University Rankings are here to stay

if we can't ignore them, how should we use them?

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'21st century' research-intensive universities are expected to …

- demonstrate **quality**, societal relevance and social responsibility

- offer **access** to learners and students

- ensure **employability**

- participate in **societal debate**

- contribute to local, regional or national **competitiveness**

- advance knowledge for **problem solving** and global challenges

- engage in **technology transfer** and cooperate with the business sector

- be competitive and earn an **income from the marketplace**

- gain international or domestic **prestige**

University rankings for prestige measurement?

marketing and promotion

external accountability

strategic debate on institutional development

institutional benchmarking and comparisons

setting performance targets and organisational goals

Why university rankings are becoming dominant in the higher education sector?

Manifestation of more **enhanced institutional profiling**

Driven by **more intense competitiveness**: institutions, cities, regions and nations, compete for the best possible scholars and students, better facilities, more funding

Prominent presence of rankings in **popular media**

Impact on **strategic decision making processes** in higher education systems seems to be increasing

Variety of rankings for different perspectives:
• System-, institution-, subject- or theme-based
• National, regional or 'World'

Ranking systems as information brokers

Information supply

by universities or other sources

→

University ranking system

←

Information demand

from universities and other users

Ranking systems as information brokers

with information asymmetries and technical shortcomings

Information supply *by universities or other sources*	**University ranking system**	**Information demand** *from universities and other users*

supply/demand imbalance (where demand outstrips supply)

