
Navigating in the Field of University Positioning: on international ranking lists, quality indicators and higher education governing

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ABSTRACT The construction of transnational and national systems for comparing qualities of universities are presented and discussed. In focus are two important university ranking lists – those produced by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University and by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. A Swedish example concerning the making of a resource distribution system based on performance indicators is presented. The Swedish performance indicator system and the international university ranking lists contain similar technologies for comparing universities and are to a large extent based on services of the same multinational corporations. From this point of view ranking lists and systems of performance based governance can be conceived of as globalisation at work.

Introduction

The focus of this article is constructions of transnational and national systems for comparing the qualities of universities and the implications of such for academic work and life. I will deal with the two most important university ranking lists – those produced by Shanghai Jiao Tong University and by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. To this is added a Swedish example in the making of a resource distribution system based on performance indicators. As will be shown, the Swedish system and the international university ranking lists contain similar technologies for comparing universities and are to a large extent based on services of the same multinational corporations. From this point of view, ranking lists and systems of performance-based governance can be conceived of as globalization at work.

Competition and positioning are, of course, not new in academia. On the contrary, this is a vital part of academic work and life, which is analyzed, for instance, by Pierre Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus* (1988), and a lived experience for the research community. What is new are the technologies for positioning universities and the construction and use of systems of performance indicators for the governing of universities and faculties. Ranking lists are comparing universities and their faculties and researchers in transnational arenas by means of numbers based on citation impacts and prizewinners. Governments are distributing resources for research by similar competitive comparisons based on systems of indicators. The outcomes of such positionings and comparisons are also used as feedback to those who are positioned and compared. These numbers inform universities where they find themselves in relation to others – the state of their condition and progress locally as well as worldwide.[1] In this way, they can be translated into navigation tools for universities as well as for different stakeholders and clients in higher education.

How are we as researchers to deal with such ongoing tendencies of understanding academic work and life as competition presented in ranking lists and as a system for the state to distribute resources? The aim of this article is, then, also to describe and analyze such tendencies, and to discuss alternative stances towards these tendencies.

Constructing World-Class Universities by Ranking Lists

University ranking lists are not a new phenomenon, but it is only during recent years that they have been highly emphasized in discourses on higher education and research. This is partly due to

global tendencies in economic competition, which, in turn, put demands on education and research, and partly due to changes in governing based on marketization, accountability and transparency (Marginson, 2006; Ramirez, 2006). In current discourses on higher education and research, notions of ‘world-class universities’ and international ranking positions are put forward in competitive language. Distinctive in these discourses are comparisons based on measures of performance and reputation by means of a selection of indicators (Dill & Soo, 2005). These comparisons result in ranking positions assumed to measure the qualities of universities around the world (Usher & Savino, 2007).

What these ranking lists do is to inform about positions based on so-called ‘quality indicators’ of academic work. Presenting such positions in a ranking list is carried out with the aim of informing the world – i.e. decision makers and policy makers, students and their parents, research funders, etc. – about the qualities of universities and their performances, and thus improving the qualities of their decisions. In this way, ranking lists inform the many about the few – working as a reversed panopticon (Simons, 2007) governing the universities willing to improve their position.

But the ranking lists are also supposed to inform the universities about where they are situated – not literally, but in relation to the world of other higher education institutes – and about changes in their respective performances. Stated otherwise, different agents are using the ranking lists, inside as well as outside the universities, in order to make political decisions or strategic choices (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

The following questions are put forward:

- What are international ranking lists stating about higher education and research, and what tools are used for doing this?
- What are the implications of using international ranking lists as feedback mechanisms in the governing of universities?

The focus is on two well-known and important university ranking lists: the Academic Ranking of World Universities [2] published by the Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University (the ‘Shanghai list’) and the *Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)* ranking list, the THES-QS World University Rankings.

As will be shown later, these lists are framing university qualities in different ways, though both use the ranking metaphor and to some extent similar tools for positioning universities around the world.

