that used to dominate weakens with falling union membership. Despite that, the Dutch system maintains a far longer-term outlook for its fiscal and spatial planning — and it delivers results. The Netherlands invests a third more of its GDP on infrastructure, does so 15–20% more efficiently, and so is able to build, for instance, almost twice as many homes per person as the UK.

Fiscal strategy

The Dutch fiscal cycle is deliberately linked to elections, giving it regularity. A new coalition agreement culminates in a fiscal framework that looks four-years ahead, ensuring governments begin with a medium-term financial plan rather than setting these year-to-year. This fiscal framework fixes multi-year expenditure ceilings at the start of a government's term, locking in discipline and predictability, enabling ministries to plan beyond the short-term political calendar. It is based on independent long-range forecasts developed by the CPB, injecting objectivity and ensuring the fiscal debate rests on settled, transparent, long-term analysis rather than political optimism. The four-year timeframe forces government to think about long-term structural issues — pensions, healthcare, climate, infrastructure — but simultaneously allows the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances and learn lessons through mid-term reviews and subject specific, independent reviews of policy. This cycle — and its associated practices — has persisted since the 1990s under right-wing, left-wing, centrist, and populist governments, giving it credibility and predictability.

Like Ireland, the Dutch system is accustomed to independent critique and strategic proposals without requiring immediate political consensus. The *planbureaus* are one example; Dutch "spending reviews" are another. These reviews — very different from their UK counterparts — are commissioned by Cabinet but conducted by independent coalitions of finance and line-department officials. They rigorously assess the effectiveness of current strategy and spending, offering technical improvements as well as more ambitious policy options. Government cannot edit the reports and often rejects them, but their purpose is to inform political debate and shape future manifestos and coalition agreements.[56]

Climate adaptation — and the infrastructure need to mitigate sea-level rise — occupy a privileged position in Dutch fiscal planning. The Netherlands' Delta

Programme operates a six-year review cycle with 50–100-year planning timeframes and draws from a Delta Fund with over €20 billion every year reserved from national, provincial, and municipal governments' budgets until 2050.[57] This shows remarkable acknowledgement of the long-termism of the problem and of the solution and is rooted in centuries of the Dutch *polder* system working together to protect (and reclaim) land from the sea and fluvial flooding. It's also an excellent example of a national fiscal system treating different problems with different timelines in different ways.

Spatial planning

The Netherlands is the most planned country in Europe.[58] It has a long history of making communal decisions about how to use scarce land area deriving from its history of communally reclaiming and protecting land from the sea. More formally, the first Spatial Planning Act in 1962[59] organised spatial planning into a national system for the first time, creating a "vertically coordinated (as opposed to hierarchically ordered)" system of plans at national, provincial and metropolitan levels, and introduced legally-binding land-use plans.[58] These sought to enable sustainable postwar reconstruction through decentralising yet containing urban sprawl. This was built on in the second (1966) and third (1970s–80s) national spatial strategies, resulting in the Netherlands' polycentric model of compact, well-connected but separate cities; and it developed the Randstad — the metropolitan arc containing the Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Amsterdam, and focused transport links between these cities. The fourth strategy (1988–91) turned national focus to a globally-connected economy, focusing on building up the '*mainports*' or Schiphol Airport and the Port of Rotterdam and domestic railway connectivity. The 1991–00 edition turned the spotlight on green infrastructure and established an ecological network of interconnected nature parks through land purchase and planning reform. The fifth national spatial strategy reduced the system's reliance on regulation and devolved decisions much more to provinces and municipalities. The impact of these spatial strategies has had a very tangible impact on the Netherlands which now famously consists of compact, well-connected cities, separated by wide green space, and containing lots of owner-occupied new and high-quality homes.

The latest national spatial plan, yet to be fully finalised, continues the deregulating and devolving tendencies of the fifth and highlights the multiplicity of challenges impacting land and sea use in the Netherlands: from mitigating and adapting to climate change, to requiring better water quality standards and digital connectivity. But it does so simultaneously recognising the limited space now available in the Netherlands — with the second highest population density in the EU after Malta and nearly double that of the UK.[60] It therefore focuses on innovative solutions: combining functions where possible (e.g. parking built into the fabric of flood defences), choosing where not.

