In Pursuit of Performance Assessment in Higher Education: Between Rankings and Institutional Diversity

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Abstract: *The New Public Management reform wave emanated by US and UK liberal governments in the 80's stressed the need for developing public accountability systems based on performance indicators across all types of public services. University ranking systems are an important and useful tool in comparing universities and in stimulating competition among them. But are these rankings adequate in evaluating and comparing different universities coming from different cultural contexts or holding different institutional profiles? Accordingly, the main argument stressed in the paper is that internationally-used university ranking systems favor research-oriented higher education institutions leaving aside universities with traditional teaching or learning as main activities, thus affecting institutional diversity. I conclude by offering alternative ways for assessing higher education performance taking into account institutional diversity.*

Keywords: *higher education, performance, institutional diversity, university, ranking systems, research*

1. Introduction

In the last past three decades there has been a worldwide research focus on developing performance indicators in the education sector due to a general widespread wave of public management reforms with a specific emphasis on performance management and instruments of measurement. In this respect, „performance" has become a common conceptual denominator for solving certain public needs, such as reducing budget deficits, redefining responsibilities between actors (legislative vs. executive, public sector vs. market, politics vs. administration) and redesigning mechanisms of accountability (Bouckaert, 2009).

In the European Union context, higher education is being regarded as a key element for creating and assuring a „knowledge-based society" through transfer of knowledge, products and technologies into the economic environment and as well as through delivering high qualified human resources. As result, there is a strong international science policy trend that emphasizes the research performance of the university sector due to an increase of both public and private financial dependence which led to a performance-based budgeting strategy. As Serenko and Dohan (2011) well say, the contemporary society is fascinated with ranking, and the academia hasn't been an exception as well. University ranking systems have burst out since the 2000's with the most popular international academic ranking report of Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities published in 2003 which places American and UK universities at the top of 500 best universities. In the last few years, the Shanghai ranking system has been heavily criticized because of its emphasis on measuring scientific research productivity in terms of number of papers published in Science and Nature journals and citations by paper, diminishing or even ignoring the importance of social and art sciences or by eliminating books and conference papers as significant publications though they may well contain valuable scientific information (Frey & Rost, 2010, Moed, 2005).

2. Institutional diversity in Higher Education

2.1. The change of paradigm

In his article on Karl Jaspers' "Renewal of the University", Jürgen Habermas (1987) tackles the phenomenon of expansion that has evolved after World War II in higher education, which led Talcott Parsons to speak of an "educational revolution" (p.3), thus affecting and changing both nature and structure of higher education systems. Since then, there

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has been a growing demand to widen access to higher education, which was bound to change the elitist nature of universities (Rosenblit et al, 2007, p. 373). For example, in the German Reich between 1933 and 1939, the number of students had been cut in half, dropping from 121.000 to 56.000., and by the mid 1950's, 50 universities could already accommodate 150.000 students (Habermas & Blazek, 1987, p. 5). The phenomenon of massification in education, in general, and in higher education, in particular, which began to take place after the 50's, called for a reanalysis and reassessment of the role of education in a postindustrial society. OECD publication of *Universities under Scrutiny* (1987) was the first official point of view regarding the changing role of higher education and it came to question "its very purposes and functions in post-industrialized societies". Policy proposals sketched by the OECD referred to coupling university's self-definition with external expectations by designing policies that would promote greater vocationalism and a sense of "appliedness" (Peters*,* 2004, p. 68), as well as a greater focus on efficiency, productivity and accountability. However, the massification of higher education within OECD countries also involved rethinking new funding models apart from those delivered by the state. In this sense, funding becomes the new key variable in dealing with higher education policies.

