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What happend? What remains?
What's to come?

15 years of ranking experience

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1   What is it about?

During the past years a huge number of university rankings were published. Besides several specified rankings, e.g., on the MBA market or on web page analysis, there are different national and international rankings which refer to whole colleges and/or fields, but rankings are still developed for the university sector and are published. On the one hand this leads to the situation that universities are contacted by different institutions which strains the university employees and rectorates and - due to underlying methodology - to different results. Nevertheless Rankings lead to transparency and disclosure of university achievements and study terms which is not only helpful for students, but allows also a comparison of universities.

Besides, often the discussion about university rankings is marked ideologically or also politically. The question to whom and for what university rankings are useful, actually is seldomly taken into account.

The Centre for Higher Education (CHE) in Germany tried to get first answers on these questions. Three surveys regarding the CHE university ranking and U-Multirank, an international ranking under the leadership of the CHE and the Dutch Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), deal with these questions.

In the evaluation, "Nutzung von Rankingdaten an deutschen Hochschulen. Eine empirische Analyse der Nutzung von Hochschulrankings am Beispiel des CHE Hochschulrankings" (Use of ranking data at German Universities. An empirical analysis of the use of university rankings at the example of the CHE University Ranking), will be used to answer the question whether the results of rankings are known within the colleges and if they are used for internal analyses. It appeared that university rectorates and in particular the press offices of the universities work with the results, for example the results are used for press releases or advertising measures are derived.

Also the use and the intelligibility of the CHE University Ranking were checked by a survey among registered users of the university rankings. The answers show that the ranking is helpful for the study orientation.

Statements about U-Multirank as a multidimensional international ranking are still difficult at the moment; nevertheless, it appears that the demands which are made by the participants to the project vary much. At the same time the participants estimate U-Multirank as being so successful in its outcome, that these approaches will be fulfilled.

2 What was?

When the Carnegie Foundation started with their classification of colleges and universities in America in 1970, the comparative analysis of university institutions began.

During the past 40 years different investigations and studies with the subject of the classification, measurability and analysis of university institutions were published. Also different university rankings were set up in past decades. Not only in Germany, but worldwide rankings are published yearly which suffer – in different magnitudes – from praise and criticism. They are working with different methods and serve different target groups.

In Germany different rankings which serve different target groups are published. The first university ranking was already published in the 80s by the weekly magazine "Der Spiegel". Rankings of the magazines "Focus", "Handelsblatt", "Karriere" and "Wirtschaftswoche" joined. The first CHE Ranking was published in 1998. Media partners have included, "Stiftung Warentest", "Stern" and more recently, "DIE ZEIT".

These rankings were and are commonly published a) in a magazine and b) to address a wide public as a target group.

Besides the CHE University Ranking there are some other initiatives which are surveying students. An example is "MeinProf". According to their own information they make the quality of the German university teaching public. Therefore students can evaluate on the internet platform their lecturers and courses.

To these rankings other ones come which lay their main focus on the target group of the scientists and researchers which also appears in the underlying indicators. For Germany the DFG Förderatlas and the Humboldt Ranking have to be mentioned.

Some of the mentioned rankings are published yearly, others have been updated for a longer time as it becomes evident from table 1.

International Rankings

Besides the national university rankings there are several international ones which are also well known in Germany, such as the "Financial Times Global MBA Ranking" and "Webometrics" focusing mainly on the MBA market through the visibility in the internet. The "Leiden Ranking" focuses on the bibliometric performance of the 500 biggest universities worldwide (regarding their output).

Probably best known under German scientists is the "Academic Ranking of World Universities" of the Shanghai University, also called "Shanghai Ranking", as well as the "Ranking of World Universities" of the magazine "Times Higher Education". In addition, the Taiwanese "Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan" (HEEACT) ranks the scientific publications of the 500 top universities.

Also in other countries rankings of universities were set up long ago, as for example the "US News Ranking" in North America.

The following table summarises the rankings (August, 2013).