It starts at a national level. The national government identified four priorities for spatial planning:

1. Space for climate adaptation and the energy transition
2. Sustainable economic growth potential
3. Strong and healthy cities and regions
4. Future-proof development of rural areas

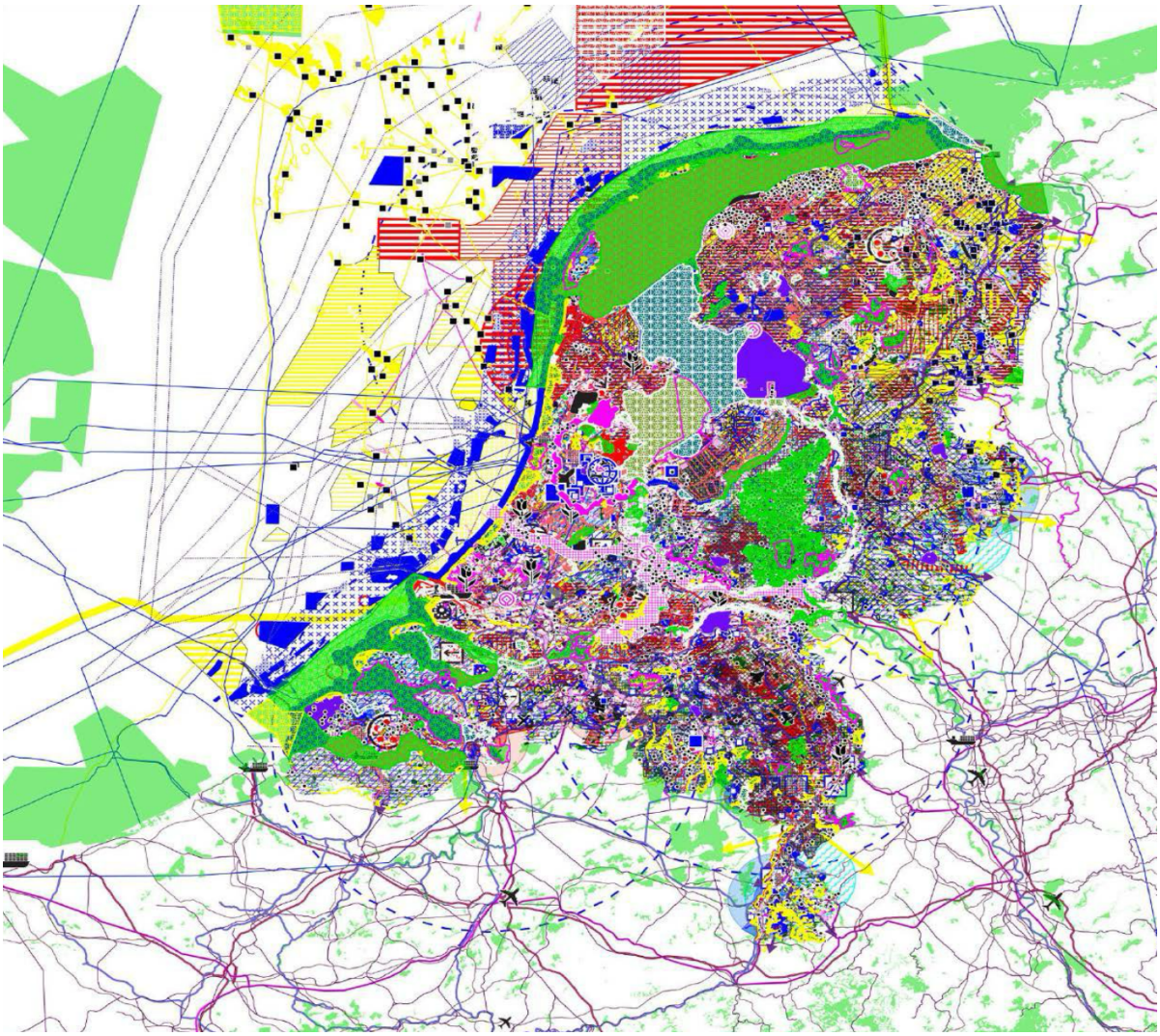
For each, it makes national choices: for instance, identifying large swathes of Dutch seabed for offshore wind, or rebalancing rural land use away from farms and towards biodiversity. And it also gives direction for decentralised choices: urging integration and co-location of logistics functions, setting a preference for clustering of onshore energy production, establishing a national ordering of how to urbanise — focusing first within existing urban centres, then outskirts, then around out-of-town transport nodes, and only then on greenfield sites.[61]

Regions and then municipalities, are then required to reflect these priorities, these choices and these directions in their own plans which are customised to their geographies, populations and political preferences. They are not developed in isolation. The municipality of Veldhoven worked with local business ASML — the Netherlands' biggest business employing tens of thousands of high-skilled workers — to identify its long-term skills and staffing need.[62] [63] Realising it could not support the housebuilding required over the next two-to-three decades, it sought support from neighbouring municipalities to develop extra housing in commutable areas outside Veldhoven, jointly funding strengthened local transport links.