Starting with the 80's, in higher education spectrum a change of paradigm in terms of what universities are supposed to be and to offer in the larger context of a knowledge-based society has been taking place. In this new context, universities are expected to adapt faster than before to maintain their leading role in contributing to societal progress (Rinne & Koivula, 2009, p. 186). The trend included state budget cuts, pressure for efficiency, conditional contracting, evaluation systems, managerialism and emphasis on the values of an enterprise culture (2009, p. 183). On the one hand, higher education is being regarded as having a social value by matching its production of knowledge to the social and economic needs given in a certain national, regional or international context. In this certain case, knowledge turns into a commodity and its transfer into the society the most important universities' feature, or as Peters stressed it (2004, p. 73), knowledge is now valued for its strict utility rather that as an end in itself or for its enlightenment effects. On the other hand, the concept of research has suffered significant transformations. The notion of "problem solving research" introduced by Gibbons at al. (1994) gives account of thinking of scientific research as a central element in the "new production of knowledge", as well as an account for the third mission attached to universities, apart from its classical features of teaching and learning (Laredo, 2007, p. 445). This third mission is intimately connected to research activities and to its purposes.

2.2. Higher education governance in the context of a knowledge-based society

In the last past thirty years, the concept of governance in the field of education, and mainly in higher education, has suffered structural changes with the redefinition of the roles of the state and universities in designing education policy strategies. Several researchers have been discussing even about a "hollowing out" of the nation state and the emergence of network governance mode of public management (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007, Enders, 2004, Neave, 2000) with functions moving from the nation state upwards to European Union level (Ferlie et al. 2008). Developing this topic, Guy Neave (2000) argues that this change of paradigm that characterizes the field of higher education and which has been undergoing for the last fifty years has marked the transition from "comprehensive" to "specialized" university (p. 25). That is, the vision of university having a full range of faculties has shifted to a narrower one which encourages institutions to get specialized, thus restricting the range of disciplines, research fields, and saleable services. On the other hand, Jürgen Enders (2004) highlights the national dimension of universities by recalling that the contemporary university was born of the nation state and it was only until the 19th – marked by the nation-building process in Europe - and 20th century that it acquired its identification with science and technology (p. 365). There are several features that have been identified and which have influenced and reshaped the relation between state and universities in the last few decades. These refer to the process of massification in higher education which has begun after World War II, but also to globalization and internationalization (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007, Enders 2004, Neave, 2000, Rinne & Koivula, 2009). As such, the concept of governance in higher education has gained new dimensions. One of the most significant relates to what Bleiklie and Kogan call the university as a stakeholder organization (2007, p. 477). In this view, the state is no longer the predominant player in regulating the higher education sector, but there are other *stakeholders* interested in higher education's inputs, processes and outcomes, and they vary from public bodies to transnational organizations, funding organisms, private firms, students.

In this respect, the European Commission has put forward a clear vision for the governance of European higher education institutions, which includes, among other things, a diversification of funding resources, an intensification of ties between universities and industries and a closer match between the supply of qualifications and labour market demands (Dobbins et al. 2011, p. 666). Moreover, the evolution of higher education policy in the early 1980's has to be seen not as

a narrative driven by a changing higher education agenda, but mainly by a series of agendas, financial, social and economic, consequent on higher education's absorption into the public policy making context (Shattock, 2009, p. 182).

On the other hand, the changing role of universities, along with processes of massification and internationalization, represents an additional argument for sustaining it. The massive expansion of higher education across all continents has been one of the defining features of the late 20th century and early 21st century, by the 2000 the total enrolment within higher education institutions was about 100 million students, representing about 20% of the relevant age cohort worldwide (Rosenblit et al. 2007, p. 374). In the European Union context, the governance of higher education has been shaped through the initialization of what is known as the Bologna process, represented by a series of intergovernmental conferences of European education ministers at which programmatic declarations and communiqués were passed (Witte, 2006, p. 123).

2.3. Institutional diversity in Higher Education

The concept of diversity applied to university systems is being perceived as an inherent good (Huisman et al. 2007); in writing of higher education in the US (King, 2004, p. 166), Robert Birnbaum described institutional diversity as one of its "major ideological pillars" and as having "a strong ethical component". It is often argued that a more diversified system enhances much better students' choices and consequently levels of participation (Huisman et al. 2007, p. 563). Debates on higher education diversification can be traced back in the 1960s when the structure of higher educational systems became a major issue in higher education policies. In this sense, the establishment of *polytechnics* in UK, the *Institutes Universitaires de Technologie* in France and the *Fachhochshulen* in Germany initially supported the view that most European countries placed prime emphasis on institutional diversity (Rosenblit, 2007, King, 2004), and that two-type or multi-type structures were likely to emerge in many countries. Starting with the 1980s, efforts have been made for defining diversity in higher education, what is intended to achieve and finding ways for fostering it.