Table 1: Overview over existing university rankings which are existing or well known in Germany

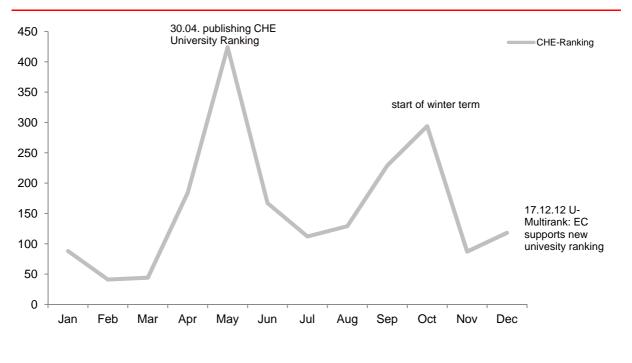| Name of the Ranking	URL	Directed to	Methodology	Update
German Rankings				

CHE University Ranking	www.che-ranking.de	Multidimensional Ranking – compares several dimensions: teaching and learning, research, infrastructure, international orientation, work experience	Survey of Students, professors, departments and university administration; use of official statistical data	2013
Karriere			See Wirtschaftswoche Uni Ranking	2013
Wirtschaftswoche Uni Ranking	http://www.wiwo.de /ranking-die-besten-unis-und-fachhochschulen/8 046582.html	Based on a survey beyond personnel managers; information for interested public.	500 personnel managers are surveyed. Five field categories are analyed.	2013
DFG Förderatlas	http://www.dfg.de/d fg_profil/foerderatla s_evaluation_statis tik/foerderatlas/	Research oriented. Compares research performance based on third party funds.	Third party funds given by the DFG, the EU and the government are published. In addition also fund by AvH, DAAD and ERC.	2012
Handelsblatt	http://www.handels blatt.com/politik/oe konomie/bwl-ranking/die-top-fakultaeten-deutsche-betriebswirte-fallen-zurueck/7142160.h tml	Business: Top 250 Ranking: business professors which perfom best in research. Top 100 under 40: The most active German speaking economists worldwide which are younger than 40. Top 100 since 2008: The most active German speaking economists in the last years; Top departments: The departmens doing best in research in business. // Economy: The departments doing best in research in their research performance since 2002.	Publications in scientific journals are counted.	Business 2012 Economy 2011
Humbold Ranking	http://www.humbol dt-foundation.de/web/ humboldt-ranking-2012.html	International Reputation of universities	The research stays of foreign „Humboldianer" in Germany are counted. Beside a full ranking four scientific fields are analysed in detail.	2012
MeinProf	http://www.meinpro f.de/hochschulranki ng	Ranking of whole universities, lecturers/professors and courses, a so called "Material ranking" as well as a MINT (mathematics/natural sciences) 10 Ranking	The users of MeinProf.de judge their professors and courses.	2012
Staufenbiel MBA Ranking	http://www.mba-master.de/mba/ran kings/staufenbiel-mba-ranking.html	Top 10 Business Schools Europe; Top 10 Business Schools USA; Top MBA Schools in Asia; Staufenbiel MBA Ranking	Besides an international accreditation, the ranking position of the programmes within the most famous rankings (Financial Times, Business Week, U.S. News and World Report and Economist Intelligence Unit) is taken into account.	2012

Der Spiegel	http://www.student enspiegel.de/medi a/ergebnisse_stud entenspiegel.pdf	Information for students and prospective students. The "Studentenspiegel" could also be used by the students to compare their own performance with the performance of other students.	Studentenspiegel: survey of students and graduates. Open access to online questionnaire.	Spiegel Uni Ranking is not published any longer. Studenten-spiegel 2010.
StudiVZ	http://www.studivz. net/l/hochschulrank ing/2/	Information for students	User of the social network StudiVZ answer questions regarding student life.	2009
Focus	http://www.focus.d e/wissen/mensch/c ampus/uni-ranking/	Ranking of German universities. 20 fields are included.		2007
Hochschul-anzeiger (FAZ)		Success of graduates.		2006
Wirtschaftswoche Forscher Ranking				SIngle study
International Rankings				
ARWU (Shanghai Ranking)	http://www.shangh airanking.com/	Worldwide research oriented university ranking	Four weighted indicators lead to a league table.	2013
Financial Times Global MBA Ranking	http://rankings.ft.co m/businessschoolr ankings/global-mba-ranking-2013	Comparison of MBA programmes all over the world.	Programmes have to been accreditated, full – time and exist since at least four years. Survey of graduates and Business Schools itself.	2013
Leiden Ranking	http://www.leidenra nking.com/	Research oriented (Bibliometric Analyses). For Europa and worldwide five different rankings.	Absolute number of publications, "crown indicator"; "Alternative Crown Indicator"; citations per publication	2013
QS Topuniversities	http://www.topuniv ersities.com/univer sity-rankings	Research oriented ranking, worldwide.	Six weighted Indicators	2013
Times Higher Education World Universities Rankings	http://www.timeshig hereducation.co.uk /	World University Ranking; Top universities by reputation; Top 100 under 50 years	Multidimensional Ranking with five dimensions.	2012/2013
Webometrics	http://www.webom etrics.info/	" Visibility" ranking	Websites of 20,000 Hochschulen are analysed, more than 5,000 are published in a ranking list.	2013
HEEACT	http://www.heeact. edu.tw/mp.asp?mp =4	Research oriented (bibliometric)		2010
U-Multirank	www.u-multirank.eu	Prospective students, scientists, rectorates	Multidimensional Ranking. Survey of Students and HEI, patant analyse and bibliometric analyse.	Published first in 2014

