

Time: no longer than 20 min.

**Global university
rankings as
geopolitical tools
and market
devices.
Case of Russian
universities**

Makareva Anastasiia

NRU HSE, 2020

Outline of the presentation:

- applicability
- academic significance & future implications
- research objectives
- research methodology & design
- theoretical & conceptual framework
- preliminary findings
- case of Russia
- what is next?

Questions and points to keep in mind

- Are global university rankings subjective? If so, should we trust them?
- What is the impact of the global university rankings on different social groups?
- Do universities form and contribute to the emergence of economic markets and development of the geopolitical cleavages?
- Do rankings produce certain Weberian 'ideal types' to follow?



Interest in the issue → applicability and significance

It all started with the one convincing question ...

If higher education multidimensionally contributes to the market, how about global university rankings?

- Rising interest to the research in HE as separate field of study
- Teichler (2005): research in HE is often strategic

→ to some extent, rankings:

1. signal both the strategies undertaken by universities and their rivalries
2. highlight the strategies worth considering

Academic significance: 2 major perspectives

1. From the perspective of the organization of knowledge:

- not all of the peculiarities of the global university rankings were examined
- in many cases, connections with other fields of study remain overlooked

2. From the perspective of the object of research itself

- lack of consensus within academia on whether there is a necessity to unify rankings
- how such implication can be applicable to the policy-making

Other factors:

- interest in the higher education as a separate field of study
- growing interest in the research of global university rankings based on its strategic significance

Contribution:
to fill the gaps in the existing research

General hypothesis: *Global university rankings can perform the functions of geopolitical tools and serve as market devices in the context of current global agenda.*

Research objectives:

1. Which roles do global university rankings currently possess in geopolitics and economic sociology?
2. How their roles and overall perception has changed compared to the previously existing one?

- to assess and evaluate the existing theoretical analysis of the global university framework
- to look how global university rankings fit into the institutional frames of the markets and geopolitical agenda
- to examine the approach towards the study of global university rankings: as instruments and devices

Research methodology and Design

more exploratory rather confirmatory research

descriptive → case-study

review → literature review

***meta-analytical** → meta-analysis of the global university rankings in different spheres

Research methods: mixed

qualitative

- knowledge-based on constructivist perspective
 - collection of open-ended, emerging data
- HE as relatively new sphere
- same applies for global university rankings

quantitative

- use of measurement and observation
- statistical databases of global university rankings

Some more details on methodology...

The **subject matter** = the role, impact of global university rankings on different fields, specifically, the geopolitics and markets.

The **object** = the evidence from the existing literature and cases of global university rankings, including

- *THE* (Times Higher Education)
- *QS World University Ranking*
- *ARWU* (or Shanghai University Ranking)

The chronological framework:

1. **2nd part of the 20th century**
early university rankings gained increasing prominence, both regionally and internationally
→ brief overview on the historical background of global university rankings' development and their embodiment into the system of HE
2. **recent evidence from the year 2000 till present**
→ recent changes in the system of global rankings
→ alterations, if any, in the way it is connected with the identified dimensions (geopolitics and markets)

Theoretical & conceptual frameworks

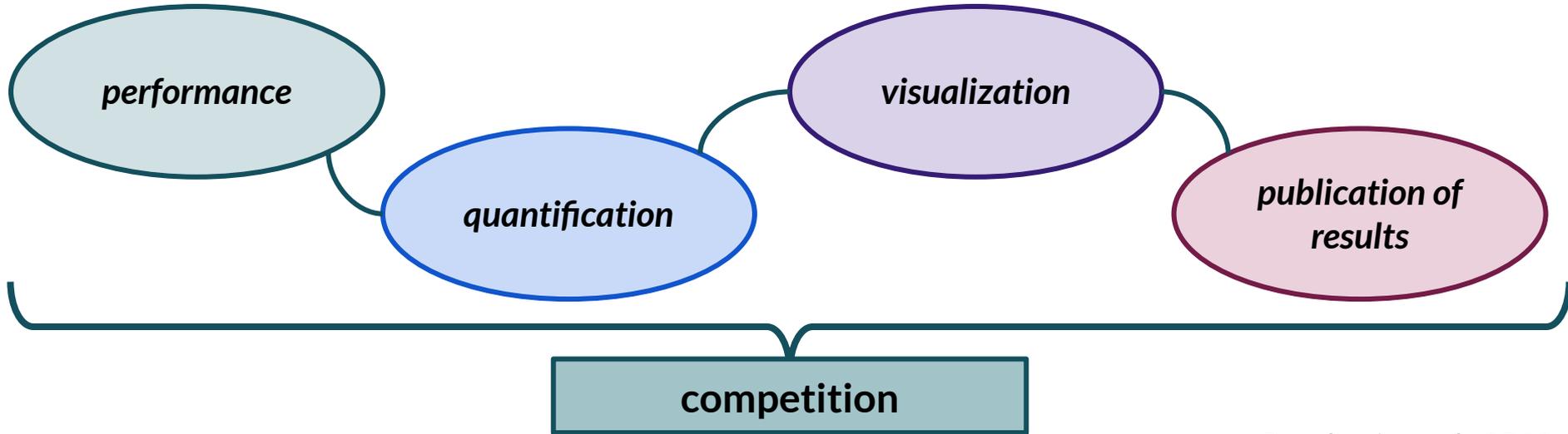
- major theoretical framework: **sociological institutionalism**

