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Tero Erkkilä • Ossi Piironen

# Rankings and Global Knowledge Governance

Higher Education, Innovation and  
Competitiveness

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# Preface

There has been a surge of global indicator knowledge that has come to challenge more traditional forms of transnational governance. This book discusses the field development in global ranking and argues that there is now a global policy script on knowledge governance that is greatly linked to economic competitiveness and innovation. Higher education and innovation policies have become central features of national economic competitiveness, nowadays measured by global rankings. We see this as a part of a broader field development in global comparative assessment, where earlier rankings in economic competitiveness and good governance are increasingly interlinked with global university rankings and indicators on innovativeness.

We observe the interlinkages and similarities in the indicators of different policy domains, arguing that there is now an evolving field of global measurement that surpasses them. In considering the dynamics of field development, we highlight how the number of indicators is rising rapidly, as there are new entrants to the field that propose methodological improvements or claim to explore novel conceptual grounds. Regional rankings and city-level indicators have also emerged as alternatives to global rankings.

As a result, the rankings now construct a global policy script on knowledge governance that posits institutions and practices of national knowledge production at the heart of economic competitiveness and innovation.

The universities are at the heart of this, but also university rankings are central to this reasoning, serving as a bridge between the different levels of measurement and inspiring the methodology of other measurements. The field development also has implications for transnational governance more broadly, challenging its typical actors and providing new standards for producing comparative knowledge.

Communication with and among international actors is increasingly taking place with the help of indicators that are now becoming a *lingua franca* for transnational governance. Relevant rankings and indicators are known by everyone in a policy field, as are countries' and higher education institutions' standings in them, but more importantly there often is a shared understanding as to what would need to be done to improve your position in the rankings. Indicators not only describe but also prescribe. This has implications for governance at national and even local levels, as countries, cities, and universities are under pressure to accommodate these policy prescriptions.

It is therefore important to understand the ideational background and normative assumptions underlying the figures, as well as their interlinkages and methodological aspects. Moreover, as we explain in this book, the focus of global measurement is also changing, reflecting the changes in transnational policy ideas but also causing them. To fully appreciate how global indicators and changes in their composition influence transnational governance, one needs to uncover their mechanisms of influence as policy instruments. This allows us to reflect where we now stand, surrounded by numbers, and how to approach them critically.

In tackling the above problematic, this book summarizes many of the perspectives that we have developed over the past decade. It is not only a result of our collaborative effort but also due to our interaction with a broader community of researchers. We have benefited greatly from the academic environment at the University of Helsinki, where we have had several research projects on the topic hosted by the Department for Political and Economic Studies and the Network for European Studies.

Our thanks go to our colleagues Niilo Kauppi, Satu Sundström, Jemima Repo, James Mittelman, Salla Huikuri, Max Eklund, Caroline Werner, Jan Westö, Jaakko Hillo, Leo Aarnio, and Taavi Sundell for joining us in this research venture and for our inspiring academic exchanges

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We have benefited greatly from our collaborations and exchanges with other scholars working on the topic. We would like to thank Pertti Alasuutari, Anni Kangas, Barbara Kehm, B. Guy Peters, Meng-Hsuan Chou, Isaac Kamola, Jon Nixon, Richard Münch, Dorota Dakowska, Bob Reinalda, John Meyer, Detlef Sack, Mathias Albert, Katja Freistein, Fabrizio De Francesco, Thomas Pfister, Terence Karran, Arto Mustajoki, Nelli Piattoeva, and Magdaléna Hadjiisky. Despite the political imaginary of competition that the global rankings enforce, academic research to us is fundamentally about collaboration.

The book project would not have been possible without the outstanding research assistance by Max Eklund, Caroline Werner, Jaakko Hillo, and Leo Aarnio. We would also like to thank Jaakko Hillo for commenting on the manuscript and Mark Waller for editing the language. We also had the pleasure to work with Rebecca Wyde, Laura Aldridge, and Andrew James, our editors at Palgrave Macmillan. Finally, and most importantly, we would like to thank our families for their love and support.

Helsinki, Finland

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Theory: Rankings as Policy Instruments</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Ideational Background of Global Knowledge Governance</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Rise of Global Rankings and the Competitive Logic</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Field Structuration and Fragmentation of Global Rankings</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>From Global to Local: Regional- and City-Level Alternatives to Global Rankings</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Rankings and Global Knowledge Governance</b>	<b>219</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>251</b>

# List of Figures

Fig. 3.1	References to university rankings and governance indicators in Web of Science and Scopus	56
Fig. 3.2	References to knowledge-based economy and related concepts in the OECD documents (percentage of documents)	58
Fig. 3.3	Number of countries with freedom of information acts	67
Fig. 5.1	Global knowledge governance: field structuration and fragmentation of indicators	125

# List of Tables

Table 4.1	Knowledge governance—field development and selected rankings	86
Table 4.2	Classification of governance assessments	92
Table 4.3	Data sources used in 2015 update of Worldwide Governance Indicators	94
Table 4.4	Global competitiveness rankings	99
Table 4.5	The two first global university rankings	105
Table 5.1	Selected global rankings on good governance and transparency	131
Table 5.2	Selected second-generation measurements of transparency	132
Table 5.3	Selected global university rankings	139
Table 5.4	Global university mappings	143
Table 5.5	Selected global innovation rankings	154
Table 5.6	Overview of Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) and Global Innovation Index (GII) data providers	160
Table 5.7	Pillars of Global Innovation Index and Global Competitiveness Index: conceptual overlap and similarities	161
Table 6.1	Selected subnational competitiveness assessments	180
Table 6.2	Selected regional and subnational innovation rankings	183
Table 6.3	Global Power City Index: Indicators and Sources of the Research and Development function	195
Table 7.1	Indicators' mechanisms of influence and institutional effects	221
Table 7.2	Summary of knowledge governance assessments	222
Table 7.3	Rankings of selected countries and innovation hubs	232