But the notion that universities should specialize and focus on what they are good at has a long history, particularly in the US, initially formulated to justify a plurality of religious environments to match respective practices of students and staff (King, 2004, p. 119).

Birnbaum's classification of seven forms of diversity gained popularity among scholars in the field: systemic diversity (institutional diversity), structural diversity (organizational dimensions), programmatic diversity (curricula), procedural diversity (modes of teaching), reputation diversity, constituential diversity (types of students served), values and climate diversity (internal culture and social environment) (Teichler 2008). In recent accounts of institutional patterns of the higher education system, Teichler (1998, 2007) points out that national higher education systems are described concretely in most cases according to: different types of HE institutions, different types of programs (academic versus professional), various levels of programs – sub-degree, bachelor, master and doctoral programs), variation in reputation and prestige within formally equal institutions and programs, different substantive profiles of institutions and study programs.

On the other hand, Huisman et al. (2007, p. 566) analyzes higher education diversity relative to five dimensions: institutional size, form of institutional control, range of disciplines offered, degrees awarded, and modes of study. Most of these analysis emphasize the multidimensional aspect of the concept of diversity in higher education arguing that the last changes in higher education governance which have undergone for the past thirty years - diversification of funding sources, introducing market competition in attracting resources and creating public accountability mechanisms and quality assurance procedures – have rather led to a process of homogenization of HE systems. Moreover, competition for scarce resources, mainly funds for research, causes institutions to become more similar because the uniform environmental conditions of competition bring forth similar responses. Accordingly, national HE systems worldwide have been moving from a "specialized regime", that is institutions which are supposed to develop their own specific profiles, towards an "integrative regime", featuring a standardized system where all institutions are defined and measured according to one set of criteria (Zha, 2009, p. 460). This move away from specific and distinct missions and profiles of HE institutions stands for an increasingly determination by hierarchical orders which makes institutions more vertically diverse, but often engaging in "academic drift" (Bleiklie, 2007), that is a drift toward the structure and norms typical of more prestigious universities (Morphew & Huisman, 2002, p. 492). As a consequence, Morphew and Huisman argue that in many countries in the world, colleges and universities are growing more alike over time as smaller, newer, less comprehensive institutions become more like their larger, older, more comprehensive peers. In US, examples of academic drift would include four-year colleges adding Master's degree programs and comprehensive universities adding Doctoral degrees. On the one hand, studies like those of Morphew and Huisman (2002), Neave (1979, 2000), show that this type of academic drift can be explained as universities' response to complying with standards of quality, and to the quest for prestige. On the other hand, scholars like Rossi (2010) and Zha (2009) propose that HE institutions are neither

becoming strictly homogeneous and isomorphic at a national or global level, nor highly differentiated and polymorphic at the local-organizational level, but they could rather be conceived as variants of the three major institutional archetypes constructed on two dimensions: functional and operational.