Spatial planning in the Netherlands is highly effective national strategy. It enables bold, big-idea-led reorienting of policy in a place-sensitive way that leads to spatial outcomes — economic gains, regeneration, environmental benefits. It enables the Dutch to actively shape their economic geography, not just follow it.[64] And it puts hectarage on a pedestal with euros as critical national resources that need to be thought about collectively, understood, projected. It helps the Dutch identify what the big challenges and trade-offs of the next few decades are going to be; and how best to use the valuable resources of land and sea to balance solutions.

Maps are crucial to this: several interlocutors highlighted how important the use of maps are as a convening and conversational device; they enable ministers, civil servants, companies and the public to understand competing demands on the same land. They allow politicians to make decisions about what to prioritise and what not and where, and how to most efficiently balance the country's needs not in a uniform way but in a place-sensitive one that recognises the unique possible contributions of different places.

Figure 13 — Overlapping national interests mapped[65]



Japan: Society 5.0 — national industrial and green transformation strategies focused on public welfare

Japan has a culture and history of long-termism that continues to be a core part of the fabric of its political culture and which enables Japan to be remarkably confident in making big bets about the long-term. Two interrelated examples demonstrate this well: its approach to industrial and economic strategy which is closely linked to its science strategy, and their approach to green transformation.

Japan's industrial strategies

Japan has a long strategic history of industrial strategy which can be understood in distinct periods (see Fig.14).

Figure 14 — The periods of Japan's post-war industrial strategy

1940s 1950s	1	Reconstruction of Japan through the establishment of a basic, post-war, free market economy.[66]
1960s 1970s	2	'High growth' economy of the 'westerly wind' of free enterprise and markets; and the 'easterly wind' of preferential industrial structure.[66]
1980s	3	The new 'traditional' model of Japan as a major and mature coordinated and consensus-oriented market economy characterized by class compromise and relatively high levels of equality and economic security.[67]
1990s 2000s 2010s	4	The introduction of Japanese-flavoured neoliberal reforms and a resultant increase in instability, competition and inequality. Most strongly characterised by the post-2012 'Abenomics' involving monetary easing, fiscal stimulus and labour market liberalization.[68]
2020s	5	The 'New Direction' model. A socio-economic mission-oriented and economic security-focused hybrid of previous models

These strategic periods fed into each other: the first three represent an economic strategy that reflects a maturing and complexifying economy and the New Direction model is moulded expressly to mediate between the strategies of the previous six decades. Inflection points also played their part and demonstrate the influence of foreign ideas on domestic national strategy: Reaganomics and Thatcherism greatly influenced the shift away from consensus-oriented, coordinated industrial strategies in the 1990s; and the economic security focus of the 'New Direction' model was a response to the loss of confidence in the Anglo-American model following the global financial crash and, crucially, the rise of an

increasingly-confident China which challenged even the strongest of home-grown industries. Crucially, the objective of Japan's industrial strategy is not simply economic growth or economic security (though both of these goals have become more important over the last two decades). Instead, it is expressly focused on resolving Japan's biggest social challenges with the latest iteration borrowing much from its allied science and technology strategies.

Science and technology strategies and Society 5.0

Japan has also taken a consistent and long-term approach to science, technology and innovation, led by a dedicated Cabinet Office secretariat. Since 1996, science and research policy is structured in five-year planning periods, each setting key priorities and backed by major government investment (the last mobilising ¥26tn in public funding, with further public-private investment).