Criteria for the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Ranking List

The Shanghai list of world-class universities was first presented in 2003 and invoked considerable worldwide interest. Its main task, according to the compilers of this list, is to identify and to analyze world-class universities in order to identify working goals and indicators for universities around the world to become world-class universities.[3]

In Table I, the criteria and indicators for the Shanghai ranking list are presented, as well as their relative weight for the calculation of ranking positions of universities.

Criteria	Indicator	Weight %
Quality of education	Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	10
Quality of faculty	Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	20
	Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories	20
Research output	Articles published in <i>Nature</i> and <i>Science</i>	20
	Articles in Science Citation Index-expanded, Social Science Citation Index	20
Size of institution	Academic performance with respect to the size of an institution	10
Total		100

Table I. Criteria and indicators and their relative weight in the construction of a basis for comparing universities (Academic Rankings of World Universities, 2007).

Of importance here are two things. First, specific measures of track records are used – i.e. what is achieved in terms of prizes and publications. In sum, 90% of the ranking position is derived in this

way. Second, these track records are mostly in the field of science. Social scientists or educationalists as well as teachers and researchers in the field of the humanities are perhaps mostly visible in contributing to the size of a university, which in these contexts is a somewhat ambiguous contribution, given that research output is divided by the number of staff.

Of vital importance in the compilation of this ranking system are the services of the Thomson Institute for Scientific Information (ISI).[4] It is part of the Thomson Reuters Corporation, offering different bibliographic database services such as measurements of citation impacts of different kinds.[5] In sum, the Thomson ISI services make a 50% contribution to the compiling of the ranking lists.

Criteria for the THES-QS Ranking List

The THES-QS list is somewhat differently constructed. Up to 50% is based on reviews – such as Internet surveys – by academics and employers, which to a large extent is a measurement of the reputation of universities and their students. The track record (citation impact) in a more narrow sense contributes 20% of the total sum on which the ranking is based. Teaching quality is measured by dividing the number of students by the number of faculty staff. In addition, the THES-QS list gives weight to the participation of international staff and the number of international students as indications of academic quality. These measures of the number of staff and students, as well as international attraction, are based on answers from the universities on questions from the THES-QS.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) is a company specializing in careers and developing information on higher education.[6] To 20% this company was using the Thomson ISI services and now Scopus, which is a similar multi-national corporation.[7] However, the QS lists are based on information provided by the universities as well as on surveys to academics and recruiters concerning the reputation of universities and student employability as represented in Table II.

Field	Method	Weight %
Peer review	QS survey to 5100 academics	40
Recruiter review	Reviews of important international employers	10
Citation impact per paper	Number of citations of papers that university staff have published as measured by, previously, Thomson Web of Science and now Scopus	20
Staff–student ratio	This is based on the number of staff in relation to the number of students, where a higher rate is conceived of as higher quality	20
International attraction	The ability of the university to attract a number of foreign students.	5
International faculty	The ability of the university to attract teachers from other countries, according to QS.	5
Total		100

Table II. The construction of the THES-QS World University Rankings
(http://www.topuniversities.com/worlduniversityrankings/methodology/simple_overview/)

Taken together, there are clear similarities and differences between the Shanghai list and the THES-QS list. One difference is that the former uses available resources in terms of awards and publications, while the latter to a high degree uses surveys to academics and employers, along with information provided by the universities. One similarity is the use of measurements of citation impacts plus the very simple fact that QS, Thomson ISI and Scopus are all multinational corporations.

How Are Ranking Lists Representing Academic Qualities?

Ranking lists are conceived of as indicating qualities in higher education and research. One of the main ideas behind using a set of indicators is to discuss qualities of higher education institutions in a more comprehensive and comparable way compared to course descriptions, journal article production or teaching qualities. Another main idea is that such a set of indicators goes beyond the

esoteric qualities of the works of specialized research teams or university teaching (see, for example, Dunn, 2003). Ranking lists are assumed to represent higher education and research institutions in ways that make it possible for laymen and politicians, as well as students and parents, to understand and compare qualities of different universities. In an era when higher education, and especially research, is getting more costly and in need of support in different ways, university ranking lists are regarded as being informative for actors inside as well as outside academia. Thus, such representations are assumed to provide information about an incomprehensible world and make their qualities transparent and possible for us to deal with as informed customers and or as decision makers.