limited coverage of key organizational features
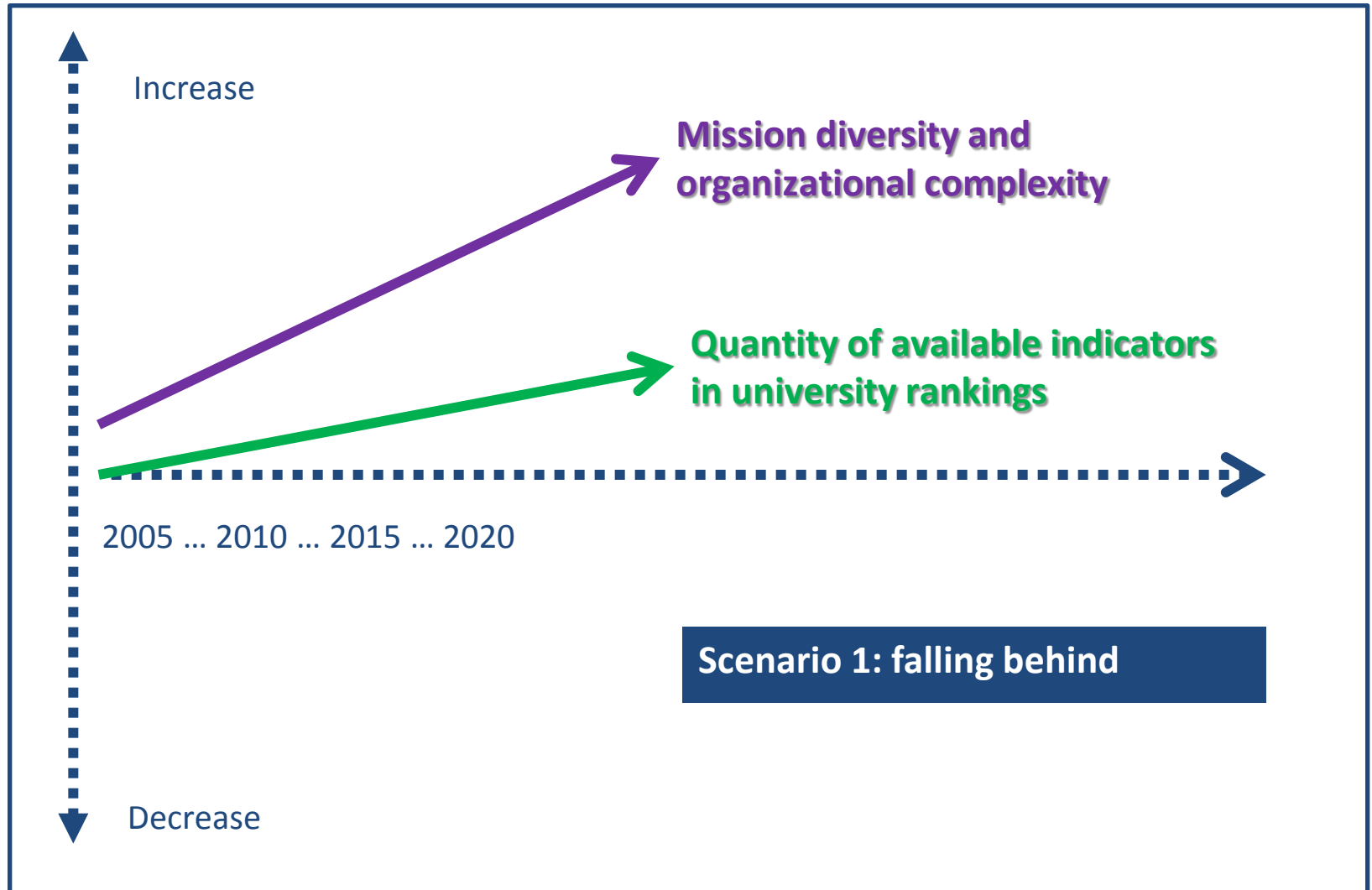
small set of performance indicators
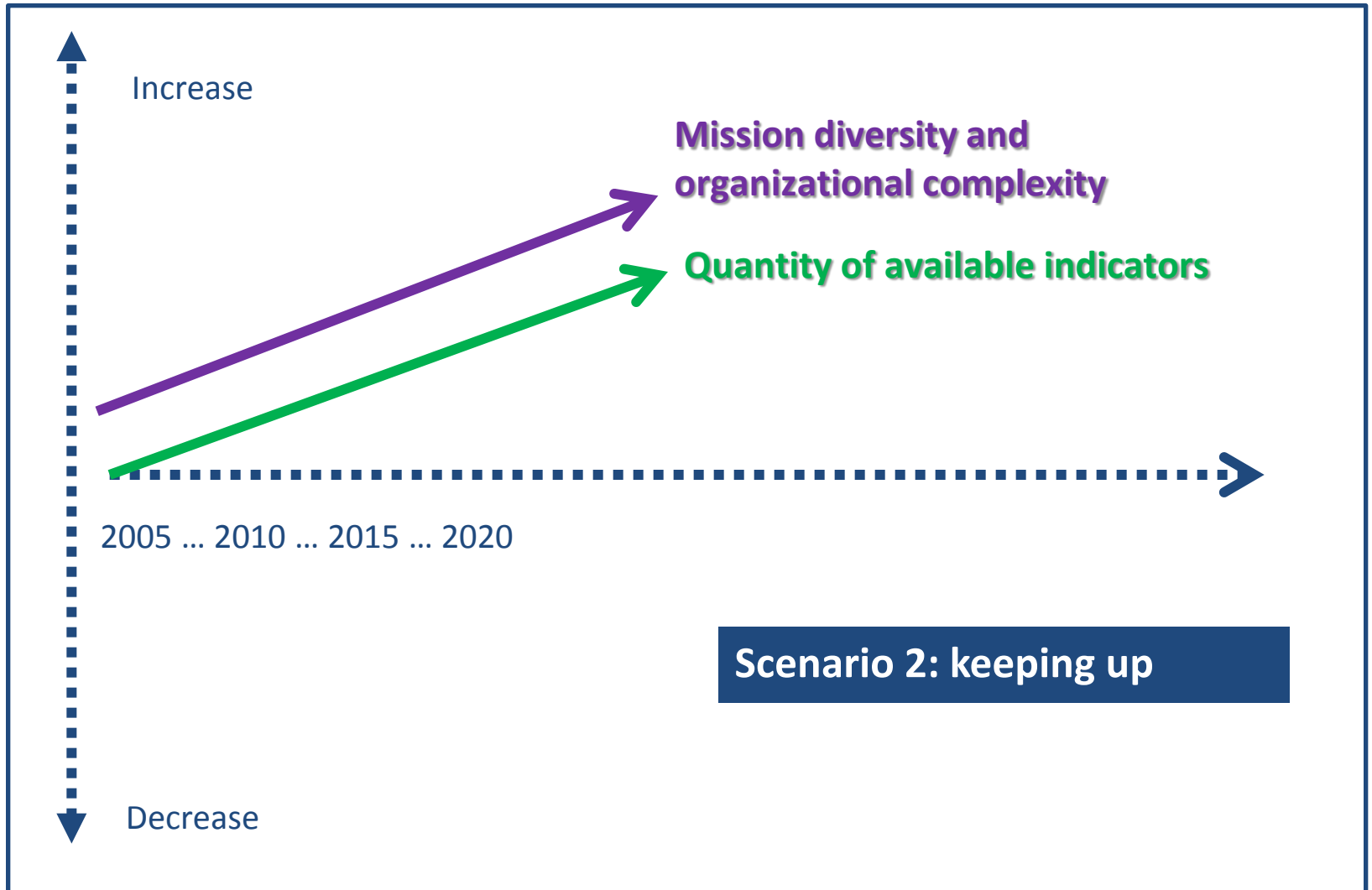
scarcity or lack of high-quality data in some areas