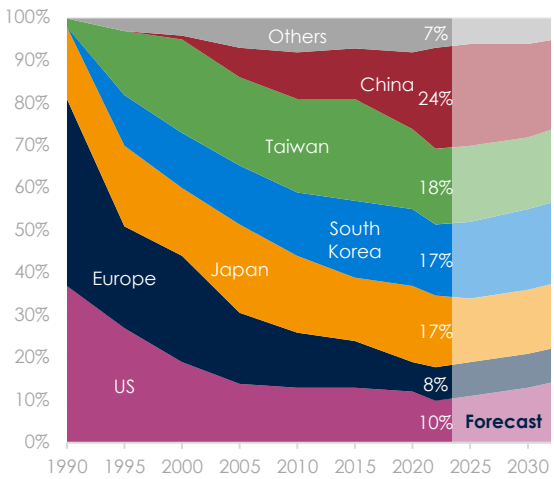
It is from this model that Society 5.0 was established in 2016 as part of the 5th Science and Technology Basic Plan. Partly inspired by Germany's Industry 4.0 programme, Society 5.0 is a whole-of-government concept to illustrate how Japanese society could be transformed and benefit from technological advancement, and a blueprint to drive this development. Society 5.0 considers how significant challenges facing Japan now and in future, such as its ageing population, could be mitigated through advances in technology like AI and automation. It enables central government, in collaboration with the private sector and academia, to consider what is required to realise its desired future. This includes a programme of Moonshot R&D goals: ambitious long-term innovations which the government is strategically managing and investing in.

Modern Japanese industrial strategy borrows much from this approach: the locating of purpose in social good rather than commercial success, the focus on research and development, and ability to bet big on moonshot ideas, backing them with impressive state funding and support.

Semiconductors

Japan's recent approach to semiconductors is a good example of this mission-driven approach, where the desire for economic security appears to have taken priority over short-term profit. Japan once played a major role in global semi-conductor production but was overtaken by international rivals — a decline symbolised by the collapse of Elpida Memory in 2012 (see Fig.15).[69] Now, Japan is seeking to re-establish

Figure 15 — Global 200mm+ commercial semiconductor fab capacity by county[69]



domestic capacity in advanced chipmaking through a bold public–private strategy centred on a new joint venture: Rapidus. The company was established with major government support to onshore manufacturing capability of cutting-edge 2nm semiconductors — currently manufactured by only one firm globally, in Taiwan.

Two features of this strategy illustrate strong internal coherence. First, the scale and structure of investment. The Japanese Government has committed over $11bn in public funding, alongside coordinated private backing from eight major firms, including Toyota and Sony. This growing investment has enabled Rapidus to become only the fourth company worldwide to acquire multiple extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography machines — at $200 million each, among the most complex and capital-intensive tools in the world and beyond most startups or even large firms.

Second, the clarity of strategic intent. The Japanese government has made clear that the purpose of this venture is not commercial profit. Its success will be judged instead by national objectives, particularly the restoration of economic security and sovereign capability in a critical sector.

This kind of intentional, proportionate and goal-aligned strategy reflects a broader tradition in Japanese industrial policy: close state-business coordination, comfort with long time horizons, and a willingness to back large-scale action in pursuit of public goods.

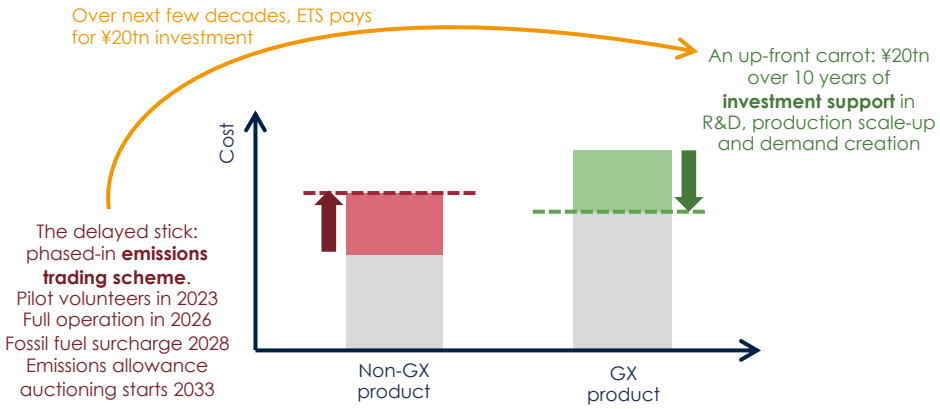
Green Transformation

The announcement of Japan's 2050 net zero target in October 2020 was a key moment because it took some by surprise, contrasting with Japan's traditionally slow, consensus-driven decision-making, and because it marked a clear step change in Japan's approach to green transformation (GX), which has continued since. In this and in other contexts, senior officials from both central and local government noted a culture of commitment in Japanese policymaking, reflective of society more broadly. As one put it: "When we say it, we do it". Because targets are culturally expected to be met once set, officials noted that target-setting is approached with particular care — seen as a protected and deliberate process to ensure credibility and follow-through.