As representations, ranking lists are also part of the governing of universities. According to Marginson & van der Wende (2007, p. 309): 'The global rankings immediately secured great prominence in higher education, policy and public arenas; and have already had discernable effects in institutional and policy behaviours.'

On behalf of the University of Gothenburg, Cavallin & Lindblad (2006) analyzed the qualities of university ranking lists. They described the tools used for ranking, such as the Thomson ISI and peer reviews. Their empirical studies pointed to a number of problems in the construction of ranking lists as representations of academic qualities:

- The basis for ranking is based on very thin descriptions of academic work life and outputs. This gives a lack of stability in the ranking positions over the years that seems to be unlikely, given that they represent large and complex organizations using huge infrastructures in their work.
- There is a linguistic bias in ranking positions. Almost all the top universities are working within an Anglo-Saxon language domain. Universities in other linguistic contexts, such as French, German, Spanish, Chinese, etc., are highly underrepresented.
- There is a bias in terms of scientific fields. Mathematics, natural sciences, medicine and technology are heavily emphasized, while the humanistic and artistic fields of knowledge and educational science, as well as large parts of the social sciences, are to a large extent underrepresented.
- A specific publication genre is represented in ranking lists – articles in peer-reviewed journals – while monographs and books and other ways of presenting research are more or less invisible in the making of ranking positions.
- Large universities with broad faculty coverage and large teaching tasks are disfavoured compared to more specialized universities specializing in medicine, technology or natural sciences.

In sum, Cavallin & Lindblad (2006) identified deficiencies in ranking lists in terms of misrepresentations of academic qualities, as well as in linguistic and geographic terms.[8] What counts most is work in mathematics and sciences, as well as medicine, carried out in Northern America or Great Britain and published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Writing books on the arts or philosophy in French or Swedish does not count for much. Putting it to an edge, the latter kind of academic work is actually disqualifying, given that the number of publications and citation impact that matter are divided by the number of teachers and researchers. If these academics do work that has no significance for ranking positions, they are not productive in the making of their universities' academic capital.

These conclusions in terms of misrepresentations constructed in ranking lists are supported by a number of studies which have scrutinized the technologies at work in different ways.[9] Such a criticism is not to be understood as a criticism of international publications and ways of analyzing their impact. It is a criticism of the lack of quality in the construction of ranking lists having ambitions to capture academic qualities but when doing so are based on important biases and misrepresentations, as well as misrecognition of large sectors of academic work and life. This criticism is especially relevant for the THES-QS ranking list.

Outcomes of Rankings

Given the notions of representing academic work and life in the construction of university ranking lists, I will now turn to what these lists produce and the impact of the biases present in the ranking constructions.

Ranking of universities according to the Shanghai list, 2003-08. In Table III, we find the 20 highest ranked universities during the period from 2003 to 2008 according to the Shanghai list. This list was first presented in 2003 with lots of publicity. We find here Harvard at the top, followed by Stanford – a seemingly stable pattern over the years (the only newcomer in 2008 compared to 2003 is the University of Wisconsin-Madison). What we can also note is a stable outcome in terms of political geography. The USA, in combination with Oxbridge, occupies almost all of the places, with a Japanese university in at number 19.

University	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Harvard University	1	1	1	1	1	1
Stanford University	2	2	2	3	2	2
California Institute of Technology	3	6	6	6	6	6
University of California, Berkeley	4	4	4	4	3	3
University of Cambridge	5	3	3	2	4	4
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	6	5	5	5	5	5
Princeton University	7	7	7	8	8	8
Yale University	8	11	11	11	11	11
University of Oxford	9	8	8	10	10	10
Columbia University	10	9	9	7	7	7
University of Chicago	11	10	10	8	9	9
Cornell University	12	12	12	12	12	12
University of California, San Francisco	13	17	17	18	18	18
University of California, San Diego	14	13	13	13	14	14
University of California, Los Angeles	15	16	16	14	13	13
University of Washington	16	20	20	17	16	16
Imperial College London	17	23	23	23	23	27
University of Pennsylvania	18	15	15	15	15	15
Tokyo University	19	14	14	19	20	19
University College London	20	25	25	26	25	22

Table III. Ranking of universities according to the Shanghai list, 2003-08.

