

Dear colleagues,

With this email, we would like to invite you to the upcoming talk organized by the Institute for Higher Education Management.

Title: ***Putting Global University Rankings in Context: the Internationalisation of Comparability and the Geo-politicisation of Higher Education and Science***

Date: Thursday, **December 1**, 4 pm

Speaker: **Prof. Ellen Hazelkorn**, Professor Emeritus, Technological University Dublin, Joint Editor, *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*

Location: WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Institute for Higher Education Management, **Building D5, 6th Floor, Room D5.6.029 Department Lounge** (<http://campus.wu.ac.at/>).

The event location has barrier free access.

For those who cannot attend in person, can join us online via MS Teams livestream.

Please express your interest by registering at verena.herbsthofner@wu.ac.at.

Looking forward to welcoming you,
Barbara Sporn

About the speaker

Professor **Ellen Hazelkorn** is Joint Managing Partner, [BH Associates education consultants](#). She is Professor emeritus, Technological University Dublin (Ireland), and Joint Editor, [Policy Reviews in Higher Education](#). She is Research Fellow, [Centre for International Higher Education](#), Boston College, and founding member of [Centre for Global Higher Education \(CGHE\)](#), Oxford.

Ellen is a member of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education, and the Commission for the College of the Future (UK). She has been appointed to the EU Higher Education for Smart Specialisation (HESS) Advisory Group, the EURASHE Committee for Strategic Advice, and the Advisory Board for U-Multirank.

Ellen has worked with/advised governments and international organisations for over 20 years, including the European Commission, OECD, UNESCO and World Bank. She was policy advisor to, and board member of, the Higher Education Authority (Ireland). For 20 years, she was Vice President, Dublin Institute of Technology (now TU Dublin). Ellen was President of EAIR (European Society for Higher Education), a NAFSA Senior Fellow, and awarded the Tony Adams Award for Excellence in Research by EAIE.

Ellen has written extensively on university rankings. As consultant to the OECD (2001-2010), Ellen initiated and led, beginning 2006, the project on League Tables and Ranking Systems: Assessing Their Influence on Institutional Decision-Making and Government Policymaking. She was co-editor, [Research Handbook on University Rankings: History, Methodology, Influence and Impact](#) (Edward Elgar Publishing 2021); editor, [Global Rankings and the Geopolitics of Higher Education](#) (Routledge 2016); co-author, [Rankings in Institutional Strategies and Processes: impact or illusion?](#) (EUA, 2014); co-editor, [Rankings and Accountability in Higher Education: Uses and Misuses](#) (UNESCO, 2013); and author, [Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education: The Battle for World-Class Excellence](#) (Palgrave, 2011, 2015; trans into Japanese and Chinese).

Other publications include: co-editor of [Research Handbook on Quality, Performance and Accountability in Higher Education](#) (Edward Elgar 2018) and [GUNI World Report 6: Towards a Socially Responsible University: Balancing the Global with the Local](#) (UNESCO, ACUP and UNU, 2017), and co-

author, *The Impact and Future of Arts and Humanities Research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and *The Civic University: Meeting the Leadership and Management Challenges* (Edward Elgar 2016).

For further information see <https://www.bhassociates.eu>

Abstract

Over the years, global university rankings (GUR) have evolved from being a transparency and accountability instrument to a key influencer of individual, institutional, government, policy, investor and public opinion, behaviour and decision-making. Their emergence beginning in 2003 with the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) corresponded with and responded to a period of accelerating trans-national trade and capital flows, and student and professional mobility. Their initial and continuing success has been their ability to compare the performance of different types, resourced and contextually dissimilar institutions. By effectively devising an easily understood international comparative framework, global rankings challenged long-standing assumptions about quality, status and reputation. Heretofore, academics, institutions and countries had relied on self-assertion, local or personal intelligence and/or limited institutional and/or national data. Their individual choices of indicators have collectively become powerful reference points for national and international benchmarking. Accordingly, GURs are now widely used to highlight and promote national comparative and competitive characteristics of research- and resource-intensive universities and their countries to attract and retain highly mobile capital, business and talent as befits a geo-political environment.

There are two main sections to the paper.

This paper reflects on twenty years of global university rankings. Using broad strokes, it charts the role and influence of rankings in the context of two intersecting trends: the internationalisation of a framework for comparability and the geo-politicalisation of higher education and science. Both trends are interpreted in a strategic, pro-active, sense - as key components of a deliberate process of developing and using particular policy areas – in this case higher education and science – to enhance sectoral or national interests rather than used to simply describe international and global dimensions. These trends crisscross and interconnect, the former laying the ground for the latter. In doing so, higher education was transformed from being a nationally determined and oriented field to one with geo-political value and consequence. This evolution would have been impossible without the comparative evidence.

Part 1 looks at rankings in the context of an evolving international framework for comparability in the global era. Part 2 considers the way in which rankings have helped frame and make visible the global higher education and science system as a geo-political chess game. The conclusion draws these two strands together discussing some implications of these developments.