Global Rankings at a Local Cost? The Strategic Pursuit of Status and the Third Mission

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Abstract

This study examined how hierarchical positions within the global field of higher education influence the selection of strategic priorities by universities in different parts of the world. The study particularly focused on universities' commitment to third missions as reflected in their strategic plans and compared to their global rankings. The findings demonstrate that top globally ranked institutions are generally less explicit about their commitment to the third mission relating to their geographic setting compared to mid/low and unranked institutions. Meanwhile, unranked institutions most consistently exhibit strategies in contributing to the local economy, recognizing their local challenges and environment, and working for the benefit of their local community. This study informs debates on the intention and extent of the public good and missions of universities in light of the increasing dependence on ranking schemes.

Keywords: strategic planning, rankings, international higher education, third mission

For decades, research universities throughout the world have sought to secure and strengthen their statuses, not least to advance within the major global rankings (Hazelkorn, 2015; Marginson, 2007). Although status is an intangible asset, developments within higher education globally have made it easier to increasingly link the attainment of status to measurable indicators and criteria through rankings. Ranking schemes are also increasingly scrutinized for what they do and not measure, leading to overemphasis on certain criteria and de-emphasis of university commitments that are not relevant to the rankings (Hazelkorn, 2016). At the same time, due to national expectations of higher education institutions, there is renewed political interest in how higher education contributes to society – economically, socially and culturally (Benneworth, 2013; Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008; Marginson, 2007, 2016).

Ministries of education around the world, often through statements, emphasize various national interest needs for their education system to respond to through their own policies. For example, Singapore's ministry of education (MOE) states that their university system's goal is 'to prepare students not only for today's world' but also for jobs of the future. Aside from global interests, each of the nation's universities address various national interests, for instance, one university specifically focuses on life-long learning and another on education with industry collaborations (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2019). In China, the MOE references a recent education conference responsible for laying out new education reform plans and highlights the importance of tackling poverty through its education system so that minority populations also gain access to education (China Ministry of Education, 2018). The United States (US) Department of Education states that its mission prepares students for "global competitiveness … and ensuring equal access"(US, Department of Education, 2019). In Jordan, the MOE states that their education should address the needs of the nation's constitution wherein their faith, national

and social base are key philosophies that are weaved into their education system (Jordan, Ministry of Education, 2019). In Sweden, the new national roadmap for contributing to the European Research Area underlines that sustainability implies close alignment between global, domestic and local strategies, and that global challenges need to be translated into domestic and local actions (Swedish Government, 2019).

Hence, in a number of countries, governmental authorities and higher education institutions are emphasizing societal engagement, or what is known as the "third mission" of universities, encompassing activities that are related to development, innovation, community service and outreach (Nedeva, 2007). Some authors also claim that "third mission" activities is an essential element in the mission and strategic plans of many higher education institutions (Montesinos, Carot, Martinez, & Mora, 2008; Nedeva, 2007).

While one could argue that adding the "third mission" to the core of university strategic planning is positive, there are still a number of concerns related to this development. One of these concerns is how higher education institutions prioritize among the many possible third mission activities, and consequently, which segments of society they choose to "serve," and how (Benneworth, 2013). The current article addresses this issue by analyzing the third mission priorities found in the strategic plans of higher education institutions in regard to institutional status. This focus is based on the fact that many tangible indicators and criteria for third mission activities are based on economic contributions to society, and that in search of higher status, institutions engage in various forms of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), resulting in other possible third mission activities being relegated as lower priorities or altogether absent, including those that may have social and cultural impacts for different segments of society.

By using global rankings as a proxy for institutional status (Authors, 2019), the current study provides a detailed analysis of how hierarchical positions within the global field of higher education influence the strategic choices and priorities of universities in different parts of the world by examining the geographic orientations of third missions in their strategic plans and the kinds of third mission activities that are emphasized.

Strategic Plans

Over time strategic plans have become a key management tool in higher education, as evidenced by the prominent place strategic planning has taken within universities and colleges (Toma, 2010). While the institutional movement towards becoming more "strategic" and pursuing status through rankings varies between regions and countries, the overall trend is quite clear with ongoing governmental deregulation and the subsequent rise of the entrepreneurial university internationally. These institutions tend to employ strong steering cores (Clark, 1998; Fumasoli & Lepori, 2011; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) due to increased political and societal pressure for external accountability both financially and academically (Fumasoli, Pinheiro, & Stensaker, 2015; Morphew, Fumasoli, & Stensaker, 2016; Saichaie & Morphew, 2014).

While the impact of strategic plans can be debated (Birnbaum, 2000; Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Toma, 2010), it is, in general, found that strategic planning does affect universities, not least with respect to shaping the process of institutional positioning through branding and marketing efforts, in addition to long-term budget allocations and public accountability to key stakeholders (i.e., prospective students, faculty, potential regional partners and governmental leaders). Often strategic plans require the input of numerous university committees – usually comprised of faculty, staff, and student leaders - and take several months to over a year to develop, while building institutional commitment. Given the extensive process and

choices necessary to be accepted across an institution, strategic plans can be seen as both internal and external expressions of where institutional attention is focused – which also can have a considerable impact on later decision-making and institutional priorities by legitimizing and rationalizing difficult trade-offs that have to be made by those in charge (Drori & Honig, 2013). As such, strategic plans are valuable sources of information because they are a publicly available documentation of how universities have made priorities internally as well as attempted to establish and strengthen external legitimacy, both locally and globally (Fumasoli, Pinheiro, & Stensaker, 2015).