The data collected are analyzed in terms of regional and geopolitical aspects concerning, for instance, the distribution of top universities around the world in relation to gross domestic product (GDP) and percentage of world population. Here is just a glimpse of the results of such analyses:

- The USA has 54% of the top 100 universities, 27% of the GDP and 5% of the population of the world.
- The United Kingdom has 11% of the top 100 universities, 5% of the GDP and 1% of the population of the world.
- Sweden has 4% of the top 100 universities, 0.8% of the GDP and 0.1% of the population of the world.
- Russia has 1% of the top 100 universities, 2% of the GDP and 2.2% of the population of the world.
- China has 0% of the top 100 universities, 5.5% of the GDP and 20% of the population of the world.

This gives a clear message to the reader: top universities are unequally distributed around the world and so is the GDP.

However, this is not only considered as a fact but also as something that can be dealt with in order to improve universities that currently do not belong to the world elite. 'World Class Universities is a dream for generations of Chinese. It is not only for pride, but also for the future of China' (Liu, 2008).

Given this way of framing the outcomes of the Shanghai list, a number of universities – in China and in other parts of the world – are putting forward ambitions to become world-class universities and presenting strategies and time schedules for achieving such goals.

Ranking of universities according to the THES-QS list, 2004-08. In Table IV, I present an overview of the top 20 list from 2004 to 2008 according to the THES and its partner, QS.

University	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Harvard University	1	1	1	1	1
University of California, Berkeley	2	6	8	22	36
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	3	2	4	10	9
California Institute of Technology	4	8	7	7	5
University of Oxford	5	4	3	2	4
University of Cambridge	6	3	2	2	3
Stanford University	7	5	6	19	17
Yale University	8	7	4	2	2
Princeton University	9	9	10	6	12
ETH Zurich	10	21	24	42	24
London School of Economics	11	11	17	59	60
University of Tokyo	12	16	19	17	19
University of Chicago	13	17	11	7	8
Imperial College London	14	13	9	5	6
University of Texas at Austin	15	26	32	51	70
Australian National University	16	23	16	16	16
Beijing University	17	15	14	-	-
National University Singapore	18	22	19	33	30
Columbia University	19	20	12	11	10
University of California, San Francisco	20	-	-	-	-

Table IV. Ranking of universities according to the THES-QS list, 2004-08.

We find here some stability as well, though not as dramatic as in the Shanghai list. On the contrary, the variation is somewhat of a mystery. How can, for instance, the decline of Berkeley be explained – being in second position in 2004 and in thirty-sixth position five years later? And how about the University of California, San Francisco, starting at twentieth position in 2004 and never to appear in the top 200 list again. A number of other cases could be mentioned, which presumably says more about the problem of measuring universities by reputation and employability than about their respective academic qualities.

How are, then, these results put forward? The presentation of the 2008 ranking list by the *THES* was framed as a public event. The universities received their positions a few days before they were made public, many comments from university people were published and a conference on the ‘Globalisation of the University’ took place just after the publication. An introductory question in the presentation of the conference was:

Higher education is global: Where is your institution positioned? ... Some 300 000 overseas students are currently in the UK spending £5 billion annually on their education – what is your institution’s strategy to fill this audience’s growing requirements?
(<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk>, 14 October 2008)

Here, the *THES* put forward questions for universities to consider on how to attract overseas students. A number of reactions around the world on the 2008 rankings are presenting themselves, including a fear that the United Kingdom is loosing positions in the ranking game.

University Ranking Lists at Work?

Earlier, I suggested that the Shanghai list has ambitions to be an instrument to create world-class universities and the THES-QS list puts forward images of the modern entrepreneurial university acting strategically in a market.