→ rankings, as institutions, will be analyzed in accordance with their embeddedness into the broader system and related social environments

- **discourse analysis:** from both structural and interpretivist perspective (Wodak & Meyer, 2009)

+ Necessity of interdisciplinary research (Rindova et al., 2018)

Preliminary research findings



Brankovic et al., 2018

Hence, **global university rankings** deal with such issues as:

- social operations contributing to the continuous set up of competition for a target audience;
- zero-sum game
- 'informative' vs 'performative' functions

Global University Rankings

'meta-performance' indicators (Marginson, 2007)

comparative orderings, defined as 'public, stable system of stratification, comprised of unstable positions' (Rindova et al., 2018)

organizational-level contributions

- endowment, recruitment, commitment claims

individual-level contributions

- influencing the perspectives of people, for instance, employment

tools for **surveillance** and **control** (Rindova et al., 2018)

- + Espeland's (2002) notion of **commensuration**: transformation of the qualitative characteristics into quantitative

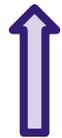
internationalization; mobilization of human capital; recruitment; value for money (Hazelkorn, 2017)

Case of Russian universities: why we use rankings?

universities as 'soft
power'



performance



visibility of
intellectual
power

- contribution to knowledge economy
- socio-political function
- representation

tendency to use prestige
as a tool for *measuring
excellence*
(Oleksiyenko, 2014)

Case of Russian universities

Limitations:

- phenomenon of 'university rankings'
- appeared within last decade
- hence, lack of sufficient attention

- human factor* → readjustment and manipulation

- how strategically important reforms were overlooked by Russian universities by 'race-to-the-bottom'
→
→ universities adjust their policies, without actually analyzing its expediency

Background:

the immediate post-Soviet background shaped the interference of market relations into the system of Russian higher education in 1990s (Rodionov et al., 2014)

At the same time ...

- high level of social participation in HE
- nation-building role and its impact on HE

Case of Russian universities

Post-Soviet background

Catch-up strategies & reforms do not work that well - *debatable?*

- 1) “National research university” initiative
- 2) funding programmes for study/ research abroad
- 3) 5-100 initiative

... aimed not only at improving their results but also at prioritizing aims(!)

Case of Russian universities

'Human factor' as tool of positioning or what is the role of global university rankings when it comes to students, academic and teaching staff in Russian universities?

- few students pay attention to university rankings while applying to university
- students are aware about rankings, but this awareness is doubtful

- academic and teaching staff have higher awareness compared to students
- however, what is doubtful is the measures applied for improving positions

Research stages: what is next?

- further **institutional profiling** of global university rankings aimed at measuring performance
- analysis and comparison of the **socio-political contexts** under which the selected rankings operate: **particular policies and tendencies in rankings/performance**

points to keep in mind:

- unification vs particularization paradigm
- consider specific **limitations** (criticism of ARWU, for instance; measurement; subjectivity)
- filling gaps which were previously overlooked, a case in point: production of rankings, ranking entrepreneurship

Thank you for your time and attention!

**QUESTIONS! COMMENTS!
SUGGESTIONS!**

makaryevam@gmail.com, amakareva@hse.ru