3   What remains?

In particular, rankings with international focus can attract attention to themselves on account of their regular actualisations. A press analyses can provide evidence on that fact: If a ranking appears, universities report their good results in the press and the results are also taken up by the local media.

The universities are also working with national rankings. An analysis based on the media service "Meltwater" shows a clear increase in press reports on the CHE University Ranking, as soon as this is published. An exemplary evaluation which considered the publication of the CHE University Ranking was carried out in 2012. It focused on the media analysis functions of the public relations software "Meltwater News" for the idioms "University ranking" in connection with "Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung CHE". For the evaluation Meltwater searched 162,000 online publications according to their own information.

Figure 1: Media analyse for CHE university Ranking 2012

[CHE, based on Meltwater News]

It appears that directly after publication of the CHE University Ranking in May a jump occured in press releases only for a short period and decreased afterwards on a clearly lower measure. Then on time for the start of the winter term the reporting about the ranking rose again clearly.

Consequently it can be held on that rankings are used for the press work at universities. It can be supposed that the results are not only in general written by newspapers and magazines, but also that the press offices of the universities use the results of the ranking for their own reporting.

3.1   User analyses within the universities

The fact that universities are using the results of a university ranking could be proved by a study of the Centre for Higher education, (CHE). In the working paper " Nutzung von Rankingdaten an deutschen Hochschulen. Eine empirische Analyse der Nutzung von Hochschulrankings am Beispiel des CHE Hochschulrankings" (Use of ranking data at

German universities. An empirical analysis of the use of university rankings at the example of the CHE university ranking) [1] by Julius-David Friedrich it was proved that the results of the CHE University Ranking are used primarily for the press work.

For that analysis 171 central coordinators[2] and 270 deans were invited to an online questionnaire. All together 77 valid questionnaires (45%) could be registered by the central coordinators. The following results are based exclusively on the use of the CHE University Ranking, because on the one hand this was used most often by the interviewees and on the other hand, by students which were also in the focus of the study. Only the DFG Förderatlas is intensely used beside the CHE University Ranking by the universities.

Table 2: Use of University Rankings by universities[3]

Ranking	Yes, used % (number)	No, not used % (number)	Don't know % (number)	Ranking unknown % (number)
CHE University Ranking	53,1% (17)	28,1% (9)	18.8% (6)	0% (0)
DFG-Förderatlas	48,3% (14)	13,8% (4)	31% (9)	6,9% (2)
Financial Times MBA-Ranking	0% (0)	44,8% (13)	41,4% (12)	13,8% (4)
Handelsblatt Business and Economy-Ranking	7,1% (2)	39,3% (11)	42,9% (12)	10,7% (3)
HEEACT – Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for World Universities	3,6% (1)	42,9% (12)	39,3% (11)	14,3% (4)
Humboldt-Ranking	17,9% (5)	25% (7)	32,1% (9)	25% (7)
Leiden - Ranking	7,4% (2)	40,7% (11)	33,3% (9)	18,5% (5)
QS – Topuniversities / US News Ranking	11% (3)	40,7% (11)	33,3% (9)	14,8% (4)
Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai Ranking)	7,1% (2)	46,4% (13)	35,7% (10)	10,7% (3)
Times Higher World University Rankings	11,1% (3)	37% (10)	33,3% (9)	18,5% (5)
Webometrics	0% (0)	28,6% (8)	39,3% (11)	32,1% (9)
Wirtschaftswoche: Uni-Ranking	6,9% (2)	41,4% (12)	38% (11)	13,8% (4)

The interviewees use the DFG Förderatlas for example as an important source of information to receive comparative results within the dimensions research performance with other HEI, or they are using the Förderatlas for internal and external allocation of funds as well as for target agreements.

