

## Chapter 19

# Institutional Legacy as a Context of the Implementation of International Rankings in the Russian Higher Education System

**Natalia Karmaeva**

*National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia*

**Tatjana Kanonire**

*National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia*

### ABSTRACT

*Western university model was transferred to Russia in the 18th century. The development of HEIs took its own unique direction serving the needs of the country, while the state has been dominating the HE sector. The chapter analyzes the interplay of market, state and informal mechanisms in the process of implementation of rankings. The institutional legacy underpinned the locally defined hierarchies of HEIs and disciplines, both explicit and implicit. The challenges that Russia meets on its way toward world university ranking are on the level of institutions and faculty, students and parents, and employers. As a conclusion, global rankings and local hierarchies have to be balanced in the HEIs structures to allow for a compromise between the demands of the global competition and the needs of the local communities.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the issue of how global university rankings are implemented in the non-Western higher education (HE) systems, which have been serving the local needs rather than dominated by the international disciplinary communities of academics (Clark, 1983) and accentuates the example of the Russian HE system. Rankings have had a profound impact on higher education systems worldwide (Henkel, 2005; O'Meara, 2007; Sauder, & Espeland, 2009). In Russia, policies oriented toward raising the

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positions of Russian universities in the rankings have been implemented in the last decade. Specifically, when universities aim at attaining a higher ranking, they tend to adopt mechanisms which are aligned with ranking bodies to evaluate faculty work (Gonzales, 2015; Leisyte, & Dee, 2012). World university rankings typically favour English language and Western models of knowledge production (Kaba, 2012).

The implementation of international rankings can be characterized by two processes. Firstly, the institutional legacy in HEIs (higher education institutions) and its impact on the implementation of global rankings. The HEI system in Russia has its own unique historical development and characteristics. The principles of teaching and research unity influenced the formation of the higher education system in Russia in the 19th century. However, academia was historically dominated by the state and served the local demands as defined by the state authorities. Teaching and research were subsequently separated in a highly bureaucratized system. Academics have generally focused on teaching rather than undertaking scholarly research at universities. Academics have been teaching rather than doing academic research at universities. During the Soviet period, the function of research was located predominantly in the Academy of Sciences, with the exception of several classical universities (Kuzminov, Semyonov, & Frumin, 2013; Kuraev, 2016). In the 1990s, HEIs gained financial autonomy as a result of the fiscal crisis and public funding reduction. Universities were pursuing a variety of survival strategies, commercial education services were the most common. Academics developed formal and semi-formal survival approaches; many of them were combining contract academic jobs in teaching at various universities (Kitaev, 2004; Sandgren, 2004; Shattock, 2004). All these resulted in an increased teaching load and limited the opportunity to do research (Berryman, 2000).

Secondly, the structure of the Russian HEI system has changed in response to the need to improve its positions in international rankings. There are several types of universities depending on their involvement in world-class research such as the National Research Universities, the Federal Universities and the Classical Universities.

Regional differences and centralization have an impact on competition in the HE field. The demographic downturn also questions the strategy of growth in the HE sector based on the commercialization of education. Commercial education programmes are the primary source of extra funds for many HE institutions; academics still prefer teaching to research (Kozmina, 2014).

The goal of the policies from 2000-2015 in Russia was to integrate Russian universities into the international academic market and improve their position in international rankings. These changes expanded the quantitative systems of evaluation on various levels oriented at performance in teaching and research. Support of “productive” universities and faculty meant salaries increased in line with increasing individual accountability and responsibility, restructuring or closure of “inefficient” HE institutions, differentiation of HE institutions and their funding. The productivity demands and demographic crisis resulted in redundancies and optimization of the study process (Hagurov, & Ostapenko, 2014).

Tensions in the implementations of rankings and ranking-oriented policies can be identified on the following levels: faculty and staff; institutional level; students and parents; employers; and regulation of the HE system, including budgeting.

In summary, we consider that the Russian case can demonstrate the interplay of market, state and informal mechanisms in the process of implementation of rankings. The institutional legacy underpinned the locally defined hierarchies of universities and disciplines, both explicit and implicit. The challenges that Russia meets on the course toward world university rankings is illustrative of other non-Western countries where professional autonomy is low and the state is the key agent in the HE landscape.

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