When looking at higher education policy discourses, there are reasons to believe that ranking lists are at work. For instance, Marginson & van der Wende (2007, p. 322) recently noted the use of such lists in European research policy:

In Europe the weak representation of European higher education in the two global rankings systems – only nine European universities in the Jiao Tong top 50 and twelve in the *Times Higher* top 50 – has prompted policy reflection and action in both EU [European Union] and national

government circles. This rankings performance is often cited in public proposals for greater investment in the European higher education and research area, and proposals for the further concentration of funding in networks and centres of excellence.

A number of universities also have, as part of their policy, the improvement of their position in relation to ranking lists such as the Shanghai list and the THES-QS list. They also present their position on their websites as an argument for their quality. The picture is different, but to my understanding ranking lists are translated around the world by universities and governments as a basis for strategic reorganization and resource allocation. The lists are not only providing simple measures of university performances at a time when performativity matters much, they are also serving as signifiers for reorganization and change in higher education and research.

What we in sum get is a translation from different qualities of universities into a standardised base that can order universities to each other in a competitive way. Given this standardised base, universities can now inform prospective clients and investors about their position in the field of universities. However, they can also inform themselves about their position compared to other universities. Thus, ranking lists are making universities visible to themselves from an outside point of view as well as to the world around them according to the competitive logic of league tables.

The big question is whether ranking lists are having an impact not only on university policies but also on the ways in which universities are constructing and managing arenas of academic work and life. Universities as institutions are not easily changed but they follow different trajectories over time (see, for example, Rothblatt & Wittrock, 1993). Will university ranking lists have such implications?

Concluding Comparative Remarks on Ranking Lists

In Table V, the Shanghai list and the THES-QS list are compared in terms of ambitions, instruments and outcomes. A first and simple common point is that the lists are based on the metaphor of a rank where the totality of academic work and life is turned into a position on that rank.

Aspect	Shanghai	THES-QS
Ambitions	A tool for modernizing universities based on qualities in science and technology innovations.	A tool for entrepreneurial universities to strengthen their position and an information system for stakeholders.
Instruments	Collecting information on high-status awards. Analysis of publications and their impact by means of Thomson ISI. Thin basis for comparisons.	Surveying reputation and employability by means of QS. Collecting information from universities. Analysis of publications and their impact by means of Scopus. Somewhat broader basis for comparisons based on surveys.
Outcomes	Rather stable rankings over the years at the top. More unstable lower down. Analyses of geopolitical and financial characteristics.	Rather unstable rankings over the years, even at the top. Making sense of instabilities in positions.

Table V. Comparing the university ranking lists.

However, we can note in Table V the different ambitions of the ranking lists, where the Shanghai list is constructed to be a tool for the making of modern top-class universities, while the THES-QS list is constructed as a tool for the modern entrepreneurial university. This is furthermore underlined by the rhetoric used when presenting and analyzing the ranking results in terms of making world-class universities or capitalizing on ranking positions.

A common feature of the ranking lists is that they are constructed by means of the services of multinational companies. Here, we can talk about a globalizing partnership between the ranking list compilers and a few companies – Scopus and the Thomson ISI, plus, in the case of the *THES*, QS. QS operates globally from offices in Beijing, London, Paris, Singapore, Sydney, Tokyo and

Washington, DC. The Thomson Reuters Corporation, which owns the Thomson ISI, is a similar company and so is Reed Elsevier, where Scopus is located. There are differences in the instruments – the Shanghai list is based on the universities' own research and the services of the Thomson ISI, while the *THES* uses the services of QS and Scopus. Considering the similarities, ranking lists are to a large extent constructed by multinational enterprises.

In the commentaries on ranking positions, the *THES* tries to make changes understandable – the instability is combined with good-reason essays on this instability. The Shanghai list is used for the analysis of inequalities in the world as well as in the distribution of world-class universities around the world.