However the CHE University Ranking is used in particular for the public relation and also for activities in the university management and the departments.

[1] http://www.che.de/downloads/CHE_AP166_Nutzung_von_Rankingdaten_an_deutschen_Hochschulen.pdf

[2] Central coordinators are employed at the universities and are the main contact persons of the CHE. They are coordinating tasks within the universities regarding the CHE University Ranking and help with the communication between departments and CHE. Central coordinators are often employed at a central position of the university.
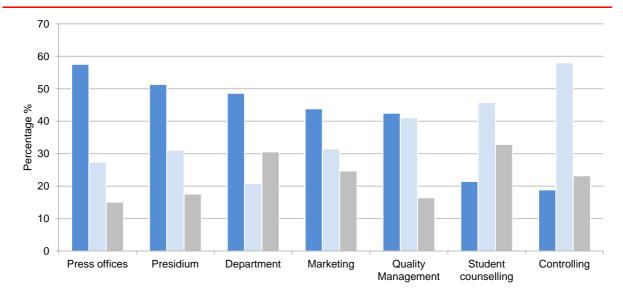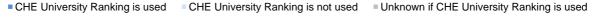
[3] Missing values are not included.

Figure 2: Number of universities using/not using the CHE University Ranking in their units

[CHE]

For the public relations at universities the results of the university ranking are used for concrete activities: in particular it highlights the achieved results in the CHE University Ranking.

Table 3: Activities in press offices

Activity	Number	Percentage
For press releases	33	82.50%
For the homepage of the university	24	60.00%
For advertising efforts	21	52.50%
For annual reports	20	50.00%
No detailed activities known	1	2.50%

Besides the use of the results for the press work and public relations, the results are pulled up by the universities presidium/university management for their own internal analyses. A differentiated evaluation shows that the universities presidium use the results in particular for strengths and weaknesses analyses.

Table 4: Activities presidium/university management

Activity	Number	Percentage
For strengths and weaknesses analyses	26	68.42%
As basis of conversation between Presidium and Department	25	65.79%
Recognition for improvement potential	23	60.53%
Competitor analyses	19	50.00%
As support for profiling/strategic focus of the university	13	34.21%
As evaluation for implemented activities	12	31.58%
As basis of conversation with students	11	28.95%

As decision support for strategic university control	11	28.95%
As basis of conversation with ministries	11	28.95%
As basis of conversation with/ valuation for accreditation agencies	9	23.68%
For Benchmarking-Networks	8	21.05%
For chances and risks analyses	5	13.16%
To make aims quantifiable (indicator based target agreements)	5	13.16%
No detailed activities known	0	0.00%

The central coordinators were asked to name if possibly, concrete examples of the use. As concrete action areas for the university management were mentioned for both points "Strengths and weaknesses analysis" and "recognising of improvement potentials" from the interviewees, for example "comparison with internal evaluations" and "improvement of the study quality". Further the results are used for an analysis of the "correlation between prospective customers' inquiry and ranking position" and for the "benchmarking with other universities in the same fields". As "a conversation basis" the data act, for example, with a "round table with students", by the "discussion of the teaching evaluations", or for "indicating the success of courses of studies".

In addition, the data are pulled up within the scope of the university council meetings as well as in talks about the equipment and removal by courses of studies and main study focuses. Here an overlapping is also given to examples in the area of the "strategical university control". Also here the use of the CHE University Ranking data was mentioned as a suggestion for new courses of studies, but also "a use with regard to the strategical personnel development" and the "removal planning of the university". Out of this it becomes clear how many-sided ranking results are used as an additional source of information in the university management.