An earlier study by the paper authors (2019) found evidence of stratified university strategies that varied according to institutional status. The findings suggested that university strategic plans respond differently to the forces of globalization and pressures of status seeking, depending on their institutional rankings. Universities, divided into highly ranked, medium/low ranked, and unranked, were shown to follow a snake-like procession in their strategic plans (Riesman, 1958) that contributed to the differently ranked universities pursuing different paths in seeking to build external legitimacy (Stinchcombe, 1997). Based on Suchman's (1995) differentiated forms of legitimacy, highly ranked institutions pursued "cognitive" forms of legitimacy, evoking the neo-liberal global narrative of the world-class university, while non-ranked institutions espoused "pragmatic" accounts having to do with infrastructure and curricular standards. The biggest similarity found was that across all ranking categories, "moral" narratives of connecting the universities to the larger society were present.

Third Mission

This study focuses on these "moral" narratives that bridge universities to society. The conceptual framework for this study focuses on a university's "third mission" and stems the

contextual understanding that in the era of globalization, gaining status and global reputations have become important objectives for universities, and that the ways to strengthen status not only have triggered some universities to engage in 'snakelike' behaviors, but have also narrowed down their missions as a consequence potentially reducing their public responsibilities (Salmi, 2009; Marginson, 2007). Several issues here are noticeable.

First, when attempting internationalization as a goal, many universities tend to conceive of their constituencies so broadly, and so globally, that they may downplay service to the locations in which they are embedded (OECD, 2007), and which tend to make up the bulk of both their student populations and stakeholders who are most practically and immediately impacted by the university's actions. As global rankings, over national or even regional rankings, increasingly become the cornerstones of university marketing efforts, and institutions seek to prove their merit based on perceived global reach, local engagement may get reshuffled to a minor position in terms of institutions' commitments and impact. A globally oriented university may not see the benefit to its status when highlighting work in its own city, unless it is forced to do so because of negative relations or local pressure. However, institutions enjoying lower status may actually find their distinctiveness, and their niches, exactly in this gap left by the outward oriented global status university (Rodriguez-Pomeda & Casani, 2016).

Second, given the many possible activities that fall under the "third mission" label, another dimension of importance is the kind of service to society that universities prioritize. Laredo (2007) has, in a discussion of the many possible dimensions related to third mission, distinguished between those that are related to economic concerns and those that are related to societal and cultural concerns. In the economic category, Laredo identifies activities such as spin-offs, patents and intellectual property rights, and contracts and collaboration with industry

(p. 447). In the social and cultural category, Laredo includes cooperation with public bodies, involvements in social and cultural life, and participation in policy-making and/or implementation (p. 447-448). In terms of current national and international accountability, reporting and performance-based schemes, and not least within global rankings, it is often the economic indicators, over the common good, that become tangible, and as such represent a way to consolidate and improve institutional status.

A related classification further splits the third mission into social, enterprising, and innovative dimensions. Montesinos, Carot, Martinez, and Mora (2008) propose these particular differentiations in order to identify services to society that do not produce any direct economic benefits and yet should be factored into global rankings. The "social third mission" (p. 262) is comprised of engagement activities that are typically pursued after budget requirements are met, and can include non-academic dissemination, volunteer contributions to the community, cultural activities, and other forms of outreach and education. In contrast, the "enterprising third mission" involves behavior that would diversify university income and generate resources by developing economically based services to society, other organizations, and students, such as in the form of patents, intellectual property commercialization, collaborative research, and continuing education. Finally, the "innovative third mission" would include services and products transferable to society, such as business networking, solicitation of seed capital, and other joint ventures. Among the three, the social third mission produces hardly any, or at least limited, economic returns (or status), and thus perhaps remains the least prioritized among the highly ranked 'world-class' universities.

Marginson (2016) distinguishes the relatively complex economic and political definitions of public and private goods into the four quadrants, divided by market and non-market goods and

state and non-state sector goods. In addition to differentiating the economic from the social third mission activities (i.e., market and non-market), his framework further addresses the extent of the public realm being served (i.e., state and non-state). Within the broad range of possible public goods, the model further allows for the identification of local, or state, versus global, or non-state, benefits. While Marginson focuses primarily on the research and educational missions of universities and the kinds of goods they produce, these variations apply to the third mission activities as well, as the findings will demonstrate.

The fact that third mission activities may include both global and local, as well as economic and social/cultural activities is a characteristic that in general could be imagined as sustaining institutional diversity and allowing for institutional diversification (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 2012). For example, it is possible to argue that an explicit and public commitment to social and cultural community engagement is a way for lower status institutions to engage with the broader public in a manner that reasserts the value of both the institution and its community. Furthermore, high status universities might seek to assert their status by adapting to the tangible criteria that are associated with global outreach and a focus on economic impact.

However, the drive for improving institutional status may dramatically impact system diversity and also the global higher education landscape, especially due to lower status institutions attempting to imitate higher status institutions (Riesman, 1956). In addition to reducing institutional diversity, such imitation activity could also potentially impact the scope of third mission activities by reducing the local, social and cultural dimensions. Such challenges have triggered questions about the extent to which the higher education sector still reflects the traditional public good dimensions traditionally associated with universities (Broucker, De Wit,

& Verhoeven, 2017). How lower ranked universities fare globally has received limited attention, with far less known about the publics being served.

Methods

The research question is as follows: To what extent do universities position themselves locally in their strategic plans, and are their third mission strategies in relation to local society reflecting their ranking position?