3. Higher education performance assessment and rankings

3.1. Performance

There can be identified three main reasons for the legitimacy of performance and university rankings use. The first one relates to performance-based budgeting and resources allocation in higher education sector due to the major financial shift from state allocations to more and more capital flow coming from the private sector and NGOs. This trend has led to what some of the scholars (Toutkoushian & Webber, 2011, p. 123) define as "academic capitalism" and the possibility of research for financial gain more than for authentic discovery of knowledge. Another reason is public accountability regarding stakeholders giving evidence for ways of spending public funds as well as the increasing significance of research, development and innovation in the context of a knowledge-based society and economy. The demand for quality has created the incentives for designing higher education performance measurement tools for research, teaching and learning, a quality assessment movement along with the development of new performance indicators. Thus, several performance assessment forms started to put increasing pressure on the academy, with universities being "sandwiched" between the state and the market, between imposed external evaluations and their self-evaluation of the pursuit of their own objective (Sarrico et al. 2010, p. 36). In this respect, the problem of measuring research performance is a highly debated issue, for policy makers, administrators, academic community and various stakeholders involved in the academic process. Assessing higher education research performance is possible by creating and using a set of indicators that measure both the impact and the productivity of scientific research. Scientific research is considered to be the most important field in higher education because of its main function of creating and developing new knowledge and technologies. Research performance indicators are designed to highlight the productivity of researchers from different education fields and the impact of their products, respectively the number of published papers and the number of citations per paper (Hirsch 2005). Bibliometric indicators and peer review are regularly used for this purpose, and the most popular rankings are those that use publications and citations as indicator of scientific worth (Frey and Rost, 2010, p. 2). But these bibliometric tools are purely quantitative reflecting the position or rather the significance of a scholar, university or country relative to others (Butler, 2007, Dill & Soo, 2011, Frey & Rost, 2010,), and there have been some attempts to differentiate quantity from quality in evaluating research outputs through peer-review systems. On the other hand, efforts have been made for introducing recursive field-normalization bibliometric indicators that try to correct for the fact that the density of citations differs among fields (Waltman et al. 2011).

3.2. University rankings

Beside the use of performance indicators in evaluating higher education institutions specific activities such as research, teaching and learning, there is also a more world-wide recent focus on university ranking systems or league tables in providing valuable information regarding education quality for improving the international market for higher education. Following the example of the US News ranking, a growing number of commercial media and research institutions have begun to release ranking world-wide or nationally (Shin & Toutkoushian, 2011, 2) and some of the most well-known international ranking systems include the Academic Ranking of World Universities by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES), World's Best Universities Ranking – US News and World, Leiden University Ranking, the Taiwan Higher Education, the Accreditation Council ranking and others. According to Shin & Toutkoushian (2011), in 2009 there were at least 33 ranking systems of higher education around the world. The ranking systems mentioned above comprise a combination of institutional performance variables in fields like research, teaching, services, and a set of institutional characteristics - mission, size, external environment. The differences between these systems lay on the one hand in the criteria used, and on the other hand, in the weight that is being attached to those criteria as well as data collection and analysis (Guarino, Ridgeway, Chun & Buddin, 2005, Liu & Liu, 2005, Miguel, Vaquera & Sanchez, 2005). In the following section I describe three of these international university ranking systems, namely the Academic Ranking of World Universities or Shanghai Ranking against the Times Higher Education Supplement in order to highlight the main differences and convergence in higher education quality debates.

3.2.1. Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai Ranking)

The story of ARWU actually begins in 1998 when Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) was selected by the Chinese government to be among the first group of nine universities in the '985 Project and this ranking was first published in 2003 and has been updated since then annually (EUA Report on Rankings, 2011). Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), was initially designed to compare Chinese universities' research performance in the fields of science and technology, and to compare performance between the Chinese national higher education sector and the rest of the world, especially the United States, thus being primarily a tool for steering national research policy and planning; it therefore targeted policy makers and public authorities (in particular the ministries of education, science and technology) (Westerheijden, 2010, p. 40).

ARWU ranks universities based on their success in four fields: quality of education, quality of faculty, research output and per capita performance of the university and the weghts for each are as at follows:

1. 10% quality of education expressed in alumni of an institution winning Nobel prizes and Fields Medals;
2. 20% quality of faculty expressed in staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals;
3. 40% research outputs expressed in two directions:
        a. Papers published in Nature and Science – 20%
        b. Papers indexed in Science Citation Index-expanded and Social Science Citation Index – 20%
4. 10% per capita performance of the university expressed in per capita academic performance of an institution with respect to the size of the institution.

Looking at these criteria, it can be argued that this ranking system is highlighting a research-oriented perspective on higher education quality, mainly through the major weight attached to research performance indicators. As such, the second criterion awards points for the number of highly cited researchers a university has in a broad range of academic disciplines, thus attending to the important question of a university's ability to attract outstanding researchers in various fields (Taylor & Braddok, 2007, p. 253).