In addition, results are also used - as shown – for the university's marketing. In contrast to the public relations the university marketing uses the results of the CHE University Ranking, nevertheless, not only for the outside representation (advertising activities 46.9 percent), but, like the university management, for internal (strengths and weaknesses analysis 46.9 percent), as well as external analyses (competitive analyses 53.1 percent and chances and risk analysis to 12.5 percent). Moreover, the results of the CHE University Ranking are used in the university marketing for the conceptual work (marketing drafts 34.4 percent) and for concrete activities (28.1 percent).[4]

Table 5: Activities Marketing

Activity	Number	Percentage
Competitor analyses	17	53.12%
For strengths and weaknesses analyses	15	46.88%
For advertising efforts	15	46.88%
For marketing concepts	11	34.38%
To infer concrete efforts	9	28.12%
No detailed activities known	5	15.62%
Risk analyses	4	12.50%

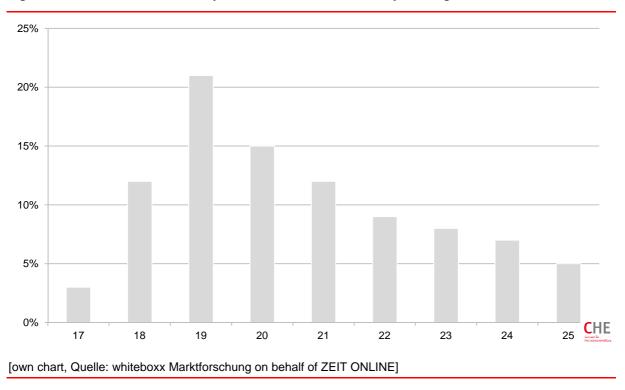---

[4] No further information given.

The universities use the results of the CHE University Ranking, therefore, in particular to generate attention. It is by press articles or as information on the homepage, or for advertising efforts.
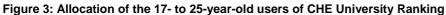
Thereby it comes for a spreading of the results about the university-internal canals as well as about the universities itself. In particular with the rankings which are published in cooperation with a media partner, or directly by a magazine the results are strewn mostly already by the publication broadly.

3.2   User survey Online-User

For the CHE University Ranking an analysis was carried out in 2012[5] to the question whether the presentation of the ranking as well as its functionality meets the expectations and requirements of the primary target group – prospective students.

The aim of the questioning was a user's survey and a usability test among the users of the online version of the university ranking. Therefore an online questionnaire was carried out with the help of a full-structured questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. Two groups were evolved which worked on two different user tests beside a common questionnaire. Per each group 15,000 registered users of the CHE University Ranking were selected at random and invited to participate in the online-survey by email. In group 1, 1072 (7.2%) of the questionnaires were answered completely. In the second group 1083 (7.2%) were edited completely. The majority of the users were between 16 and 20 years old and the 18- to 19-year-olds were just one third of the users put out.

Figure 3: Allocation of the 17- to 25-year-old users of CHE University Ranking

[own chart, Quelle: whiteboxx Marktforschung on behalf of ZEIT ONLINE]

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[5] Non- published survey, duration between 17.10.2012 to 26.10.2012 by Whiteboxx Marktforschung und Kommunikationsberatung on behalf of ZEIT ONLINE
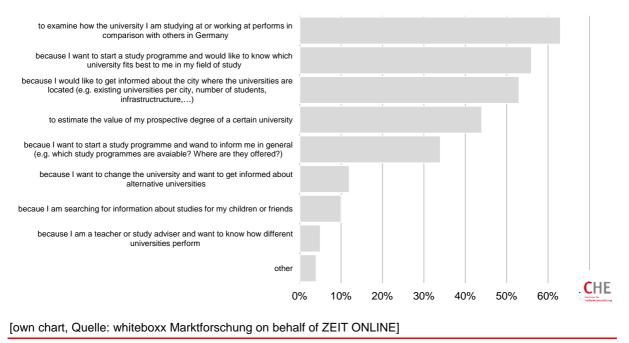
A (Fach-)Abitur (high-school diploma/A level) as the highest educational degree at the time of questioning own 70.5 percent of the included users, indeed, 18.5 percent of the interviewees already dispose a university degree.

The majority (73.5%) of the interviewees assigned themselves to the status group of the students, about 10 percent still called themselves in October 2012 a pupil. Those which assigned themselves to the status groups of pupils, trainees, student, the armed forces, voluntary social year or "the other" began a study in the winter term in 2012/2013 to 51 percent, consequently were at the time of questioning university entrants in the first semester. The other seven percent of the interviewees planned a study beginning in the summer term in 2013.

Hence, it can be summed up that the users from the CHE University Ranking also correspond predominantly to the sighted user's group of the prospective students.