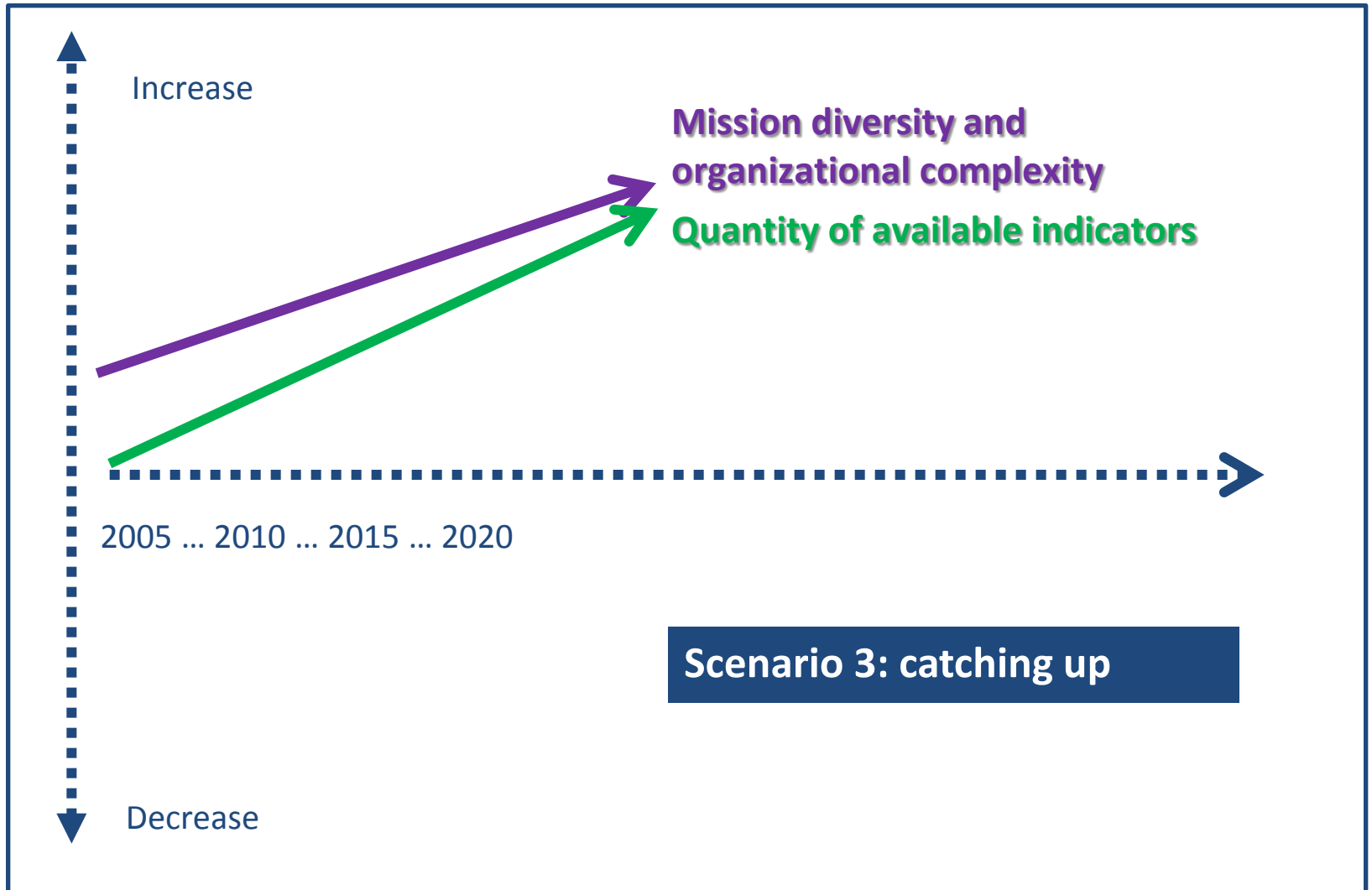*insufficient transparency on information processing and computations*