3.2.2.   The World University Ranking – Times Higher Education

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings was first published in 2004, and, in a certain way, it was an 'answer' to the Shanghai ARWU ranking that was first published in 2003. Then, Times Higher Education Supplement, which later became the independent Times Higher Education Ranking, used Quacquarelli-Symonds (QS) as its data collection and processing engine between 2004 and 2009. In 2009 the Times Higher Education (hereafter THE) announced that it was ceasing cooperation with QS and that a new cooperation was being established with Thomson Reuters (Baty, 2009 in EUA Report on Ranking 2011). Between 2005-2009, THE focused its measurements not only on research performance aspects but also on features related to mechanisms of peer review as well as the size of institutions. Thus, the major weights are being attached to peer review both academic and institutional, on research and student enrollment rate. The turning point is evident, expressing the heavy critics brought over time to the international university ranking systems.

In 2009, the Times Higher Education has signed an agreement with Thomson Reuters to provide data and the methodology has been revisited and changed by introducing new indicators and weights for its 2010 ranking:

- Economic activity/Innovation - Research income from industry -2.5%
- International mix – staff and students – 5%
- Teaching – the learning environment – 30%
- Research – volume, income and reputation – 30%
- Citation - research influence – 32.5%

The changing methodology goes hand in hand with a change of approach in defining and understanding quality and performance in higher education. The 2009 new methodology focuses mainly on reputation surveys and on the added value of education in the broader framework of a knowledge-based society. Research performance is measured along with quality in teaching and its outputs. With respect to reputation surveys on teaching, they are based on surveys of experienced scholars. Thus, though more than a third of the overall weight has been assigned to the bibliometric indicators, the reputation surveys also continue to constitute over one third of the total weight. Beside reputation and social and economic added value, the rank puts emphasis on regional comparability as well as on subject areas. The

regions include Europe, Asia, North America, South America, Oceania and Africa and among subjects, it covers life sciences, arts and humanities, social sciences, engineering and technology, health and physical sciences, thus rendering the opportunity of ranking HE institutions by region and by subject.

4. The struggle between "performing" and "being different"

4.1. World-class university rankings: revealing what, which and who's quality

Taking a closer look at the two world university rankings, they each try to outline a certain definition of what academic quality is. The main research question addressed here is if the notions of quality implied by these rankings do really reflect academic quality or is there another way of dealing with quality in education that takes into account institutional diversity, or better said, is this notion of quality enhanced by these rankings compatible with differences among higher education institutions in terms of mission, academic profile and external environment? In effect, the act of choosing a set of indicators and weightings imposes a one-size-fits-all definition of quality (Usher & Savino, 2009, p. 257).

Both systems are highly research-oriented and reward institutions with a scientific profile. Ellen Hazelkorn (2007) argues that bio-sciences are favored because their activity is best captured in internationally, publicly available and verifiable database, e.g. Scopus, or Thomson ISI. Another side-effect refers to the preference for English speaking journals and non-native English speaking academics are required to publish in these journals if they want to perform. As a consequence, these rankings turn out to be misleading in that they may over-differentiate among institutions, assigning different rankings to institutions that may be more or less indistinguishable (Guarino et al. 2005, p. 148). Moreover, it is often argued that rankings are handicapped by methodological concerns due to the fact that there is no clear, agreed-upon measure of quality. Thus, this lack of consensus drives systems into creating their own set of indicators based on available data and combining it in a formula that can be questioned both on the basis of its contributing elements and the manner in which those elements are aggregated. As noted above, higher education ranking systems and calculations depend heavily on published and available data (Vaquera & Sanchez, 2005, p. 204), but also on the purpose of the ranking. For instance, international rankings such as Shanghai and THE rather serve as a "reputation barometer" because they do not intend to label HE institutions as "the best", being limited only to hierarchization. However, even if their main purpose is not labeling, these systems are being intensively criticized by academia both for methodological short-comes and research performance orientation. But the issue of quality in higher education cannot be resumed to what and how it is being measured, but it also raises questions on how and what we understand as quality; thus, one should better discuss the qualities of higher education than its quality (Blackmur as cited in Sarrico et al. 2010, p. 40) and several studies point at a multidimensional approach on higher education quality due to the complexity of the matte. The multidimensionality of quality in higher education is also due to the different dimensions associated with fulfillment of higher education's mission, namely the quality of inputs, outputs and processes, which have to be combined with the demands put forward by students, universities and society each time one intends to assess quality (2010).