Since announcing its commitment to net zero in October 2020, Japan is taking a balanced approach to GX, aiming to reduce emissions alongside supporting economic growth and energy security. To achieve this, there are a number of complementary strategies and planning documents, with varying time horizons but mostly focused on the long-term. The long-term and predictable nature of climate change enables Japan, alongside others, to take a well-planned approach that can be sustained over multiple decades and balanced alongside other national priorities. It also enables the use of methods that would not be possible in other areas, such as Japan's creation of Climate Transition Bonds, which aims to provide

over $1tn of investment for GX initiatives over the next decade, partly funded by future carbon pricing (see Fig.16).

Figure 16 — GX is based on a pro-growth carbon pricing framework with the carrot of large, up-front government and private investment to reduce the price of green products; phasing in the stick of carbon pricing for non-green products to rebalance economic incentives[70]



GX also presents an opportunity to develop areas of Japan that may have been waning economically. Over 60% of Japan's population lives in the connected metropolitan regions of Kantō, Keihanshin, and Tōkai — all located on the island of Honshu, with a particularly high concentration along the southeastern coastal corridor around Tokyo.[71] So too are clustered Japanese business, industry and power generation. Yet Japan's most abundant renewable energy potential lies elsewhere — on the islands of Hokkaido and Kyūshū, which together account for just 14% of population and 12% of GDP.[72] [73]

When we spoke to officials from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), they emphasised how the GX strategy is deliberately seeking to rebalance this geography, not just as the most efficient way to decarbonise, but to reshape the national economy and land use. METI's decision to invest in a semiconductor hub on Hokkaido illustrates this: it brings clean power to an energy-hungry industry, supports energy security, on-shores a key industry boosting economic security and stimulates economic renewal in a remote and depopulating region. It shows how national strategy can drive coherent delivery through thought-through spatial choices that advance multiple objectives at once.

More generally, Japanese political culture seemed to find the long-term a more comfortably place than many countries. One senior Japanese politician reflected to us that uncertainty — including the possibility of losing office — should not prevent long-term planning. In his case, he acknowledged that a future administration might alter or reverse some of his plans. But he argued that if the strategy is well-founded, much of it will likely endure. His successor might choose to tweak or adjust parts of it, and in doing so, may be responding to a changed context — or may simply have a better idea. Even if those plans are later replaced more substantially, he suggested, thinking in terms of long time horizons still makes

for better policymaking. The point, he suggested, is not to avoid long-term planning because of uncertainty, but to do it well enough that it stands a good chance of surviving it.

Japan: *Hiroshima Vision* — local approaches to long-term strategy

The culture of long-term planning persists below national level too. Japan has a relatively organised subnational system with two levels of governance below the national level: 47 prefectures, and below that approximately 1720 municipalities. Though central government retains significant power, regional and local responsibilities are constitutionally guaranteed and set in law. 2006 reforms granted greater financial freedoms, enabling more fiscal independence from central government (including the ability to borrow).

We met a range of officials within the Hiroshima Prefecture Office to better understand their approach to strategy and planning. There is a clear sense of regional autonomy and long-term thinking, with caveats. Hiroshima officials emphasised proactive regional planning, demonstrated by the prefecture's current long-term strategy — *Hiroshima Vision*.[74] This used backcasting, local expert input, and clear monitoring and refinement processes to identify 17 areas of focus, 99 policy objectives for 2050 (with 10-year milestones), and 51 progress indicators. Yet clearly some decisions remain centralised, meaning the prefecture often responds to, rather than leads on national initiatives.

Not all prefectures have such a long-term vision, and Hiroshima's leaders expressed clear pride in theirs. The strategy is framed as giving direction not only to local government but also to citizens. It was deliberately crafted as an institutional framework rather the personal project of the long-serving governor, allowing successors to update and modernise it. This adaptability is built in: progress indicators are updated annually, policy objectives every five years. The plan shapes each prefecture budget and is continuously adjusted to reflect affordability and evolving priorities.

The United States: Eisenhower's Project Solarium — competing strategic approaches for coherence and clarity on trade-offs

Japan's ability to set coherent national and local long-term strategies — to decide what their big bets about the future are and to organise government and society around them over the long-term — aid their ability to pick objectives and achieve them. But they are highly dependent on a blend of constitutional and cultural norms that differ markedly to the UK. We were therefore particularly interested in examples of more procedural attempts to do this in more contested political environments with cultures more akin to our own.