The data for this study were based on a larger project that investigates strategic plans across universities of diverse rankings throughout the world (Authors, 2019). The data consisted of publicly available strategic plans for a variety of high ranked, mid/low ranked, and unranked institutions across six regions: North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. The data were gathered by a research team comprised of a diverse group of international scholars and graduate students located in, and/or with experience in, most of the major global regions. The selection of countries was based on the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the larger research team. Each researcher was responsible for collecting regional university information based on their language skills (i.e., Spanish, Mandarin, Russian, etc.) and direct knowledge of the region they were assigned. For institutional selection, research team members were then tasked with identifying globally ranked and unranked public and private universities. Over 100 universities were identified in the initial list of universities. Where formal strategic plans were unavailable, related online university documents (i.e., annual and financial reports) were examined. Universities without either online strategic plans, annual, or financial reports were eliminated. In all, 78 institutions were included in the study from 33 countries across 9 regions (See Table 1). Both public and private institutions were examined with the additional goal to include in the dataset countries that are often overlooked in higher education studies. Highly

ranked institutions were designated as those ranked in the top 200 in one of three major rankings systems. Mid/low ranked institutions were those ranked from 200-800 in at least one of the rankings, and unranked institutions were those that did not appear in the top 800 of any of the named rankings systems during 2016-2017.

Table 1. Study sample by institutional regions and rankings.

Region	High Ranked	Mid/Low Ranked	Unranked	Total
East Asia	4	2	4	10
Europe	9	7	6	22
Latin America	2	6	1	9
Middle East and North Africa	3	4	3	10
North America (excluding Mexico)	4	1	1	6
Oceania	1	1		2
South Asia		1	1	2
South East Asia	2	4	3	9
Sub Saharan Africa	1		7	8
Total	26	26	26	78

For the purposes of this study, three major rankings systems were utilized: the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) 2016; the QS World University Rankings (QS)

2016/2017; and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) 2016/2017. As shown in Table 2, global rankings criteria of all three university rank lists are generally based on research output and global impact without substantive weight directly related to third mission activities. The only appearance of any aspect of the third mission is in the Times's "Industry Income" criteria (accounting for 2.5% of the ranking score), which reflects knowledge transfer to society (Times Higher Education, 2017). There are no apparent measures in any of the three major global rankings criteria that acknowledge non-economic contributions to local communities.

Table 2. Global Rankings Criteria in 2017

ARWU	QS	Times
· Teaching (30%) · Research (30%) · Citations (30%) · International Outlook (7.5%) · Industry Income (2.5%)	1. Academic Reputation (40%) 2. Employer Reputation (10%) 3. Faculty/Student Ratio (20%) 4. Citations per Faculty (20%) 5. International Faculty Ratio (5%) 6. International Student Ratio (5%)	Quality of Education (10%) Quality of Faculty (40%) Research Output (40%) Per Capita Performance (10%)

The analytic approach was to generate the common qualitative patterns that arose within each ranking category. The data (translated if not in English) was coded to identify expressions of third mission and then compared to the initial codes across rankings. These categories were

then organized into two major classifications: Economic Third Mission and Social/Cultural Third Mission (Laredo, 2007; Marginson, 2016; Montesinos, Carot, Martinez, & Mora, 2008). The Economic Third Mission entailed strategies that would yield direct or indirect financial benefits, unlike the Social/Cultural that would likely not yield economic benefits (see Table 3).

Table 3. Third Mission Economic and Social/Cultural Classifications

Type	Montesinos, Carot, Martinez, & Mora (2008)	Laredo (2007)	Marginson (2016)
Economic	"Enterprising Third Mission" and "Innovative Third Mission"	Spin-offs, patents, industry collaborations	"Market-Produced Goods"
Social/ Cultural	"Social Third Mission"	Cooperation w/ public bodies, involvements in social & cultural life, and civic participation	"Non-Market-Produced Goods"

Beyond the economic versus non-economic designations, the extent to which universities' expressed commitments were local (i.e., city, country region, country, global region) and/or global was examined. Marginson (2016) distinguishes public and private goods from the "state sector" and "non-state sector," while this study conceptualized a more flexible sense of location given the varied levels of economic development within a country's shared region that might be emphasized. The second cycle of coding consisted of developing core categories related to the local, referring to relative locational engagement: "contributing to the local economy", "preserving or promoting local culture/scholarship", "partnering locally (training, community

service, etc.)", "recognition of local challenges/environment," and "representing the local region/nation/continent." This latter category was the most common category across strategic plans and reports for universities across all rankings. Within this category, further sub-themes of "regional (and sometimes continental) representation", "national representation," and "nation building" were identified. The findings are organized by rank, then by the variations on local and/or global contexts and their third mission strategies.

Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that, based on their strategic plans, top globally ranked institutions were, in general, less explicit about their locally focused third mission compared to mid/low and unranked institutions. Top ranked institutions' ambitions tended to be the most globally oriented, and when third mission was discussed, it was mostly framed in economic terms within the broader global context. Mid/low ranked institutions appeared to be more aspirational in partnering locally. Meanwhile, unranked institutions showed the most evidence of national development or nation building, beginning at the immediate local level. Unranked institutions most consistently demonstrated strategies based on contributing to the local economy, recognizing local challenges and the local environment, bettering the local surrounds (i.e., nation-state and community). These institutions also most clearly emphasized promoting and preserving their country's social and cultural distinctiveness as priorities. A visual snapshot of the key findings from the strategic plans are represented in Figure 1 to illustrate the type of third missions that institutions prioritize by their global ranking. The outermost circle of the figure represents unranked institutions and they have been found to emphasize local activities in their third missions. The next circle represents mid and low ranked institutions and their predominant strategic focus fall within national and regional lines. High ranked institutions make

up the center of the figure and these institutions emphasize global third missions through their strategic plans. The following findings sections further detail these geographic orientations, including similar patterns in expressing the different kinds of third missions (i.e., economic and social/cultural).