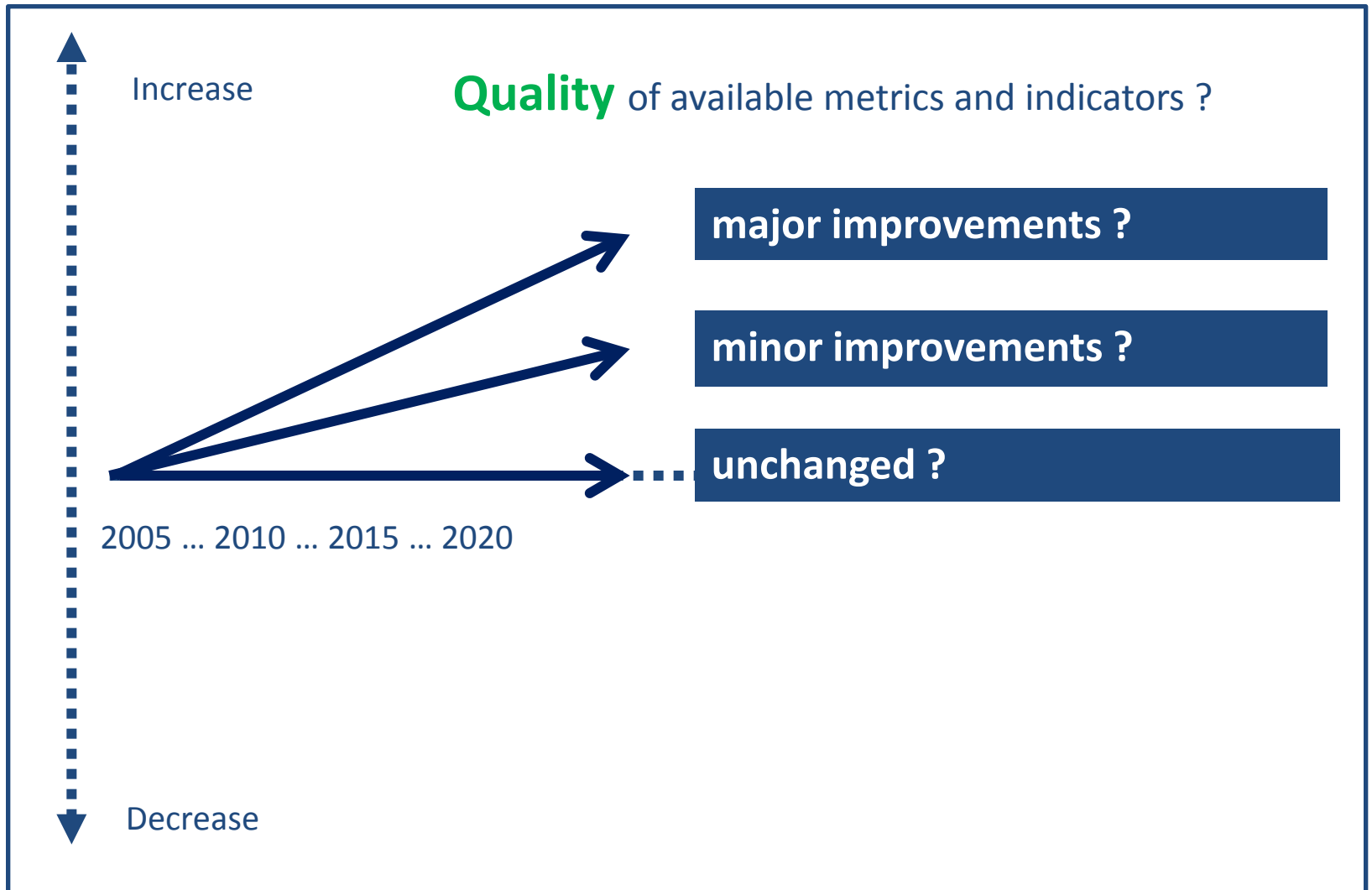# University mission development in the 21ˢᵗ century