Besides, the reasons of the use are varied. Most often it was indicated by the users to examine with the help of the CHE University Ranking, how the college in which they studied or worked performed in the nationwide comparison. About half of the interviewees (56%) indicated that they wanted to begin a study programme and want to find out with the help of the university ranking which university(ies) fits best to their needs within the field they would like to study.

Figure 4: Reasons for using the CHE Ranking

[own chart, Quelle: whiteboxx Marktforschung on behalf of ZEIT ONLINE]

Information about the university – regardless if they are already matriculated at that HEI or if they are prospective students - is the main reason to enter the ranking and use it. For the concrete choice of a university for a particular study programme, the assessment of the course of studies or the department judged by the students were pulled up by the users. For 84 percent of the interviewees this was the most important criterion. Also, the contained information about study and teaching was judged from 83 percent as "important". The equipment of a department was "important information" for 77 percent of the interviewees, as well as the "practice relation" and "occupational relation" of a course of studies.

However, the reputation of a university in the science was judged "important" by only 62 percent, just as the information about the research activity of a department from less than half of the interviewees (47%) was chosen as important criterion for the choice of a university for certain courses of study.

Hence, on the basis of this information, it can be concluded that a university ranking is really used by the target group – in this case university entrants/current students – are willing to find the information they request. In addition, the survey shows that it is helpful for the users if different sources are considered in the results and thereby a wide look at the study situation is allowed. A restriction only on student's questionings or only on department data would not be able to provide such a huge number of information.

Besides, it must be considered that the interviewees do not come to their final study choice and university decision only on the results and information published in the university ranking. On account of the results of the university ranking about 70 percent of the users visited the website of a specific course of study or a certain university. Almost half of them (48%) applied on account of the results of the universities in the ranking to at least one university.

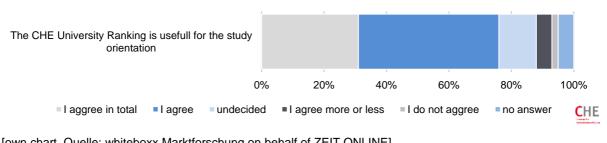Predominantly the interviewees answered that they found the university ranking useful for the study orientation.

Figure 5: Helpfulness of the CHE University Ranking for the study orientation

[own chart, Quelle: whiteboxx Marktforschung on behalf of ZEIT ONLINE]

Nearly one third of the interviewees agreed to this statement completely, 76 percent held the ranking as useful. 80 percent of the interviewees would also recommend the university ranking to friends or colleagues.

The aim to deliver the results of the university ranking as information to the target group is apparently reached. This becomes visible in the fact that nearly 90 percent of the interviewees indicated, the texts on the internet presentation of the ranking are formulated understandably and that about 70 percent confirm an easy navigation through the web page. However for 17 percent, the use of the ranking was sometimes "very disappointing" because they had problems to achieve their aim. Hence, it remains that for the majority, the information is processed in a way that it meets the demands of the target group, nevertheless, there is still a relatively big group which indicates having difficulties with the use of the published results.

On the basis of these three evaluations of the CHE University Ranking it can be summed up that university rankings attract not only attention to themselves, but that they are also helpful for different user groups.

Employees of the universities can work with processed results constructively. They can work with the results of a university ranking in the press offices and use the data for university-internal processes.

Pupils and students can get helpful information from a university ranking which they can use for their study choice. University rankings play an increasingly important role for the students as it was found out by the HIS GmbH. According to the publication "Studienanfängerinnen und Studienanfänger im Wintersemester 2011/12 – Tablenband (university entrants and female university entrants in the winter term 2011/12)" a good ranking result of the university is for 37 percent of the interviewees a (very) important motive to choose a university. Furthermore, the portion of those who have indicated this has steadily risen for many years. In 2003/2004 30 percent of the interviewees answered that way.

4 What's to come?

Rankings have set up during the past years, although it can be found that for Germany the huge number of the rankings which still existed a few years ago decreases.

It can also be assumed from the facts that in the future more university rankings will be published, since students use the results of rankings for their own study choice and scientist use rankings as a source of information. Also, the universities begin to use the data from university rankings for their own purposes like analyses. The wish to receive comparative information about the studies offered also appears in the fact that - according to the present state - at least three new university rankings are developed in Europe alone: national rankings in France and Spain as well as the international project U-Multirank.