Figure 1. Global, National/Regional, and Local Third Missions by University Ranks
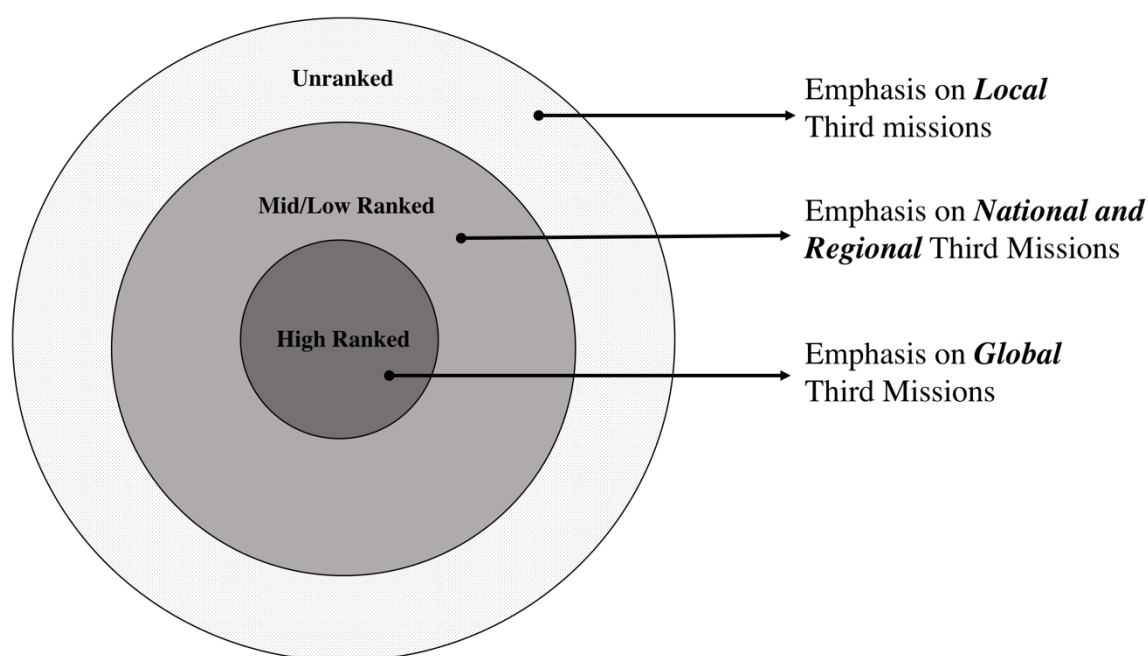
Top Ranked

Top ranked institutions' strategic plans showed the least evidence of third mission with respect to the local. Very few statements included any clear recognition of particular local challenges or the local environment, and often the mentions of local engagement were plans to collaborate with unspecified businesses and industries, as will be discussed.

Geographical Orientation.

National and Global. Though the overall goals of universities at the top of the rankings were quite ambitious in terms of breadth of audience and impact, these institutions mostly

discussed the roles they played nationally or geographically in their strategic plans. The top-ranked rarely mentioned their respective city roles within their respective countries, instead focusing on their national, broadly regional, or global reputations. One university discussed its conscious effort to move away from being a regional university within the US. "Growth meant that [University] had to transform itself from a good regional university to an outstanding national and international research university" (USA). According to this institution, progress was associated with moving its focus and impact beyond the university's geographic location.

Unsurprisingly, top ranked institutions positioned themselves as the best university representatives from their countries, and sometimes continents, to the world. A Mexican university described itself as "the University of the Nation." The Saudi government's goals for their universities was intertwined with its national identity: "Our vision is built around three themes: A vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation." Others were even more ambitious. A Scottish university noted its international nature as its primary identity with the statement that it sees itself to be "a truly international university firmly rooted in Scotland." Numerous institutions promoted themselves as the leading universities within their region and their continent. A South African university wished to promote, broadly, African scholarship, while a Singaporean university desired to "become a truly leading global university centered in Asia" by influencing the local, regional, and international communities. The fact that local engagement evidence within the strategic plans was low overall, but the desire to be a leading international institution was high, highlights the differences between highly ranked institutions versus lower or unranked institutions.

Third Mission Type.

Economic Third Mission. One particularly evident and distinctive feature across the limited third mission narratives among top ranked institutions was the promotion of tech transfer and related ventures to support industry and to enhance university-industry ties. Examples included: "Here in [city], [University] will be promoting closer interaction with industry, encouraging growth-oriented technology spin-offs, and working with government to secure a broader scope of action as an entrepreneurial university" (Germany). Another institution wanted to "integrate [their young researchers and entrepreneurs]'s companies in[to] Israel's hi-tech industry." A Malaysian university also specifically discussed tech transfer and university-industry collaboration, and a North American institution listed "accelerate technology transfer initiatives" as a key focus. To achieve access in and support the growth of cutting-edge technology, top ranked institutions also prioritize strategic alliances with other top research universities to advance their research goals. For example, a leading Brazilian university stated that in order to "train professionals capable of innovating and seeking solutions to the challenges of contemporary society with a view to the full exercise of citizenship," they were prioritizing goals to ready their infrastructure to meet the needs of internationalization and global research initiatives. In doing so, they anticipated that they be better positioned to attract more global talent to their world-class institution. An Israeli university stated that they aim to produce "ground breaking research" as a way to "develop international cooperation". In other examples, highly-ranked institutions positioned themselves as topmost in specific research and/or knowledge domains and prioritized capitalizing on the richness of these strengths by partnering with other globally recognized leaders. For example, two different institutions from China stated that their world-class university status allows their students to become global leaders. These institutions welcomed competition with other leading institutions by developing partnerships that steer

innovation and research that allows for further growth. Often, such partnerships with local institutions or community level organizations were not found in the strategic plans as the goals of highly ranked institutions tended to favor international prominence.