President Eisenhower's 'Project Solarium' in 1953 stands out as a uniquely explicit and intentional attempt to confront and make real trade-offs at a national level — a rigorous and successful methodology that forced hard choices and coherent strategic options in response to the Cold War. We have done a study on Project Solarium and how it could be updated for contemporary challenges as part of this Fellowship and recommend our full paper on Project Solarium.

Estonia: Post-independence national strategy —strategies as a coherent package

If the US demonstrated procedural methods of selecting a particular big bet in a coherent way, Estonia's nascent national strategy demonstrates the value in ensuring national strategic objectives cohere with each other.

Estonia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Estonia was very small, very poor and had very little state infrastructure. Despite this, the clarity of Estonia's national strategy over the next two decades would see it rapidly develop — its current GDP per capita is similar to Portugal.[1]

Following independence, the Estonian government identified three core challenges:

1. Russia presented (and continues to present) an existential security threat
2. Estonia had no financial resources
3. And it had no state infrastructure

In response, Estonia developed clear objectives for each challenge: retain independence (as opposed to the vassalage strategy pursued by some former Soviet states), catch up with Finland economically, and create a well-functioning state infrastructure that could support its small, dispersed population. And for each objective, it chose coherent, bold, big bets: to join NATO and the EU and to develop a strong sense of Estonian national identity; to focus its economy on high-tech business; and to develop a novel model of digital government through highly democratic means.

Figure 17 — A '3x5' of Estonia's post-independence national strategy

Challenge	Objective	Big bets
Russia presents an existential security threat	Retain full independence, not vassalage	Join NATO; join EU, develop strong Estonian identity, e.g. language
No financial resources	Catch up with Finland economically (GDPs were similar pre-WWII)[75]	Focus economy and therefore education on high-tech startups
No state infrastructure	Well-functioning state to support small, dispersed population	Develop novel digital first government and high-speed data infrastructure

Crucially, these three different strategies were highly interrelated: its tech-focused economy helped develop the novel tools of government required to leapfrog twentieth century governance models — Estonia rejected Finland's suggested gifting of its old telephone exchange equipment and focused jumping straight to mobile internet. Its focus on militarism, its strong culture of conscription and development of Estonian identity has created a remarkably strong armed forces for a country with a population slightly larger than Birmingham with nearly 20% of the population fully trained and deployable, and an additional 30,000 signed up to its Defence League, a voluntary home guard.[76] [77] More than that though, these three objectives together craft a joint narrative of a proudly independent, European power with very high educational standards and a vibrant digital economy.

Concluding thoughts and next steps

This document has sought to both set out the eight core characteristics of a practice of national strategy, and then learn from the strategic practice of other countries, drawing from them an understanding of whether such design principles are possible and how to realise them.

No one country has cracked the practice of national strategy but our first conclusion is that **a practice of long-term, national strategy is possible**. Many democracies — including a variety of countries similar in size, status, and position to the UK — have developed and utilised to their benefit a strategic practice that we should aspire to.

Our eight core characteristics are each supported by this practice. Spain exemplifies a comparative and historical method; Ireland an outward-looking demeanour. Singapore has long been at the global forefront of orienting towards the future; and the Netherlands has a clear whole-society comfort with navigating the uncertainty inherent in this future. Eisenhower's Solarium exemplifies the sorts of method to properly compete strategic choices, while Finland provides an excellent example of how to use a parliament to open out national strategy-making about the long-term broader than the stuffy rooms of government. Korea and Japan both demonstrate the values of cycles of reassessment in iterating and learning from national strategy as well as seeing national strategy as a guide for all of the nation's capacities, not just government.

A common theme running through the examples discussed in this paper are that the **approaches taken to national strategic practice are often influenced by the history, context and governmental structure of each country**. Just as each of these countries utilised particular approaches or elements of practice to enable them to achieve long-term and/or ambitious objectives, the UK must decide which approaches or elements of practice are suitable to achieve its objectives and resolve key issues. This paper, and the conception of long-term national strategy it puts forward, are designed to support the development and implementation of a practice that fits the UK's history, context and governmental structure.

Alongside this paper, we will publish the first version of our National Strategy Playbook. The Playbook seeks to work from the eight core characteristics, and from what is shown to be possible in these case studies, and outlines our conception for how a practice of national strategy could be implemented in the UK. What follows are the 17 features it should design for to reflect this international learning. Each are labelled to show the links to the eight core characteristics of national strategy (directly below) as well as the case studies of particular relevance.