and its current/future representations in rankings

Increase

Mission diversity and organizational complexity

Quantity of available indicators in university rankings

2005 ... 2010 ... 2015 ... 2020

Decrease

Scenario 1: falling behind

Increase

Mission diversity and organizational complexity

Quantity of available indicators

2005 ... 2010 ... 2015 ... 2020

Scenario 2: keeping up

Decrease

Increase

Mission diversity and
organizational complexity

Quantity of available indicators

2005 ... 2010 ... 2015 ... 2020

Scenario 3: catching up

Decrease

Increase

Quality of available metrics and indicators ?

major improvements ?

minor improvements ?

unchanged ?

2005 ... 2010 ... 2015 ... 2020

Decrease

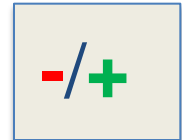# 'Quality' in terms of user values of current performance indicators

Information value
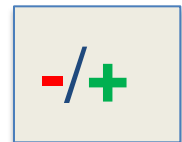
Reduces complexity and extracts interesting information

+
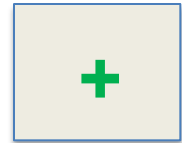
Operational value

Acceptable concepts, definitions, criteria and indicators

-/+

Analytical value

Accurate data and robust measurements

-/+

Assessment value

Valid information and meaningful knowledge

?

Stakeholder value

Acceptance and credibility among users

?

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GLOBAL

Are world university rankings up to date?

Robert Tijssen 05 February 2016 Issue No:399

This Week | African Higher Education

Rankings reduce

"Rankings are interesting and valuable tools for some purposes (such as marketing and promotion), but they are also crude reflections of reality"

"Reducing organisational complexities to a 'number' distorts and misrepresents the intricacies of a university's performance and specialisation"

Important 21st century developments in science that are not or insufficiently covered:

- application-oriented research
- multi-disciplinarity
- multiple affiliation researchers

Where next for world university rankings?

In the second blog from the opening seminar of the Centre for Global Higher Education, Robert Tijssen says league tables are meeting growing demand from institutions as well as students

March 23, 2016

By Robert Tijssen

"Ideally, high-quality indicators and associated metrics should be:

- **precise and non-biased** (the measurement is generally seen as valid representation of the underlying concept or empirical phenomenon);

- **transparent and verifiable** (users can fully understand its mode of production and can use it properly for analysis and decision-making);

- **robust and versatile** (enables aggregation and disaggregation to different levels of analysis; and fair comparisons across a diversity of institutions);

- **independent and difficult to manipulate**; users and stakeholders cannot influence data selection or processing in undesirable ways"

"Ranking systems are **social technologies**, subject to unpredictable consumer behaviours, erratic market forces and evermore sophisticated digital information infrastructures. **User-adaptability**, in the face of constant change, determines their chances of longer-term sustainable development"

"Current ranking systems, however, appear to be **stuck between** a limited supply of reliable data and a growing demand for high-quality customised information. To become generally accepted information tools, they will need to **upgrade and upscale** their operations, keep up with the digital 'open data' revolution, access a wider range of information sources, impose even better data quality standards and develop widely applicable metrics"

Ranking Producer Perspective

Principles of good practice for improving world university rankings

- *Be one of a number of **diverse approaches** to the assessment of higher education inputs, processes, and outputs*

- *Be clear about their **purpose and target groups***

- *Provide clarity about the range of information sources for rankings and the **messages** each source generates*

- *Specify the linguistic, cultural, economic, and historical **contexts** of the educational systems being ranked*