When present, highly ranked universities' limited plans to contribute to their local areas, however, were unspecified. The extent to which these strategies targeted local capacity building, internally rather than externally focused nation-building, and/or national competitiveness are unknown. In a few cases, top ranked institutions highlighted partnering with public and non-profit sectors (Denmark), or maintaining close links with local and regional players in business, politics, and culture (Germany). In most cases, however, the strategies were limited to vague entrepreneurial pursuits with far less evidence of social/cultural third mission.

Social/Cultural Third Mission. Overall, the limited examples of commitment to social or cultural third mission tended to come from the same few institutions in our study. These few exceptions included institutions that acknowledged that they had previously been criticized for their lack of local, non-economically focused engagement. Decolonization was one such strategy. A South African institution expressed its plans to "engage with a process of decolonisation…The focus of the social action has been the inequalities, prejudices, and structural disadvantages that continue to characterize South African society and our universities." A Canadian institution indicated that "in response to the expressed needs and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples, [University] engages in research and generates curricula across the University that respect, reflect and include Aboriginal cultures, histories and systems of knowledge." Among the strategies included the commitment to "create venues for dialogue with Aboriginal communities, and the broader public, on significant issues." Overall, these particular

institutions' third missions were unlike the more common economic values of the other top ranked institutions.

Medium-Lower Ranked

Mid/low ranked institutions generally fell somewhere in between top ranked and unranked institutions to the extent of how they articulate their third mission within the local context. Most notably, mid/low ranked institutions showed a more pervasive commitment to partnering locally in comparison to the more highly ranked, although those plans were also not overly specific.

Geographic Orientation.

Local. Mid/low ranked institutions' strategic plans sometimes included vague allusions to their commitments to regional networks within their countries (Turkey, Sweden, Germany) or to becoming regionally recognized (Qatar). A Russian institution's plan stated their commitment to "improving the quality of life and investment attractiveness in Russian regions". Otherwise, mid/low institutions were more focused on national representation.

National. Institutions ranked mid/low still included in their strategic plans that they were committed to striving for national excellence and reputation, especially as some were the only or among the very few the top ranked institutions in their respective countries. Most of these universities that were focused on the national context are located in Asia. One Thai university described itself as "The national university at the world level that creates knowledge and innovation to enhance Thai society." An Indonesian institution saw itself as promoting "the state ideology and dedicated to the nation's interest." Although not always top global institutions, many of the institutions were leading national institutions in countries with fewer universities overall (compared to the US and UK, for example). These countries might then impose a broader

set of expectations and experience greater pressure for their higher education institutions to work with and for local communities.

Several universities in the mid/low rankings had plans to contribute to national development, particularly in regard to the national economy, but also to promote public service. A Malaysian university discussed its goal of "empowering students to enhance future leadership talents to build a human capital that is holistic and sensitive to social issues and global changes in the process of nation building" as well as performing its "primary role…in the development of the country's human capital." A second Malaysian university also had the objective "to enhance the nation's competitiveness." A Chinese university described itself as having responsibility for national prosperity, rejuvenation and modernization. The examples of mid/low ranked institutions also included examples outside of Asia. A handful of mid/low ranked institutions' strategic priorities emphasized their institution's historical knowledge and that their immediate society can benefit from such resources for generations to come. For instance, in a mid/low ranked university in Spain emphasized strategies that were in favor of the "sustainable development and improvement of the quality of life of Spain, of Castile and Leon and of all peoples." Included in their aim to transfer "cultural knowledge" to their community. Like this university, one institution from Qatar stated that their "core ambition… is to contribute to the Qatari society." While goals aimed at regional and national development were top priorities, another university from Chile and one from Colombia included goals to each espouse "inclusivity" as they prioritized university-wide goals to emphasize and acknowledge the needs of their respective communities.

In Jordan, a university indicated that it saw itself as an institution that seeks to "…develop mechanisms that facilitate students' interaction with the local community". This

finding is also in line with the guiding philosophies offered by the Jordanian MOE. Two Chilean universities also appeared in this theme, with one seeking to "Ensure training in social responsibility, according to the development strategy of the country" as one strategy, and another vying to increase even more its "contribution to the development of the country." The latter university wanted to "make the spirit of the university community with a clear conscience of service to Chile." Another example was found in the strategic plan of a Russian institution, which aimed to develop "innovations for the socio-economic and sustainable development of Russia." Finally, the most explicit plan came from a university in Costa Rica. This university described plans to "develop new innovative academic programs that are relevant to the development of the country" and to "deepen our links with different sectors of the national community, with the purpose of improving the quality of life of the population."

Third Mission Type.

Economic Third Mission. Compared to the highly ranked, mid/low ranked institutions were more specific about how they would contribute to the local economy. One described recognizing local businesses as stakeholders (Mexico), working with local businesses to improve the economy (India), and collaborating with key enterprises in order to serve national and local economic development (China). A Malaysian institution described their establishment of an "Industry Advisory Panel to ensure its educational contents remain relevant to industrial practices." A German institution wanted to not just produce workers, but to attract more business to their region: "[The University] will continue to exercise its regional responsibilities…help shape the [Named] region as a business and science location and so ensure economic transformation." Additionally, a Costa Rican university aimed for "integration of university

activities with the main development needs of the country" and "to boost entrepreneurship and innovation for project development that serves the different needs of Costa Rican society."