The current debates around higher education policies and governance concern mainly identifying the means to accommodate HE institutions' compliance with general performance and quality standards and criteria with creating incentives for institutional diversification. Moreover, a particularly debated issue is whether, and to what extent, current trends of change in higher education governance – globalization, internationalization and quality management - have led to more diverse systems, able to accommodate a wider range of student needs and preferences, and to perform a broader range of functions (Rossi, 2010, p. 277). It is argued that increasing vertical and horizontal diversification is most likely to be the result of growing "competition for success" (Teichler as cited in Kitawaga & Oba, 2010, p. 508). In the realm of the market economy, universities are no longer competing only for funding and resources, but they also strive for international recognition and prestige. For this record, the use of rankings and league tables in the field of higher education highlights the importance which education and research have gained over the last past thirty years. The value of education and research is no longer assessed on an academic scale, with knowledge being an end itself. In their research on the Japanese higher education system, Kitawaga and Oba (2010) talk about a differentiation of HEIs not only according to specialization by functional categories (e.g. teachers' colleges, engineering, nursing, liberal or research universities), but also such diversity is ordered hierarchically, from two-year colleges and bachelor degree institution to graduate ones (universities). Consequently, the worldwide trend is that each higher education system has established a hierarchic system, with a standardized rank order where all institutions are measured and positioned with respect to an often limited set of criteria (Bleiklie, 2003, p. 343).

At European Union level, the debates around the use of global rankings have moved to the supranational level. In this line, on 2 June 2009, the EU Commission announced the launching of a feasibility study to develop a multi-dimensional

global university ranking, called U-Multirank (Vught & Ziegele, 2011). The basic argument behind the project holds that existing rankings tend to focus on research in "hard sciences" and ignore the performance of universities in areas like humanities and social sciences, teaching quality and community outreach. While drawing on the experience of existing university rankings and of EU-funded projects on transparency in higher education, the new ranking system should be: multi-dimensional: covering the various missions of institutions, such as education, research, innovation, internationalization, and community outreach, transparent: it should provide users with a clear understanding of all the factors used to measure performance and to offer them the possibility to consult the ranking according to their needs, global: covering institutions inside and outside Europe (in particular those in the US, Asia and Australia)

4.2. Reconciling Rankings and Diversity in Higher Education

In the past few years, several studies in the field of higher education performance assessment (Hazellkorn, 2007, Langberg & Schmidt, 2010, Rossi, 2010, Vught & Westerheijden, 2010) have drawn attention on the lack of transparency regarding global rankings methodologies and have questioned the notion of quality embedded in them. Altogether, parallel to global ranking systems like Academic Ranking of World Universities by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES), World Best Universities Ranking, alternative performance evaluation systems have been developing in the past four-five years both at national level as well as at a regional or supranational one.