1. Rooted in inheritance and comparative analysis
2. Outward-facing
3. Future-oriented
4. Confident with uncertainty
5. Enabling proper choices
6. Open
7. Embracing rapid learning
8. National endeavour

1 — Repeated focus on the long-term 3

A practice of national strategy should be underpinned by institutions and norms that establish habitual practices in relation to the long-term. This requires embedding these practices into public institutions, cultivating an ethos that values long-term thinking as core to good governance.

→ *See Finnish parliamentary guardianship of the future*

→ *See New Zealand Long-Term Insight Briefings*

2 — Open-source method 6

The practice of national strategy should be as open and open-source as possible — making its methods and workings visible. Clarity about process helps others engage seriously and adapt their own work — even if some limits must remain for national security or diplomatic reasons.

→ *See* España 2050's *transparent methodology*

→ *See the UK's Climate Change Act's use of independent bodies and processes*

→ *See Finland's public ecosystem of thinking analytically about the future*

→ *See the Dutch use of* planbureaus *to open out deliberation and evidence*

3 — Alignment across tiers of government 8

National strategy should include mechanisms for continuous, respectful engagement across levels of government. Both formal and informal exchanges are needed to share insights, resolve tensions, and sustain alignment over time. It should also incentivise alignment across levels of government — seeing places as sources of strategy, not just sites of delivery. It should support mature dialogue about trade-offs, enable place-based action grounded in real context, and avoid setting places in zero-sum competition.

→ *See Dutch national, provincial and municipal spatial plans*

4 — Nested but set time horizons 3 5 6 8

Long-term national strategies should provide regular, shared planning horizons that give government, business, and civil society confidence to align their own plans. Predictable cycles and clear long-term direction enable others to invest, adapt, and contribute to national goals with greater certainty.

→ *See Singapore's nested Concept, Master, and Development Plans*

→ *See Dutch* planbureaus' *use of different time horizons in scenarios*

5 — Inheritance of national strategy 1 2

The practice of national strategy should begin by interrogating the legacy of the last period; and should draw on historical and comparative insight at every stage, grounding choices in an understanding of how past decisions shape present constraints and future possibilities. This means examining not just the explicit goals of previous strategies, but also their implicit assumptions, implementation realities, and the gap between expressed intent and actual experience — to build on what has endured and learn from what did not.

→ *See South Korea's use of its ancient strengths in developing* Hallyu

→ *See* España 2050's *analytical review of progress over the prior 30 years*

→ *See Ireland's drawing from its experience of the Global Financial Crash to inform its approach to Brexit*

→ *See Japan's national push back into semiconductors following deep comparative analysis of its economic vulnerabilities*

6 — Inheritance of strategic capability 1 7

The practice of national strategy should assess the strength and limitations of our past strategic capability. By reviewing the approaches, institutions, and coordination mechanisms used over the last 20 years, governments can better design the strategic infrastructure — people, systems, and skills — needed to deliver strategy over the next period.

→ *See Singapore's whole of government routines, structural innovations and investment in learning*

→ *See Dutch innovation and development of their* planbureaus

→ *See how the UK has innovated its structures and practices in our paper* UK National Strategy in Historical Perspective

7 — Global benchmarking 2

The practice of national strategy should benchmark the UK's national capabilities against relevant global peers, and should consider framing objectives in comparative terms — such as catching up with peer nations — to support analytical clarity, foster collective purpose and encourage progress, while avoiding the distorting effects of zero-sum competition. This comparative framing — past, present and projected — helps identify enduring strengths, emerging weaknesses, and strategic advantages that could be leveraged to shape long-term positioning and cultivate a shared national understanding of the country's place in the world.

→ *See* España 2050's *analytical review of progress over the prior 30 years and its use of comparative targets and objectives*

→ *See Estonian target-setting as 'catching up with Finland'*

→ *See Ireland's constant use of the UK as a national foil to catch-up with or surpass*

8 — Place-sensitive evidence 2 8

Long-term, national strategy should be grounded in place-sensitive evidence and diagnostics. Analysing how strategic challenges and opportunities play out across local, regional, and national contexts helps illuminate the spatial dimensions of trade-offs, amplifiers of risk, and levers for change.

→ *See Hiroshima's ambitious 2030 plan*

9 — National capacities 6 7 8

Any practice of national strategy, though led by government, should be *national* in nature — reflecting a new mindset and relationship between government and society in addressing long-term challenges. It should build around the health and strategic advantage of the nation's capacities, drawing on the strengths of all sectors and communities as contributors to strategy, not merely its beneficiaries.

