

Building an ivory tower in the age of globalization? The process of construction hierarchical academic order in contemporary education through international university rankings

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University rankings during last decade became extremely popular and “fashionable” topic for general discussions and also for academic researches. As Hazelkorn mentioned in her recently published book (2011), “there is a growing obsession with university rankings around the world. What started as an academic exercise in the early 20th century in the US became a commercial ‘information’ service for students in the 1980s and the progenitor of a ‘reputation race’ with geo-political implications today”. Also there is strong critique of the general idea of ranking regarding educational institutions and the existing methodologies of evaluation of the quality of university performance - “many of institutional leaders set rankings as their benchmark in their vision or master plan for the university. Nevertheless, academics are quite skeptical of rankings because they believe that they mislead higher education institutions as well as have enormous methodological limitations”(Shin, Toutkoushian, Teichler, 2011).

Our idea is to look at rankings as a certain innovative technology, which enforces dramatic changes of university education in the context of globalization and helps to create global hierarchy of academic institutions. The creation of global educational space, started in the last decades of the 20th century, provoked numerous challenges for national universities as the centre of producing of the certain type of cultural identity (Readings, 1996). In situation of these changes, rankings become driving tools for university managers how to reform the university. They also shape the concept of “world class university”(Salmi, 2009) as the ideal model (in Weberian sense) of university in contemporary situation. Our idea is to analyze and to compare 3 variants of such academic hierarchies, based in 2011 on the most influential university rankings: 1) Academic ranking of world universities (ARWU); 2) Times higher education world university rankings and 3) QS World University Rankings.