In the media most often the development of the project U-Multirank promoted by the European Commission is mentioned. The starting point for this project was already in 2009 when the EU commissioner Ján Figel at that time demanded a ranking which delivers information to different interest groups to help make adequate and profound decisions and at the same time helps the institutions to position themselves and improve their own efficiency. At that time within the scope of a call for tender, the Consortium for Higher Education and Research Performance Assessment (CHERPA), under leadership of the German Centre for Higher education (CHE) and the Dutch Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) won the project surcharge. For U-Multirank another approach was consciously chosen than in the other international rankings. In this ranking multidimensionality and rank groups are established in a transnational ranking. Furthermore, the methodology is based on three approaches:

1) A comparison is done exclusively in a specialised way: only departments and programmes of the same fields are confronted in a ranking.

2) The ranking is multidimensional. Besides the five different dimensions (teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation and regional engagement) different data sources are also included in the investigation: Questioning at department level, questioning at university level and elevation of students' judgments. In addition bibliometric, as well as a patent analyses are carried out.

3) Rank groups will be awarded instead of rank places. Currently the subdivision is planned in five groups.

The methodology was tested within the scope of the feasibility study at 159 universities and advanced technical universities in 57 countries. Two thirds of the universities are located within Europe, nevertheless, participants also came from Asia, America and Australia, as well as some single African universities. The focus of the pilot study focused on two fields, the business management, as well as the engineer's sciences with the sub-fields mechanical engineering and electrical engineering.

The submitted data were checked during the analysis regarding their availability, conceptual clarity and validity, before a calculation and a ranking took place. By the different results of the departments in the single indicators their different performance profiles also became visible.

In January, 2013 the work for the implementation of U-Multirank began. Four fields are examined: business, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and physics. All together about 700 universities registered themselves for the participation in this university

ranking. With this, the aim size given by the EU commission of 500 universities was clearly overachieved.

If it is considered that there are already two international university rankings and different national initiatives, the question is what the universities which are participating in U-Multirank expect from U-Multirank.

In the period from May to July 2013 a survey was carried out under the contact persons of those universities which by that time registered themselves for participation. An open questionnaire was sent to about 500 universities. 297 persons participated in total.

The interviewees were asked for their appraisal of which groups will be the main users of U-Multirank. Besides the university management, in particular prospective students were mentioned as a main user group.
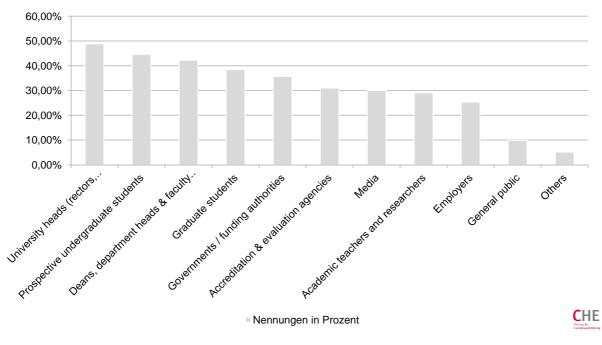
Figure 6: Users of U-Multirank

Nennungen in Prozent

CHE

[Survey beyond contact persons of U-Multirank]

In addition, the interviewees were asked to value the use of the ranking for different demands. Therefore they were asked to bring eight given attempts of utilisation in an order and they should name the most important in their opinion first and the most insignificant last. In the following graphics the attempts of the order are illustrated after their importance. The median is shown as well as the average, based on the information of the interviewees.
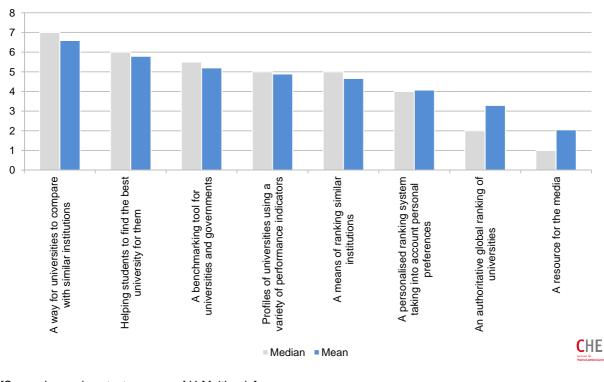
Figure 7: Importance of different uses of U-Multirank

Median ■ Mean

[Survey beyond contact persons of U-Multirank]

With the help of the prototype existing in the surveying period of the online platform on which the results will be published, the interviewees should estimate how well U-Multirank will succeed in fulfilling different attempts: Based on your experience of the prototype and thinking about the purposes of the website, how successful do you think U-Multirank would be in meeting the following?