As it has already been mentioned, in 2009 the EU Commission took a stand in developing a pilot project designed to enhance a more comprehensive approach to rankings in higher education. Therefore, the project encompassed design and testing of a new transparency tool for higher education and research. More specifically, the focus was on a transparency tool that will enhance our understanding of the multiple performances of different higher education and research institutions across the diverse range of activities they are involved in: higher education and research institutions are multi-purpose organizations and different institutions focus on different blends of purposes and associated activities (Vught & Ziegele, 2011). As such, another emphasis has been stressed in the direction of enabling a more profound understanding of the diversity in the profiles and performances of higher education and research institutes at a national, European and global level. On the basis of an extensive stakeholder consultation process (focusing on relevance) and a thorough methodological analysis (focusing on validity, reliability and feasibility), U-Multirank (2011, p. 18) includes a range of indicators that will enable users to compare the performance of institutions across five dimensions of higher education and research activities: teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation, regional engagement. In order to be able to apply the principle of comparability we have integrated the existing transparency tool – the U-Map classification – into U-Multirank. It is a user driven higher education mapping tool that allows users to select comparable institutions on the basis of „activity profiles" generated by the U-Map tool. These activity profiles reflect the diverse activities of different higher education and research organizations using a set of dimensions similar to those developed in U-Multirank. The underlying indicators differ as U-Map is concerned with understanding the mix of activities an institution is engaged in (what it does), while U-Multirank is concerned with an institution's performance in these activities (how well it does what it does). Thus, integrating U-Map into U-Multirank enables the creation of user-selected groups of sufficiently comparable institutions that can then be compared in focused institutional or field based rankings. U-Multirank was tested in a pilot study involving 159 higher education institutions drawn from 57 countries: 94 from within the EU; 15 from other European countries; and 50 from outside Europe. The pilot test demonstrated that multi-dimensional institutional and field level ranking is certainly possible in terms of the development of feasible and relevant indicators. It also showed the value of multi-dimensionality with many institutions and faculties performing very differently across the five dimensions and their underlying indicators. On national level, few examples in this direction can be encountered in Germany within the CHE University Ranking system (http://www.che-ranking.de) which ranks universities in a multidimensional manner; that is for a given subject, no overall value is derived from weighted individual indicators. CHE conducts regular surveys of approximately 130,000 students and 16,000 faculties, covering nearly 250 higher education institutes in Germany and the student surveys are very extensive and ask a number of questions about both student experiences and student satisfaction (Usher & Savino, 2009, p. 262). It is argued that the CHE Ranking system accounts for institutional diversity, holding individual strengths and weaknesses even within a subject (such as course offerings, tutoring and equipment). Nevertheless, there is no empirical or theoretical basis on which to give weighting to individual indicators. Moreover, it gives a picture of HEIs from different perspectives due to the fact that, in addition to facts about departments and study programmes, the views of lecturers and students are also taken into account when drawing up the ranking. Even though it is designed as a ranking system, it does not attach numerical ranking position to HEIs.

The CHE ranking of German university departments differs from traditional league tables in two notable ways. First, as noted above, it does not weight or aggregate individual indicator scores. Each department's data on each indicator is allowed to stand independently, and no attempt is made to rank departments on an ordinal scale. In doing so, the CHE approach cedes the power of defining quality to the consumers of the ranking system (2009, p. 263). In early 2010, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Albania commissioned CHE – Centre for Higher Education Development - to develop a concept for a ranking of Albanian higher education institutions and to test it in a first pilot study in selected fields (CHE, 2011). The basic methodology of the concept for the Albanian ranking is based on the CHE ranking methodology which differs in major characteristics from most rankings yet at the same time has a high reputation internationally: the ranking will be field-based and will not compare whole universities, the ranking will be multidimensional and look on teaching, research and other dimensions without aggregating the indicators into a composite overall score, the ranking will apply a grouping approach to ranking; it will not calculate a league table.

5. Concluding remarks

The change of paradigm brought about new elements in structuring higher education realms all over the world and it included multi-level governance and shared responsibilities between state, universities and society on the one hand, and students as education purchasers on the other hand. Rankings and league tables issued by transnational organizations or newspapers offer a one-size-fits-all dimension of quality through choosing certain sets of indicators and the weights attached to them. I stress here that comparing two international ranking systems which measure the performance of universities world-wide the emphasis is on measuring scientific research outputs, like number of published articles in scientific journals, number of citation per paper, which place on the top of the list those universities which focus mainly on research activities, leaving aside teaching, learning and other education services. In the past few years, several studies in the field of higher education performance assessment have drawn attention on the lack of transparency regarding global rankings methodologies and have questioned the notion of quality embedded in them. For this record, parallel to global ranking systems alternative performance evaluation systems have been developing. They aim to combine different performance indicators measured against various criteria and to create institutional profiles in which every university can fit according to its own mission, strategies, student profiles and specific education activities. In this context, reconciling higher education performance assessment through rankings with institutional diversity is possible by using a broader set of criteria that enhance measuring performance on a variety of dimensions, including teaching and learning activities.

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