On Research-Driven Universities: a Swedish case

Performance indicators are at work in different contexts. In the restructuring of higher education in Sweden, which started in the 1990s, market governance was more strongly implemented, and universities were funded in relation to how they produced educated students in relation to planning models. With the new millennium, university research came into focus in discourses of transparent and accountable research. This was regarded as a precondition by the government for increasing state funds for research. Now, a number of models are being discussed dealing with, on the one hand, different genres of research – such as in the sciences and the humanities – and, on the other hand, different kinds of performance indicators – such as scientific publications and citation impact. One of the main ideas is to get universities to compete for state research funds – for example, in distributing resources according to past performances or getting centres of excellence in competition with each other. Another main idea is to present lump sums from the state to the universities and let the universities distribute research funds across faculties. Thus, what is now being developed are tools and systems for governing research by quality indicators. This is presented in the following quote from the Swedish State Commission's 'Resource Inquiry' (SOU, 2007, p. 81) as being based on what the academic community conceives of as good research and on a trust in the higher education market:

The Resource Inquiry's proposed model for the allocation of funding means that direct appropriations will be distributed according to the academic community's own criteria of what is good education and research and on the basis of students' own informed choices. It follows from this that the State neither can nor should govern how resources are distributed between higher education institutions. (SOU, 2007, p. 23)

Here, the state can be said to be developing a model for assessing research quality in a way that makes the universities more autonomous (given the criteria used and the positions on the kind of market at work). In the proposed system of university evaluation concerning research, we find a combination of quality indicators to distribute 50% of state funds as hard cash.

The criteria are as follows:

- research funds as an indicator of peer reviews of research proposals (20%);
- citations in scientific articles (20%);
- share of teachers holding a Ph.D. (5%);
- share of women professors (5%).

Based on these criteria, universities are assessed in order to receive resources from the state. To my understanding, similar criteria will be used when distributing resources within the universities as well.

Fifty percent of state funds are to be distributed using these indicators. Of these 50%, 40% are to be distributed in terms of performances in terms of success in getting Research Council funds plus citation in scientific journals. By means of a simulation based on the indicators we find a substantial redistribution of resources to Swedish universities (see Table VI).

University	Research funds	Citation impact	Female professors	PhD teachers	Percent gained or lost
Uppsala	-8.1	8.1	-0.4	-1.9	-1
Lund	3.4	6.2	0.3	0.3	3
Gothenburg	-10.8	-8.4	4.9	-0.2	-5
Stockholm	-13.5	1.2	5.3	1.3	-2
Agricultural University	-4.1	0.5	-1.1	-0.6	-2
Chalmers	13.1	7.7	-3.8	0.1	15
University of Technology					
Lund Technical University	3.0	-4.5	-1.6	0.3	-4
Royal Institute of Technology	13.2	5.9	-4.7	-0.3	7
Karolinska Institute	17.1	7.2	-3.7	-4.4	6
Umeå	-11.8	-12.8	0.1	-0.5	-13
Linköping	3.6	0.2	1.8	3.0	7
Karlstad	0.9	2.3	0.6	1.0	-5
Växjö	-2.4	-3.3	0.4	0.5	-16
Örebro	-1.5	-2.4	2.1	1.0	-3
Mid Sweden	0	-3.2	-0.5	0.4	-9

Table VI. Simulated distribution of resources to Swedish universities based on different quality indicators. Changes in distribution due to the Research Commission's 'Resource Inquiry' model of indicators and percentage of budget (Universitetsläraren, 2007, p. 6).

When analyzing the simulated outcomes of the proposed system of distribution of resources based on performance indicators, we find a distinct pattern (as presented in Figure 1) in terms of total gains and losses in the proposed redistribution scheme. What is notable is that those who gain resources from this redistribution are, in general, the schools of technology and medicine in Sweden (dotted pattern) and those who lose resources are the newly founded universities (striped pattern). What makes a difference here is the external funds and citation impacts. To this is added the fact that the largest universities in Gothenburg and Stockholm are losing resources in this new distribution scheme – notably since they have a smaller share of external research funds. Here, we should remember that both are universities with large education tasks. Umeå University – a rather young university with a large responsibility for higher education – is also losing resources due to a lack of external research funds and low citation impact.