Mid/low ranked institutions, similarly to unranked institutions, also emphasized the value of preparing well-rounded students to contribute to the economy. One stated, "[our goal is] empowering students with the values and characteristics that are accepted in local and global markets" (Malaysia). Another expressed that "service to the country is not an area that should be measured by the amount of resources it generates, but rather by the capacity we develop [for] education and research in permanent dialogue with our environment" (Chile).

Social/Cultural Third Mission. Student access to higher education was a recurring third mission theme for many mid/low ranked institutions. A university in the US explicitly aimed to serve the students of their state, in particular low income and underrepresented students. This institution specifically discussed how "recognizing that our state's metropolitan universities serve nearly half of the students in the State University System, [University] has joined with [other State University] and [other State University] in a national model of collaboration." Another institution's mission was "to promote equal access to education while…giving full support to the community" (Thailand). Recognition of particular challenges in their locales appeared especially important for some mid/low ranked universities. One institution in Qatar articulated a goal to "teach and conduct research which addresses relevant local and regional challenges." And an Egyptian institution did not shy away from addressing recent events, such as the protests in Cairo during the Arab Spring, indicating that they recognized the security challenges for operating in their locale. Mid/low ranked institutions' strategic plans also included strategies related to promoting their national language and cultures, such as "promotion and dissemination of the Spanish language" (Spain) and acting as a university "imbued with the nation's cultural values

based on Pancasila[1]" (Indonesia). Aside from addressing cultural needs of their nation, mid/low

ranked institutions also discussed addressing the needs of the environment, such as one

university from Turkey that expressed their desire for their on-going research efforts to be

environmentally responsive. One university from Brazil stated that they want to interact for the

"common good" of their community and that they wanted to engage in "socio-environmental

transformation". They also emphasized an approach to educating their people to be

"contextualized" so that they can be "reflective" and to provide skilled labor that is sustainable.

Unranked

Unranked institutions exhibited the most observable commitments to the third mission in

their strategic plans in varied economic and social/cultural forms, through contributing to the

local economy, recognizing their local challenges and environment, and in representing their

locales to a wider audience. Unranked institutions were much more explicit about local concerns

and their plans about addressing specific local issues compared to the ranked institutions. Despite

their unranked status, some institutions did indicate a desire to represent their nations or regions

(either within a country or as part of a global region), perhaps as a way to signal that, despite

their lack of rank, that they are quality institutions. Additionally, universities that signaled

aspirations to be recognized internationally indicated that their focus was on bringing the

benefits of international engagement home to their students and faculty, such as through

increased opportunities for mobility or training, rather than on being able to solve grand global

challenges (in contrast to top ranked institutions).

Unranked institutions particularly surpassed the highly ranked institutions in the area of

partnering locally with other institutions, businesses, local government, and other entities

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[1] Indonesian government promoted ideology promoting nationalism over differences in religion and culture (Esposito, 2018).

through training, community service programs, lifelong learning, etc. Across all rankings, when institutions made reference to partnering locally, they usually described some form of planned collaboration with local enterprises or organizations, though the unranked institutions had, more often, actual specific plans in terms of how to achieve that goal.

Geographic Orientation.

Local. Unranked institutions were most focused on immediate location within their countries than ranked institutions, which tended to focus more on national and international orientations. Two Scandinavian universities emphasized their social responsibility to the local region and that they were seeking partnerships with other universities within the country. Regional innovation and representing the "cutting edge" of the region were cited by a Japanese university as well as an Italian university. A Chinese university stated that it "intends…to increase the support and contribution that [University] could make to [Province]…in terms of economy, culture, and social development." A Moroccan institution focused specifically on the development of their local region within the country, and a Kenyan institution focused explicitly on service and development in the eastern region of their country.

National. Unranked institutions most strongly featured national development and nation building goals. These statements appeared mostly in institutions located in lower-middle to upper-middle income economies in Africa and Asia. An Indonesian university stated, "We are committed to developing the nation" and desired to "improve the quality of life of Indonesians". Two universities from South Africa also described a desire to contribute to national development. "[University] will strive to be an effective partner in the larger national project of building a sustainable and equitable non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, multilingual society" stated one. The other aimed for "applying…knowledge to the scientific, technological, and

socio-economic development of our nation" and to aligning "university priorities with national priorities." Two Kenyan universities also appeared with this theme. One described its self-appointed status as "Kenya's university," with students there expected to use their education to improve the state of their country. The other aimed to be a premier university for sustainable national development, and its main purpose and goal was to improve access to higher education for Kenyans. A Moroccan institution also desired to contribute to national development while strengthening the nation's Islamic identity. Unranked universities concentrated their efforts in developing and addressing the needs of the public by focusing on improving their country's labor market. For example, one university in Sweden stated that to facilitate social development, their university goals emphasize the social, financial and environmental spheres of their society. While they do mention external partnerships with other organizations, their strategic plan was "inwards looking" to address the needs of "working life and society".

Third Mission Type.

Economic Third Mission. When it came to contributions to the local economy, many unranked institutions again expressed their commitment to nation building and local development. Two unranked institutions in China discussed university-enterprise partnerships, with one also including how the university could function as a think tank for industry. An unranked university in Norway focused on increasing knowledge in oil and energy production, noting its location in the "oil capital" of that country. One unranked university in Italy discussed its desire to "spread…knowledge, perspectives, and skills in the region through institutional communication, orientation, public engagement, start-ups, spin-offs, patents, consultancy, third parties, etc." A Moroccan university detailed their interest in producing entrepreneurs who could contribute to the local economy.