→ *See Irish use of social partnership in the Celtic Tiger*

→ *See Estonian societo-cultural national strategy*

→ *See Japan's deep understanding and relationship with business*

→ *See the South Korean 'flotilla' of different parts of society moving broadly together with shared purpose*

For more on this, see *National Capacities — A Model for National Strategy*.

10 — Public, explorative scenarios 3 4

The practice of long-term, national strategy should utilise scenarios both to lay out the different options available to the country — situations to avoid, capabilities to gain — and to distil what achieving our national strategy objectives would mean for everyday citizens, businesses and civil society. Using scenarios turns abstract strategy into concrete and commonly-understood possibilities, helping decision-makers and the public alike to visualise risks and rewards, grounding high-level aims in real-world impacts and practical steps forward. These scenarios should be as public as possible with understandable methods and workings: clarity about process helps others engage seriously and adapt their own work to take account of these scenarios.

→ *See* Hotel Singapore *as a strategic tool in government*

→ *See Dutch* planbureau *scenarios — intentionally public framings of the future and major choices*

11 — Sustained priorities 5

National strategy should centre on a few long-term objectives, backed by a culture and system that embed clarity and persistence. Objectives must match the scale of the challenge, with delivery methods and incentives aligned so focus is sustained over time and understood publicly.

→ *See South Korean cyclical economic strategising*

→ *See the UK's Climate Change Act and Committee as legal mechanisms to entrench norms and progress*

→ *See Dutch* fiscal planning

→ *See Singaporean nested strategies as a method of cascading enduring goals into shorter, local plans*

12 — Competing strategic approaches 5

The practice of national strategy must use methods to compete coherent strategies, making clear the trade-offs involved and sharing these decisions with the public. By rigorously comparing alternatives and exposing their costs and benefits, strategy becomes a transparent exercise in managing difficult priorities together.

→ *See Eisenhower's* Project Solarium *as the pre-eminent example of a structured process to test and compete strategic responses*

→ *See Dutch use of maps to compete national strategic spatial decisions*

13 — Navigating trade-offs in public 5 6

National strategy must force trade-offs to be surfaced — not to just to policymakers and politicians making decisions but to the public to engage them in mature conversations about priorities and hard choices about the way forward. This requires an openness to listening to the public's views on these trade-offs, enabling any resulting strategy to be rooted in an understanding of why the choices are being made.

→ *See the UK's Climate Assembly use of iterative, informed ways of navigating challenging trade-offs with the public*

14 — National dialogue through public engagement 6

National strategy can be tested and developed through genuine, innovative public engagement. Methods are available that surface dissent, explore values, and build settlement.

→ *See the* Our Singapore Conversation *genuinely involve citizens in decisions about the long-term*

→ *See the UK's Climate Assembly*

15 — An adaptive practice of learning 3 6

The practice of national strategy should build in tools, institutions, and cultures that enable rapid learning from mistakes — and ensure that learning is widely shared and acted upon. Revision of national strategy should be treated as a core discipline of long-term governance: not a sign of failure, but a reflection of responsibility and responsiveness in the face of change. Building this into training, discourse, and practice helps normalise adaptation as a strategic strength.

→ *See Ireland drawing from its experience of the Global Financial Crash to inform its approach to Brexit*

→ *See Singapore's systematic investment in the constant learning and adaptation of its civil servants and its practices*

16 — Parliamentary oversight 3 7

National strategy should create clear parliamentary mechanisms to oversee long-term goals on behalf of future citizens. A dedicated parliamentary committee, with a specific mandate to scrutinise national strategy and assess long-term alignment, can help ensure intergenerational accountability and democratic legitimacy.

→ *See Finland's use of Parliamentary committees to seize stewardship of the long-term*

→ *See New Zealand Long-Term Insight Briefings as a mechanism to hold leaders to account for long-term choices*

17 — Having a cycle 3 7

The practice of national strategy should be genuinely cyclical. While the strategic horizon should stretch 15–20 years, national strategy should be reviewed and revised every five years — keeping strategy live, adaptive, relevant and accountable.

→ *See Dutch* planbureaus *refreshing their scenarios roughly every decade*

→ *See Singapore's Concept Plans (reviewed every decade) and Master Plans (reviewed every five years)*

→ *See the UK's Climate Change Act's requirement for regular carbon budgets*

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