A very simple conclusion can be drawn: research funds and citation impact matter in the quality-indicator-driven resource distribution, according to the calculations presented here. Taken together, in Sweden we are moving towards a system of research indicators for distribution of resources to universities that stresses competition between universities as well as between departments and research groups. In this competition, indicators of publications and citations are of vital importance. These are based on the same tools and services that are used in international ranking lists.

Here, we find the rules of the game that universities must play in order to get resources from the state. This game of resource distribution is under discussion and is mostly questioned by the humanities community as well as within the social sciences. However, there will be a new way for the distribution of resources from the state to the universities based on performances measured by quality indicators, irrespective of what is stated in this discourse. Perhaps this is a new model for the Swedish welfare state's higher education and research policy?

Given this model, we are expecting the Matthew effect: 'the rich get richer and the poor get poorer'. What you have got as a university in terms of track records, citation impact and research funds will get you more resources to improve your track records, citation impact and research funds, which in turn will improve your position to obtain more resources from the state. A system in the making of an academic capitalism in order to obtain resources from the state!

Conclusions

The Swedish system of distributing resources to universities by means of performance indicators is a system created by policy makers and state intellectuals in order to govern in an informed way. In this way, it is part of a public policy emphasizing competition, accountability and transparency for academic work and life. As a tool for policy makers and the governing of universities, it is different from the international university ranking lists which aim to compare universities and to provide information to these universities and their clients.

However, we find similar technologies at work in the measuring and comparing of university performances, such as those based on the services of the Thomson ISI. In this sense, ranking lists as well as resource distribution based on performance indicators have an in-built harmonizing tendency in higher education and research around the world. The harmonizing effects are not based on directives but on the capacity of ranking lists and performance indicator systems to be translated into navigating tools informing and giving feedback to universities about their positions and directions when comparing positions over time. The notion of navigating tools – as pointed out by Simons (2007) in relation to international comparisons of test performances – as part of education governance is of importance to understand the soft working of international ranking lists.

In this way, ranking lists and systems of research assessment are not only positioning universities; they have performative qualities – they are part of the making of universities when adopted and turned into strategic action in order to improve positions and to obtain resources. In such a competitive context, governing by performance indicators is not so very soft. We can go back to the analyses of the postmodern condition that Lyotard put forward (1979, pp. 4-5) in terms of a shift from the use value of knowledge to an exchange value:

Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its 'use value'.

To analyze and debate such a shift is of utmost importance in the research community.

Given current changes in research policies in terms of performances and evaluations and in relations between science and society, we conceive of ranking list discourses as part of changing the language game of higher education institutions, underlining performances from an outside point of view as governing their work.

On Alternative Stances to Ranking Lists and Performance-based Resource Distribution

In this article, I have presented the construction and implications of international university ranking lists and a case of national resource distribution by means of performance indicators. Such tools and governing technologies are similar to a large extent and are congenial to current attempts to make the systems of policy making and research communicate.

There are two basic problems with these technologies. The first is their ways of dealing with academic qualities in thin and often biased ways. By this they are constructing, at best, imprecise and, at worst, totally misleading navigating tools for academic work and life. The second problem is that they are based on metaphors of academic work and life as taking place in decontextualized arenas. By this they are misrecognizing the preconditions for navigating in the complex academic landscape.

Given such a problematic point of view, what are, then, possible stances within academia to deal with ranking lists and performance-based resource distribution? A way to structure this is to use Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) conceptualization of different strategies to deal with problems in an organization in terms of loyalty, voice and exit.

The *loyalty* option means that you stay with the organization and its practices hoping that things will improve in one way or another, or to minimize the problem – stating that the current problem is of less importance or considering the feasibility of the other alternatives. To my understanding this is the predominant response to the current problematic. A more active response here is to play the ranking game – to change a publication pattern if it is deviant from the

performance norm, or to reorient the university profile in order to make it more fitting to the ranking standards or the performance indicators.

The *voice* option demands more activity. One route is to try to improve the system of quality indicators – to make them more representative of different parts of academic work and life. The European Educational Research Quality Indicators (EERQI) project (carried out by the European Educational Research Association in cooperation with other organizations and publishers) aims to achieve a more inclusive and representative way to deal with educational research qualities in different geopolitical and linguistic contexts.[10] Another alternative is to criticize the validity of current criteria and technologies and propose new ones that, for example, support higher education for disadvantaged minorities or other publication patterns.