Social/Cultural Third Mission. Across the ranks, the unranked were the most specific about their social and cultural third mission. A Chinese university planned to "preserve and disseminate traditional Chinese culture." One Turkish university made it clear that local society, including the community, governmental, and civic organizations are seen as important stakeholders of the institution, and promoted the development of strategies to share university facilities with its local society. Additionally, this same institution detailed how they provided voluntary education support to the local community. Another unranked institution, in Morocco, described development plans aimed to address the shortage of health personnel in their local area. A Nigerian university, in recognition of its local spiritual context, discussed offering community worship programs. Similarly, two universities from Turkey state that they not only want to develop "nature conscious" campuses but that they are developing their strategies around the focus of "community-university-industry collaborations". In this example, the placement of community before university is an important distinction, in that it reveals that the university recognized that it is nestled within a community and that it has the resources to combine industry knowledge to benefit its community. Another Brazilian university placed importance on their community by stating that their mission is to provide "development of the individual and of society". One institution from Kenya and another from Nigeria addressed cultural, political, ecological and social problems as a priority as opposed to focusing on the needs of the global society. The Kenyan university stated that their goal is to impart "moral values" that lead to "societal development". Like other unranked institutions, their goals were focused on the needs of their immediate community and ways they can support individuals within their communities. And lastly, an Italian university went so far as to recognize that they needed to

improve their community outreach. Their plan included a directive to "communicate better who we are and promote awareness of ourselves in the area around the university."

Access to education for specific local populations was a recurring theme. As steered by the nation's MOE policy to ensure education access and life-long learning for all its citizens, a Singaporean institution, recognizing that its students were often working professionals, touted its flexible hours and short time to degree plans. Similarly, a Nigerian university addressed the needs of its largely working student population in their city. For a Swedish university, their priorities emphasized their students' "working life" and the needs of their local labor market. In Hong Kong, an institution stated in its mission that it wished "to meet the actual needs of Hong Kong society by training efficient and well balanced young people for various services in the community." One university in Kenya planned to increase access to higher education for the Eastern region of the country in which it is based, due to that area's historically underserved population. An Indian and a Thai institution both addressed providing increased access to local, domestic populations. Despite being located in a global capital with high potential to recruit internationally, a Chinese university stated that it is "basing in Beijing and serving Beijing". We found these foci to be notable in the era of globalization, as by signaling their plans for internationalization, institutions are sometimes criticized for putting too much emphasis on non-local (national and usually international) recruitment (Watanabe, 2016; Anderson, 2016; McKenna, 2015; Rhee & Danowitz Sagaria, 2004 a). These unranked institutions were instead clearly emphasizing their commitments to their local stakeholders and students.

Discussion

The third mission was expressed differently based on global rankings. In contrast to the most highly ranked, mid/low ranked or unranked institutions were often more communicative

and specific about their commitments to, and intended impacts on, their local communities. Highly ranked institutions, in contrast, tended to be more focused on international engagement and global impact than on local matters. Furthermore, the unranked institutions were most explicit about social and cultural third missions, whereas highly ranked institutions' third missions were more often limited to plans promising economic benefits.

While the highly ranked, mid/low ranked, and unranked institutions included both local and global goals in their strategic plans, the differences may have indicated their underlying intentions to their respective stakeholders. The lower ranked and unranked institutions used "world class" language to signal international relevance and to possibly show that they are higher quality than their rankings might indicate. Conversely, the top ranked used local engagement language, albeit far less, to signal their local relevance. The few top ranked institutions that showed the most explicit commitment to their local communities were usually doing so in light of, or in response to, political issues within their countries or due to admitted negative community relations in the past. No mid/low ranked or unranked institution cited the existence of any past criticisms when discussing their commitment to local engagement, and none seemed to indicate that they needed to rectify or address negative political issues in their plans.

While one might assume that focusing on the immediate location in which a university is based to be parochial and contrary to the larger trend of higher education internationalization, we found that the strategic plans of lower ranked and unranked institutions do not support this. While unranked and lower ranked institutions do focus more on local issues and impact than highly ranked institutions, these universities often do so in a way that emphasizes their desire to promote local cultures on a larger scale, and/or bring the benefits of the university's global reach to bear for the local community. These institutions reflected third mission strategies in pursuit of

benefits for their traditional, local constituents. Some emphasized a desire to promote local cultures and languages to global audiences, protect local cultures, or advance national knowledge externally. It was, therefore, the prominence of commitment to the local, particular in social and cultural areas, that made the strategic missions of lower and non-ranked institutions stand out in this study.

While the study sought to identify global patterns, the findings are not intended to generalize universities everywhere. While rankings mattered, so did the extent of national development. Across mid/low and unranked universities, those located within emerging economies often cited playing a role in a national development strategy or helping with nation building projects, while those located in high income countries and at the top of the rankings sought instead to act as representative of the best of their (already highly developed) country's scholarship to the world. With the higher concentration of top ranked universities in high income countries, the findings can be attributable to the country's state of economic development, which in turn promotes high rankings. There may be other cases in which a country's ministries or department of education mandates or offers strong incentives to prioritize local needs. Such explanations or motivations are not always apparent in university strategic plans, which necessitates further research to better understand the underlying rationales. While strategic plans provide useful and explicit information on university goals, the extent of these strategic plans' reliability remains uncertain. How these statements translate to everyday realities was beyond the scope of the present study, however, future research that compares these results with in-depth case studies would provide more context to further support the reliability of goals cited in strategic plans.