- *Recognize the **diversity of institutions** and take the different missions and goals of institutions into account*

Source: *Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions* (1996)

www.umultirank.org
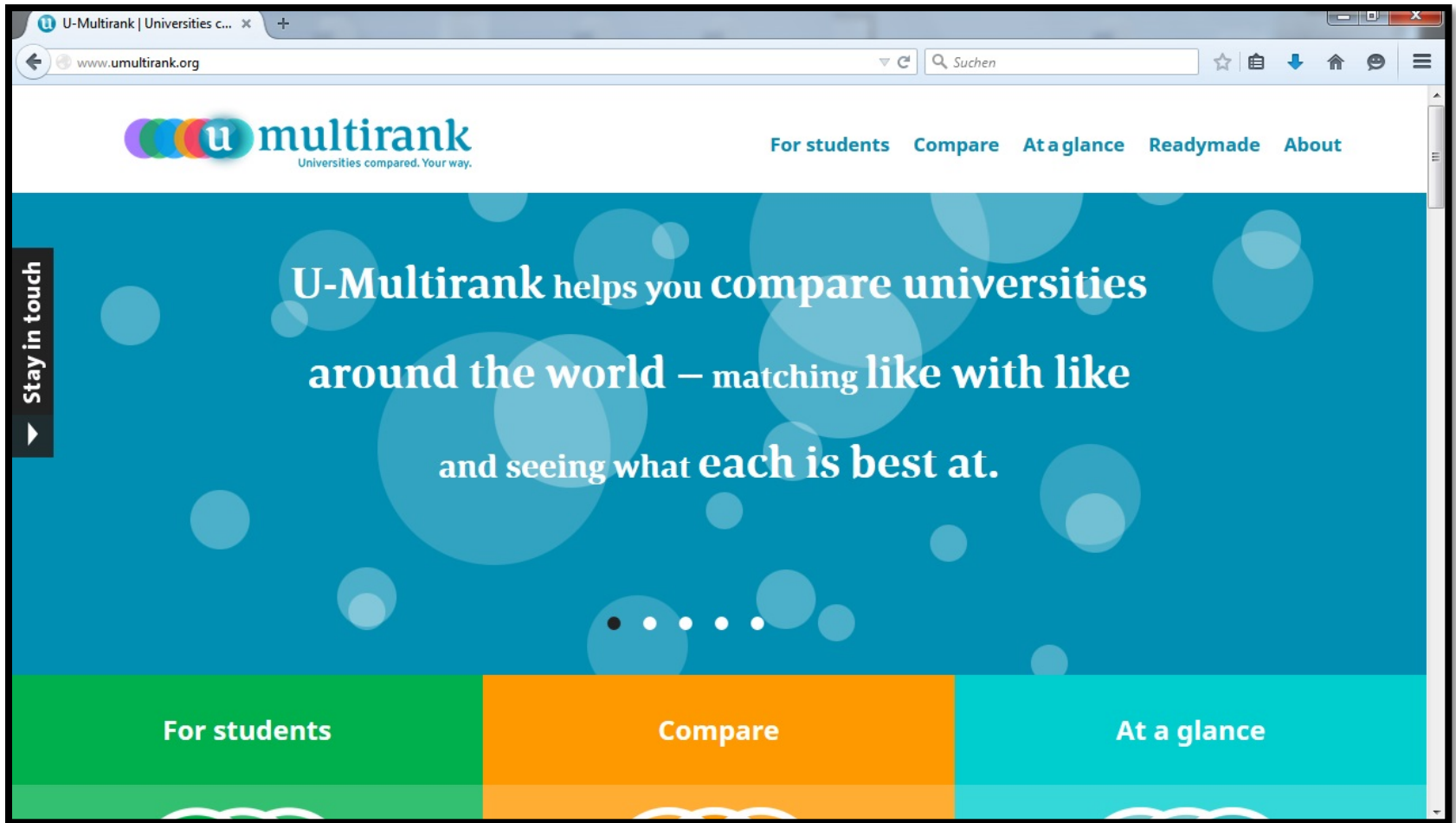
Selection of performance indicators

umultirank
Universities compared. Your way.