The interviewees could carry out the assessments with the help of a seven-point scale from "very poor" to "excellent".

As the results of this question show, U-Multirank is able to fulfill different attempts of utilisation very well. In particular U-Multirank is valued from that point of view positively to offer a possibility to compare similar universities with each other (like-with-like). 60 percent of the interviewees value this as "very good" or "good". Many alike (58%) credit U-Multirank to illustrate the profiles of the universities with a huge number of performance indicators.

All together it can be found that of the questioned, U-Multirank estimated positively, only few interviewees answered negatively.
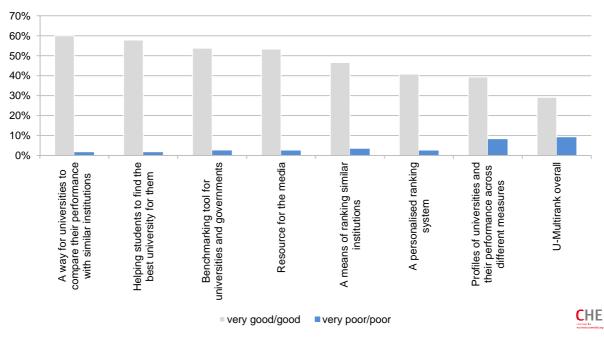
Figure 8: U-Multirank is able to be used for different approaches

[Survey beyond contact persons of U-Multirank]

Those which registered themselves for a participation in U-Multirank face this new, worldwide ranking positively. Of course no statement about those can be met which would not like to take part and which have reservations against rankings.

Nevertheless, it was found that the interest is high, very high (overachievement of the given number of participating universities) and that the present information up until now about U-Multirank is esteemed positively.

From the questioning it became clear that U-Multirank has to fulfill different approaches to satisfy the ideas of the participants. Whether these ideas are fulfilled or not, can only be answered by surveying the participants after the data collection process, or after the presentation of the results in the next year.

5 What does that mean?

University rankings are published for some years now; not only in Germany, but also in other countries and in the international context. That they would not exist is very difficult to imagine in the meantime as they have critics, as well as advocates.

The use of rankings is often discussed; nevertheless, valid knowledge is not often given, rather it is worked with arguments which arise by hearsay. To find out what rankings are used for, it is necessary to carry out suitable surveys beyond the user groups of the university rankings. Now for the CHE University Ranking two surveys which have followed this question are given.

The target group of the CHE University Ranking is prospective students. The ranking should act as a platform of information to find the university that fits best for all, applying to their own interests in the sighted field. A survey among 2,100 users of the online version of the ranking pointed out not only that these are accompanying by the majority to the target group, but also that the CHE University Ranking fulfills its purpose. 56 percent of the interviewees use the ranking to find out which universities and departments are best for them. 76 percent say the university ranking is useful for the study orientation.

In addition, it could be shown that the universities who take part in the CHE University Ranking use the results themselves. Above all the press offices of the universities use the publications for their own interests: Press releases, university homepage and advertising efforts belong to the most frequent efforts which are generated on the basis of the results. Also the university management realises different possibilities of utilisation. Among the rest, the results are brought into discussions with students and departments and act as a conversation basis.

Besides the CHE University Ranking the CHE also supports U-Multirank, a multidimensional international university ranking which will be published for the first time in spring 2014. The participating universities have high expectations of the project: U-Multirank should offer a possibility to compare similar universities with each other and be able to illustrate the different profiles of the universities in different performance dimensions. Most participants also assume that U-Multirank can fulfill these approaches. Indeed, this can be said only with certainty when the first publication of U-Multirank has taken place.

Still one has become clear: Universities have a big interest in (international) rankings. They would like to take part and also derive a benefit from this participation. Hence, the results must be processed in a way which is usable for the universities. It is important that university rankings are clear about their target group before and strictly orientate themselves by these.

University rankings will also be published during the coming years, because they can satisfy different needs. The designer of university rankings must keep one eye on the needs of the participants the whole time and at the same time keep and develop optimal strategies for the satisfaction of the needs of the target groups (how the students survey in the CHE University Ranking).