Previous research on rankings has similarly found a high emphasis instead on research output, reputation, and some learning inputs across other global rankings (Hou, Morse, & Chiang, 2012). Other scholars have well criticized rankings for promoting global or national prestige and power over third mission commitments (Pusser & Marginson, 2013). An implication of this research is the possible deprioritization of third mission, especially non-entrepreneurial social and cultural missions, as institutions seek global reputations via rising in global rank. In particular, for globally top ranked national universities located in emerging economies especially, local communities may be paying the social price for their universities' world-class ambitions. Another implication is suggesting that public universities be held more accountable to ways they provide direct benefits to their local communities and nations in a "post post-public era," based on a renewed concern about public interest in the midst of ongoing deregulation and corporatization (Marginson, 2007, para 3).

This study therefore suggests that rankings schemes place greater weight on university's commitments to local issues and communities as status or quality indicators. At the time of this study, none of the three major global rankings (Academic Ranking of World Universities, the QS World University Rankings, and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings), emphasized the third mission or local engagement. After the study was completed, Times Higher Education (THE) announced a new ranking based on university success in addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) (Bothwell, 2018, September 6). Addressing how universities are responding to this new metric is currently underway by THE but whether universities are revising their strategic plans based on this new ranking remains unknown and a topic for future investigation. In addition to the THE UNSDG ranking, regional and national attempts to measure third mission are underway, such as the European Indicators and Ranking

Methodology for University Third Mission (2017) and the Moscow International University

Ranking, "The Three Missions of Universities," (2017), although these have yet to be embraced

as globally. Meanwhile, the extent to which local priorities will be associated with world-class

status remains uncertain.

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Appendix A - List of Universities   (Region / *Country* / Institution)

East Asia
- *Hong Kong*
  - 1.- Hong Kong Shue Yan University
  - 2.- The University of Hong Kong
- *China*
  - 3. Peking University
  - 4. Beijing Normal University
  - 5. Anhui University
  - 6. Shandong University
  - 7. Shanghai Jiao Tong University
  - 8. Beijing University of Technology
- *Japan*
  - 9.- University of Tokyo
  - 10.- Yamagata University

Europe
- *Denmark*
  - 11.- University of Copenhagen
  - 12.- University of Southern Denmark
- *Germany*
  - 13.- Gottingen University
  - 14.- Technical University of Dresden
  - 15.- Technical University of Munich
  - 16.- University of Duisburg Essen
- *Italy*
  - 17.- Universitá degli Studi di Palermo
  - 18.- Universita di Macerata
- *Norway*
  - 19.- University of Oslo
  - 20.- University of Stavanger
- *Russia*
  - 21.- Moscow State University
  - 22.- Saint-Petersburg National Research University of Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics (ITMO)
- *UK*
  - 23.- University of Edinburgh
  - 24.- University of Glasgow
- *Spain*
  - 25.- Universidad de Salamanca
  - 26.- Universidad Pública de Navarra
- *Sweden*
  - 27.- University of Karlstad
  - 28.- University of Umeå
  - 29.- University of Uppsala

- ○ *Turkey*
  - 30.- Gebze Technical University
  - 31.- Istanbul University
  - 32.- Yeditepe University

Latin America
- ○ *Brazil*
  - 33.- Universidade Catolica de Brasilia
  - 34.- Universidade Estadual de Campinas
  - 35.- Universidade Federal de Pernambuco
- ○ *Chile*
  - 36.- Pontifical Catholic University of Chile
  - 37.- University of Santiago
- ○ *Colombia*
  - 38.- University of Los Andes
- ○ *Costa Rica*
  - 39.- University of Costa Rica
- ○ *México*
  - 40.- National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)
  - 41.- Tecnológico de Monterrey

Middle East and North Africa
- ○ *Egypt*
  - 42.- American University in Cairo
- ○ *Israel/Palestine*
  - 43.- Technion Israel Institute of Technology
- ○ *Jordan*
  - 44.- University of Jordan
- ○ *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*
  - 45.- King Abdul Allah University for Science and Technology
  - 46.- King Saud University
- ○ *Morocco*
  - 47.- Cadi Ayyad University
  - 48.- Chouaib Doukkali University
  - 49.- University Hassan II Casablanca
- ○ *Qatar*
  - 50.- Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar
  - 51.- Qatar University

North America (Excluding Mexico)
- ○ *United States of America*
  - 52.- Arizona State University
  - 53.- Florida International University
  - 54.- Park University
  - 55.- New York University
- ○ *Canada*

    56. University of British Columbia
    57. University of Toronto

Oceania
- *Australia*
  - 58.- Griffith University
  - 59.- University of New South Wales

South Asia
- *India*
  - 60.- Cochin University of Science and Technology
  - 61.- Indian Institute of Science

Southeast Asia
- *Indonesia*
  - 62.- BINUS University
  - 63.- Universitas Gadjah Mada
- *Malaysia*
  - 64.- University of Malaya
  - 65.- Universiti Sains Malaysia
  - 66.- Universiti Teknologi Petronas
- *Singapore*
  - 67.- National University of Singapore
  - 68.- Singapore Institute of Management-GE
- *Thailand*
  - 69.- Chulalongkorn University
  - 70.- Ramkhamhaeng University

Sub Saharan Africa
- *Kenya*
  - 71.- Chuka University
  - 72.- Kenyatta University
- *Nigeria*
  - 73.- University of Lagos
  - 74.- Veritas University
- *South Africa*
  - 75.- Cape Peninsula University of Technology
  - 76.- University of Cape Town
  - 77.- University of Fort Hare
  - 78.- University of Western Cape