Teaching & Learning

Bachelor graduation rate	Masters graduation rate	Graduating on time (bachelors)	Graduating on time (masters)

Research

Citation rate	Research publications (size-normalised)	External research income

Knowledge Transfer

Co-publications with industrial partners	Income from private sources	Patents awarded (size-normalised)	Publications cited in patents

International Orientation

Student mobility	International joint publications

Regional Engagement

Bachelor graduates working in the region	Regional joint publications	Income from regional sources

@UMultirank

Change measures

Show scores

Show the whole table

★ **Show favourites only**

		Teaching & Learning				+ Research		
		Bachelor graduation rate	Masters graduation rate	Graduating on time (bachelors)	Graduating on time (masters)	Citation rate	Research publications (size-normalised)	External research income
★ Kwame Nkrumah U Sci & Tech	GH	–	–	–	–	●	●	
★ U KwaZulu-Natal	ZA	●	●	●	●	●	●	–
★ Mansoura U	EG	–	–	–	–	●	●	
★ Mohammed V U Rabat	MA	●	●	●	●	●	●	
★ North-West U	ZA	–	–	–	–	●	●	
★ U Sfax	TN	–	–	–	–	●	●	
★ Stellenbosch U	ZA	●	●	●	●	●	●	
★ U Pretoria	ZA	–	–	–	–	●	●	

A-Z   Top scores

Organizational features not (adequately) covered by World University Rankings

Inputs and facilities

- Diversity of funding sources and income streams
- International staff; gender (in)equality
- Student housing facilities

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Activities

- Teaching quality; learning outcomes; online education (MOOCs); internationalisation of educational curricula
- Research practices and R&D orientation
- Community outreach activities and civic engagement
- Entrepreneurship and technology transfer

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Outcomes and impacts

- Student satisfaction
- Employability of graduates and PhDs
- Socio-economic impacts (local communities, global business enterprises)

African user perspective

THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS
TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION

PROFESSIONAL   JOBS   RANKINGS   STUDENT *NEW*

Top 30 African universities: Times Higher Education reveals snapshot university ranking

Institutions from 10 countries feature in a top 30 that previews what a new ranking, being discussed at the Africa Universities Summit, might look like

July 31 2015

By **Ellie Bothwell**

African stakeholder opinions

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AFRICA

The blunder of ranking African universities

Damtew Teferra 29 August 2015 Issue No:157

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AFRICA

Get rankings right for Africa, university leaders urge

Karen MacGregor 15 August 2015 Issue No:377

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ignore all international rankings !?

Major credibility problems and lack of relevance with current World University Rankings because:

- data sources and choice of metrics are **not transparent**

- metrics and indicators are **incomplete or irrelevant**

- **weighting systems** of indicators are arbitrary or questionable

- insufficient information on important **technical details**

- no options for **customizing** to local needs and circumstances

- no information to **contextualize and explain** results

use the currently best available ranking(s) as a 'transparency tool' ?

… customize and apply with great care

(guidance by technical experts and local knowledge/stakeholders)

… design, develop or improve in-house university performance assessment and monitoring systems

(for the benefit of students, university staff and external stakeholders)

… as an input for strategic planning and management

(for internal self-reflection, reputation management, and a 'pull factor' to promote a 'quality oriented work environment')

… to encourage and incentivize positive academic conduct (aligned with all relevant university missions)

Towards African university rankings ?

with Africa-relevant performance metrics

Human resources development

- Teaching and training curricula (for skills and knowledge that meet labor market requirements, such as entrepreneurship courses); employability of graduates (in government, business sector, educational sector); early career development and joint programs; employment and entrepreneurship among graduates

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Local socioeconomic engagement

- Student volunteer action in organized programs; knowledge transfer and commercialization; engagement with local businesses

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Targeted research in and for Africa

- PhD courses and PhD research targeted at local issues and problems; flows of students between African institutions; research collaboration within Africa

How to move forward?

Scenario 1

accept the current realities of World Universities Rankings: ignore them, or apply them (carefully and selectively) with each individual university

Scenario 2

African stakeholders try to influence the shape and content of the regional 'Africa' ranking that are now produced and marketed by international ranking systems

Scenario 3

African stakeholders take initiatives to collaborate and create their own fully customized and generally-endorsed 'African Universities Ranking'