The third option is *exit*. A first alternative here is to refuse to participate – not sending in publication lists or other kinds of information used for ranking. This has been an option, for instance, among US universities and colleges, at least in a few cases. A second alternative is to leave the academic field – perhaps as an inner exile – as a protest against the performativity turn in higher education.

In the research community we are using all three options – loyalty, voice and sometimes also exit. What option is at stake depends on current situations and resources, as well as conceptions about what needs to be done. The voice option is of considerable importance – not so much for providing more valid representations of academic qualities but for guarding academic arenas from the world-championship metaphor and to disqualify ‘quick and dirty ways’ (Raas, 2005) of judging academic qualities by ranking numbers instead of qualities in arguments and innovation. This alternative also emphasizes the specific professional qualities in academic argumentation – to question and to test what is considered as valid knowledge in scientific discussions. Such a voice alternative includes arguments concerning the qualities of the quality indicators and the performances of performance indicators as well as the validity of competition metaphors for scientific work, including educational research – stated otherwise, to study and analyze the scientific qualities in university ranking and governing by performance indicators. Given this voice alternative, notions of socially robust knowledge (Nowotny et al, 2001) are of vital importance for a serious debate concerning the social significance of scientific work and to find also potential allies outside academia.

Notes

- [1] This article is part of an ongoing study on publications and citations in the field of Swedish educational science. It is partly based on contributions to a symposium at the 2008 American Educational Research Association conference in New York – Is There a World Championship in Higher Education? – which Tom Popkewitz, Rita Foss Lindblad and I presented. In 2006, Mats Cavallin & Sverker Lindblad carried out a study on behalf of the University of Gothenburg on university ranking lists. This study contributed greatly to the current article.
- [2] <http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/ranking.htm>
- [3] For an outline of the reasons for ranking and problems with ranking, see the 2008 Academic Ranking of World Universities website, Frequently Asked Questions: [http://www.arwu.org/rank2008/ARWU2008FAQ\(EN\).htm](http://www.arwu.org/rank2008/ARWU2008FAQ(EN).htm)
- [4] The Thomson Reuters website puts forward the following: The Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) was founded by Eugene Garfield in 1960. It was acquired by Thomson Scientific & Healthcare in 1992, became known as Thomson ISI and now as Thomson Scientific. It is a component of the multi-billion-dollar Thomson Reuters Corporation. It presents itself as follows: ‘We combine industry expertise with innovative technology to deliver critical information to leading decision makers in the financial, legal, tax and accounting, scientific, healthcare and media markets, powered by the world’s most trusted news organization.’ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_for_Scientific_Information
- [5] See Web of Science, http://www.thomsonreuters.com/products_services/scientific/Web_of_Science
- [6] The Quacquarelli Symonds website states that ‘QS Quacquarelli Symonds was founded in 1990 and has become established as the world’s leading network for top careers and education. Our mission is

to enable motivated people around the world to fulfill their potential by fostering international mobility, educational achievement and career development.' See http://www.qsnetwork.com/about_qs/qs_quacquarelli_symonds/

- [7] Scopus is part of the Reed Elsevier Company. It presents itself as '... a world leading provider of professional information and online workflow solutions in the Science, Medical, Legal, Risk Management and Business sectors. Based in over 200 locations worldwide, we create authoritative content delivered through market leading brands, enabling our customers to find the essential data, analysis and commentary to support their decisions' (http://www.investis.com/reports/reed_ar_2007_en/pdf_cache/reed_ar_2007_en_extract_2.pdf).
- [8] Their work has, so far, only been presented as a university report in Swedish.
- [9] See here Oppenheim (1997), Archambault et al (2005) and Moed (2005), who have compared the British evaluation system Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) evaluations based on citations, and Aksnes & Taxt (2004), who have done similar analyses in Norway. See also Bollen et al (2005).
- [10] <http://www.eerqi.eu/>

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